

Conservation of wild elephant

Inadequate scientific information is one of the biggest bottlenecks that constarins the design of any sound elephant conservation program in Bhutan. While there are ad hoc reports on elephants such as reports on crop and property damages, elephants being trapped due to natural and man induced interventions, etc, the systematic field verification to understand the situation better is minimal. Given this scenario, a one year project costing Nu. 0.424m was agreed upon between RGoB and WWF in August 2005.

This project aims to get first hand information on the status and distribution of elephants in the country. The project has already trained 20 forestry staff to begin baseline studies on the distribution of the elephants and the extent of the human elephant conflicts. The project will focus on pilot sites within each dzongkhag and will directly involve the respective Divisional Forest Officers or Park Managers. At the end of one-year, future priority actions can be thus determined. This project will also contribute to the preparation of the Elephant Action Plan which will be based on the information collected over this period.

Rescue of the Giants

On the 19th of June 2005, the Royal Manas National Park rangers, during their regular patrolling, found a female elephant and a young calf, stranded between two major landslides along the Mathanguri-Panbang road in the Royal Manas National Park.

A rescue team was immediately dispatched to the area by the Park management. The biggest worry of the park rangers was the depletion of food since the elephants were stranded in a small area of approximately 1000 mt. sq.. They took some fruit along with them and also arranged other feed.

On the 25th, the rescue team successfully cleared one of the landslides, enabling the animals to pass. Now the animals have been reunited with their herd and can be seen foraging near the range office. WWF Bhutan supported the operation financially.

Landslides are a usual sight in the southern belt of the country due to the onslaught of rains this time of the year. The Royal Manas National

Park falls within one of the heaviest rainfall areas in Bhutan. The May-September monsoons bring up to 1,200 mm of rain. Thunderstorms are common during this time and rivers often impassable. During winter, however, rainfall is negligible and the temperature may drop by almost 10 degrees centigrade.

It is also one of the first and the largest protected areas of Bhutan with 1,023 square kilometres of land area. An astonishing 92% of its total area is under forest vegetation, including

extensive areas of tropical monsoon forest interspersed with swaths of Savannah grasslands and wide riverbeds. This makes it a home for many animals like the Elephant, One-horned Rhino, Tiger, Asian Black Bear, Golden Langur, etc. and exotic birds including the endangered Rufus-Necked Hornbill. Much of the park is characterised by rugged, mountainous terrain with moderately steep slopes. The climate variations are substantial.

Elephant Study

Twenty five participants, primarily comprised of Forest Rangers from Samste, Sarpang, Samdrup Jongkhar and Gedu territorial divisions, Royal Manas National Park and Phipsoo Wildlife Sanctuary, attended a three day workshop on the Population Survey of Wild Elephants, from the 3rd to 5th of August in Samtse.

Dr. Arun Venkataram, the Sub-Regional Officer, MIKE/CITES, was the resource person for the workshop. The participants were taught the various survey methods. The participants selected suitable survey methodology given the topographic conditions of the country and areas where most elephants are found. They modified the surveys forms that will be used during the surveys in the field. In Sipsu, Sajbotay, where the elephants have been reported to be living and causing lots of damages in the villages at night, demonstrations on use of the survey methodology was carried out.

TNP head office inauguration

The 5th of July saw the opening of the new park head office for the Thrumshingla National Park at Ura, Bumthang. It was inaugurated by His Excellency, Lyonpo Sangye Ngedup, the Minister for Agriculture.

Along with the park staff and official guests, the village headmen and villagers were also present to celebrate the occasion. Lyonpo Sangye in his opening address stressed the importance of conservation. He highlighted the important role people play in conserving our natural world and what they can derive from it, in return, if it is managed properly.

The park is located in Ura, which is known for its severe winters. The old office building lacked a proper heating system and was difficult to work in during winters. The new office is made to retain maximum heat, says the park Manager, Sonam Wangchuck. "Though the office is not big and elaborate, it has enough rooms for all the sections of the park management, which was lacking in the old office," added the park manager. He expressed his gratitude to WWF-UNDP(GEF) for funding the new office. He feels that his staff will be more productive, with the added facility to the park. His statement was approved by the happy nodes of the park rangers near him.

