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EcoCircular

Vol 37 No. 6 August 2005

WWF Nepal Program Newsletter

Dolphins!



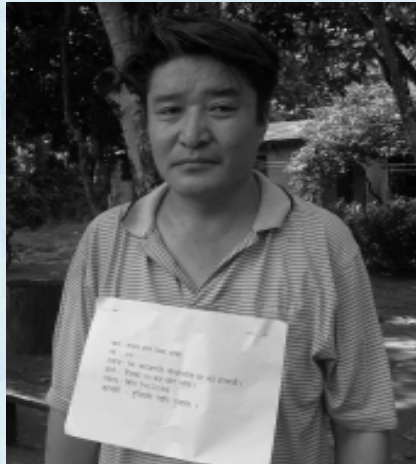
WWF Nepal Program, with support from WWF UK (Freshwater Program), initiated a project on Dolphin Conservation in the Karnali River and its tributaries in TAL from June 2005. The main objective is to identify threats and issues of dolphin conservation and its habitat in the Karnali, where WWF Nepal Program, the Department of Forest (DOF) and Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) have joint programs to restore forest and species conservation.

Living at the upstream range limit, dolphins in the Karnali River are particularly vulnerable to threats from habitat degradation. Dolphins need deep pools of water and this often places them in areas where human activities are most intense. They are accidentally caught by the local people who live in the lower Karnali basin and also commercial fishermen. If conservation actions are not adopted soon, river dolphins will become extinct in the Karnali River.

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FOREST AND SPECIES



Notorious Rhino Poacher Arrested

The arrest of notorious poacher and trader Pemba 'Yakche' Sherpa in Chitwan on 19 June was a much needed boost for the morale of rhino conservationists in Nepal. It comes at a time when the 2005 Rhino Count at Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) revealed a substantial amount of the rhino population—an estimated 100 rhinos between 2000 to the present have fallen prey to poachers. Shivaraj Bhatta, Chief Warden of RCNP, attributed the success to, "authentic and reliable information and timely operation". Acting on reliable tips through the informer's network and after months of monitoring suspects, Park authorities nabbed Pemba and two of his gang at a hotel in

Nawalparasi where he was setting up a purchase of a rhino horn. He had currency worth USD 6,300, a small fortune in Nepali rupees. Pemba, a resident of the capital Kathmandu who is high on the list of suspected traders in illegal wildlife, confessed to killing 20 rhinos and selling their horns at USD 4,250-5,700 a piece, mostly to Tibetan traders. The Anti-Poaching Operation team from the park revealed that they are laying the grounds for the arrest of another notorious rhino horn trader. At a press conference, park authorities thanked WWF Nepal Program and other organizations for their continuous support.

RCNP is hailed as one of the world's greatest conservation success stories since its inception in 1973 and WWF has been part of the ongoing conservation work right from the very start. WWF Nepal Program, through the Terai Arc Landscape Program, supports anti-poaching operations, wildlife trade monitoring activities of the DNPWC, information networks, operation costs of enforcement authorities, training, and communications and surveillance equipment. Recently, the park authorities were given two inflatable motor boats to patrol major rivers that serve as entry points for poachers into the protected areas.

In Kathmandu, WWF supports the CITES unit at DNPWC, that looks into wildlife trade monitoring and provides information to enforcement operations. Besides WWF Nepal Program has also played a very important role in bringing about coordination and renewed commitment to curb poaching among the protection units as well as in advocating with the government for more effective measures of controlling wildlife trade in the country.

People against poaching

The effectiveness of anti-poaching operations has been greatly enhanced with the involvement of local communities. Community-based anti-poaching operations outside the protected areas have become an important line of defense in controlling illegal activities like poaching, illegal logging and forest encroachment. On 29 June 2005, villagers in Khata, Bardia found out that Indian poachers had slipped into the buffer zone forests of Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP). They immediately mobilized various community forest user groups and more than 300 members surrounded the forest and flushed out four poachers who were laying traps for tigers and spotted deer. The poachers confessed that they were hired by Hari Bahadur Bohara, a local resident, who was duly arrested. All the offenders are in the custody of RBNP.

Public Hearing on Terai Arc Landscape Program

The annual program review meeting and public hearing session was held on 9 July 2005 at Thakurdwara, Bardia. The meeting was organized by the Protected Areas and Buffer Zone office of the Terai Arc Landscape Program at Thakurdwara and was attended by diverse stakeholders representing community members, executives of the implementing CBOs/NGOs, local journalists and government officials. The meeting yielded suggestions on how to improve project implementations. All participants viewed this initiative as positive and emphasized its continuity.



EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

MOU Signed with Kathmandu University

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between WWF Nepal Program and Kathmandu University (KU) on 5 July 2005 to use the resources of both organizations efficiently and effectively in order to promote conservation education and research. This relationship will also take advantage of the complementary institutional capabilities of the respective organizations in the development and implementation of joint programs like publications, seminars, workshops and conferences.



Dr Chandra Gurung, Country Representative of WWF Nepal Program, and Professor Puspha Raj Adhikary, Dean of School of Science, Kathmandu University, after signing the MOU.

Student's fund for Beauty

Students from kindergarten to Grade 4 at Wendy House School, Kathmandu, donated funds raised by making and selling paper bags to Beauty, the orphan rhino in Kasara, headquarters of RCNP after a briefing from Neelima Shrestha, Assistant Education Officer. The students will hand the money over to the Buffer Zone Management Committee, RCNP to sponsor Beauty's food.



Students of Wendy House selling paper bags to the customers of Bhatbhateni supermarket.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Alternative Incomes for Bote and Musahar

Bote and Mushar communities traditionally depend on fishing in the Narayani River but to reduce fishing pressure, WWF Nepal Program is supporting the construction of two fish ponds for 113 households of Bote and Mushars in the Amaltari area. A tripartite agreement to this effect was recently signed between the TAL program, Amaltari User's Committee and RCNP.

NTPF Promotion

More than 40 farmers attended the training programs in the cultivation of *Kurilo*, *Pipla*, *Aswagandha*, *Kalmegh*, *Palmarosa*, *Lemongrass*, etc in Khata corridor, Bardia on The TAL Program has been active in imparting technical knowledge of NTPF management through various training activities aimed at supporting sustainable forest management as well as enhancing livelihood of local communities.


CLIMATE CHANGE

Support from the British Embassy

On 28 July 2005, an agreement was