The total cost of the building was Nu. 3 million(US \$ & 70,000 approx).



Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, Minister for Agriculture inaugurating the new office building



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News Briefs

Conservation Strategy Review :
Dr. Eric Wikramanayake assisted and facilitated the review of the PO Conservation Strategy 2002-2007. The Business Plan is also nearing completion. The first brainstorming for the communications strategy was also held. The whole office participated in the process and through the Tsechu holidays from 13-15 September. The analysis and write-up of the conservation strategy is being done.

Tiger project:
As part of the implementation of the Tiger Action Plan 2005-2015 for the kingdom of Bhutan, a three year collaborative project (RGoB and WWF), costing US \$727,753 has already been submitted to potential donors. The project will generate critical ecological information such as tiger and prey species distribution, relative abundance and habitat conditions using grid-based sampling surveys in the area of focus—Royal Manas National Park (RMNP), Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park (JSWNP), Jigme Dorji National Park (JDNP) and the connecting corridors. The project will also address the anti-poaching capacity of the RGoB, mass awareness of the importance of tigers and the extent of tiger-human conflicts in the country.

Eastern Himalayan Eco-region Complex meeting:
Kinzang Namgay, Vijay Moktan and Echay represented Bhutan PO at the Eastern Himalayan Eco-region Complex meeting held in New Delhi, 11-12 August.

28 participants took part in the meeting. The landscape coordinators from four landscapes (B2C2, Kangchenjunga (India & Nepal), TAL India & Nepal and North Bank) highlighted the progress made by the landscapes in 2005 against the targets and milestones set for the Eastern Himalayan Eco-region Complex. The meeting also discussed and revised the milestones based on criteria such as their relevance and achievability for each of the landscape.

The meeting also highlighted the common bottlenecks in successful implementation of landscape programs : fundraising and communications; trans-boundary cooperation and capacity. Recommendations addressing the bottlenecks were drawn-up, and consensus reached, to present at SARTM.

New records for Bhutan

Sherub, ornithologist from the Nature Conservation Division, spotted the Black Winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*, on 13 September at the Babesa sewerage pond in Thimphu. This is a new record for Bhutan. As per the Central Ornithological Database of Bhutan (COBD) Bhutan's bird list has now reached 667. He also sighted the Greater Painted Snipe, also a new record, a couple of weeks ago.



Tiger sighted near Thimphu

In a small village near Tango, within the 4350 km² Jigme Dorji National Park, people have been reporting cattle killings for the last four years. Many cases of livestock loss to tigers have been recorded in this area by the forest department. But, until now, other than the pug marks, no pictorial evidence has been recorded.

On the 23rd of July, another case of cattle loss was reported by the villagers and, while investigating the case, tiger footage was caught in a camera trap set up by a team of people from the army who keep record of such sightings and incidences. They had been provided with camera traps, purchased from the WWF assisted Tiger project, and trained on its use by the tiger personal in the Nature Conservation Division (NCD), Ministry of Agriculture. The shot was taken no more than a few kilometers from Thimphu, at an altitude of 3000 meters plus. Sangay, tiger coordinator of NCD, said that the area of the recent sighting is the habitat of both the Tiger and the Snow Leopard.

People who have lost livestock are compensated by the Tiger Conservation Fund, a joint WWF and NCD initiative which was started in 2003. Sangay says that since the introduction of the Compensation Scheme, there has been a reduction in the retaliatory killings of the predatory animals.



Rescue of the Himalayan Black Bear

Pega, under Chukha dzongkhag, approximately 35 km south of Thimphu is one of the areas where Himalayan Black Bears (*Selanartos thibetanus*) are seen to forage for food. Apple orchards and crop fields are the favourite places. On the 19th of August, a 3 year old female bear, weighing 150 kilograms, was caught in a trap set by the villagers to protect their crops from wild animals. Forest officials, while on their routine petrol, sighted the bear and brought the matter to the Nature Conservation Division (NCD), Thimphu. A rescue team consisting of officials from NCD was immediately dispatched to the area. The animal was set free at 1:30 pm, Bhutan Standard Time.

Few such cases are reported every year, said officials from NCD. These incidences occur mostly in the Paro, Punakha and Thimphu districts. The animals are usually treated on the spot and set free, but if there is any major injury then they are brought to Thimphu for proper medications. One of the NCD officials



The trapped bear

said that, in the absence of a rehabilitation centre, the animals cannot always be given the required care and they could succumb to their injuries.

Himalayan Black Bears are under Schedule I of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan, 1995. It is one of the three bear species recorded in Bhutan. The other two are Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) and the Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*).

Study on Himalayan Black Bears

A 18-month study on bear ecology and bear-human conflict has been developed by NCD and WWF for which financial support is being sought from the US Species Action Fund.

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary

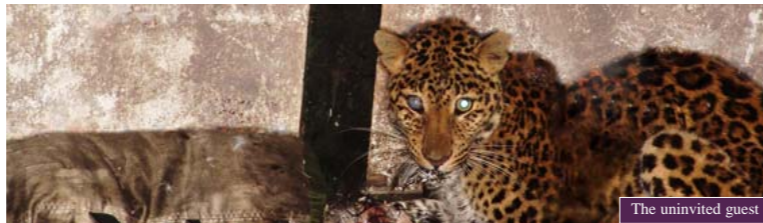
224 households of Sakteng Dungkhag have been supplied with CGI sheets to replace their wooden shingles for roofing. As per the studies conducted by the SWS staff, around 160 trees are felled for shingles every year. With the supply of the CGI, the people of Sakteng will not have to change their roofs as often. Previously, due to the moist climate of the region, the wooden shingles had to be replaced once every 3 years. To ensure that they feel a sense of ownership, the project was done on a cost sharing basis, 70% of the cost being borne by the park and the rest by the contribution of the people. WWF provided Nu 4.2 million for the project.



A Leopard visits Drakpa's home

Sengor, Thrumshingla National Park: August 24th, 2005

Drakpa is a road worker on the highway between Bumthang and Monger, based at Latongla, 13 km South of Sengor. Sengor, a high altitude village situated at 2900 masl, falls under the core



The uninvited guest

zone of Thrumshingla National Park. Drakpa's house is a typical two-room house built for road workers.

The park staff first learned of a leopard trapped in Drakpa's house on the morning of the 23rd of August. Drakpa returned home in the evening and was getting ready to light his bhukhari, when he saw the leopard sleeping under his bed. "The leopard was sleeping in the corner of the main room. Our presence and screaming did not seem to have any effect on the big cat." "It was only after Sonam banged the mud plastered wall that the leopard seemed to wake up," said Chadho Tenzin, Conservation Program Director, WWF, who went to the site with the park staff.

"We opened the rear door because it was closer to the leopard but it would not budge an inch. We were not sure if the leopard was sick or hungry, and we even fed it a chicken. We tried to chase it out with fire and long poles. Only after an hour, we came up with the idea of breaking the wall to push and free the leopard", said Sonam.

The leopard left Drakpa's house after what seemed like two long hours. "Drakpa was relieved that his visitor finally left the house. We could see the typical display of Bhutanese showing respect to wildlife as Drakpa even went to the extent of referring to his wild guest in honorific expression", said Chadho.

The leopard was a 10-12 year old female with a defect on her right eye – possibly a cataract. The park staff met Mr Biswa, Junior Engineer of the Department of Roads based at Namling, and informed him of the incidence and asked them to be more cautious.

The park management will follow up with Road officials about taking precautionary measures to avoid such incidents in future. Luckily, there was no serious damage to the road workers, their dwellings or livestock. No recent incidents of livestock depredation were reported in the region either.

Professional Eco-tourism Guide's Training

For the first time in the history of Bhutan, the Tourism Authority of Bhutan is conducting professional eco-tourism guides' training with both the environment and the human in mind. Along with the regular cultural and historical subjects, special consideration has been made to include the environment in the syllabus for the trainees this year. As one of the trainers put it, "We cannot ignore our nature; our country is known for its conservation efforts and we have realized that our tourists guides are not trained to interpret about nature correctly".

All the trainees are university graduates, making this batch the most educated lot of tourists guides to be trained. The Authority feels that this is an improvement and a positive response from the youths of Bhutan will give quality service to tourists. One of the trainees, Sonam, said that, "Till now all the tourists guides were less educated so I

thought that I could make a difference by being among the first graduates to join this profession".

"There are lots of tourists who visit our country, especially for bird watching or nature trekking, and we need specially trained guides who can talk about those topics, so this time we hope to bridge that gap," said one of the organizers. This will also give them well-rounded training, he added.

"This training course has been made possible through the generous financial support of the WWF," acknowledged the Director General of Tourism, Dasho Lhatu Wangchuk.

For WWF Bhutan, it opens the possibility of using tourism as a tool for nature conservation. In addition, this is a good opportunity to express feelings for nature by making the future generation of Bhutan the ambassadors of conservation. Well educated tourist guides promotes responsible tourism activities in Bhutan. This means the development of Bhutan as a green tourism destination, a new focus in the tourism sector. For tour operators and the government of Bhutan, this provides an opportunity; well managed natural areas are of major importance for future tourism business development due to an increasing market demand for green destinations.



The director general of the Tourism Authority of Bhutan addressing the participants.

A Dream Come True

By Marilyn & Leigh Stowell
Volunteers '04

We fell in love with the takin at first sight. We were visiting Bhutan for the first time in 1987 and, after concluding our trek, we stayed our last two nights in Thimphu at the old Olathang Hotel. Someone said that there were several takins in cages out back of the hotel. Indeed there were! And, although they were rather crowded in their cages, and none too clean, we instantly knew that they were very special animals. Apparently, the Royal Government of Bhutan was way ahead of us, as on the 25th of November 1985, the takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*) was



declared the National Animal of Bhutan. Since 1987, we've returned to Bhutan five times and, each time, we've gone to the Takin Zoo to visit our "friends". Things got better for the takin. Sometime in the early 1990's, their cages were replaced by a wonderfully large 3.4hectares/8.55 acre preserve ... but, still, their habitat was sadly lacking: the takin were difficult to locate and, once located, extremely difficult to see due to the construction of the wire fencing; photographing the takin was nearly impossible, also, due to the wire fencing; there was no information provided about the takin; garbage was a problem because there weren't any trash receptacles; and, there wasn't any entrance signage to the preserve.

We were of the strong opinion that the Takin Zoo should be made into an entertaining and informative experience for all Bhutanese desiring to see their National Animal, as well as for all of the foreign tourists who visit the Takin Zoo as part of their planned travel itineraries. Fortunately, Kinzang Namgay, Country Representative of WWF Bhutan, and Chopel Dayang, Communications Manager of WWF Bhutan, completely agreed with us. In fact, once we were given permission to make our proposal to WWF Bhutan, their entire organization "jumped on board" ... as did the RGoB Department of Tourism and Karma Wangdi and his wonderful organization of volunteer artists (VAST). As volunteers for WWF Bhutan in September and October of 2004, we were given the opportunity to assist in the design of a complete make-over of the Takin Zoo ... now called the Motithang Takin Preserve. The project was completed in a little less than a year. The entrance gate, in Bhutanese architecture, is beautiful and welcomes all visitors to a highly user-friendly, entertaining and informative experience. The sign boards, designed and painted by Karma Wangdi and his volunteer artists, are as creative as they are informative. There are plenty of photography openings in the fencing and, importantly, the preserve is clean because trash receptacles are located throughout the preserve. Without a doubt, the Motithang Takin Preserve is now worth a visit!

Thanks to the vision, leadership and financial commitment of WWF Bhutan, as well as the fine working relationship that WWF Bhutan enjoys with the RGoB, we were able to have our dream come true. Our "friends," the takins, now live in a wonderful facility that invites Bhutanese and tourists to visit them to learn about what truly unique animals they are. We hope that you will accept their invitation.



The entrance gate and some of the information boards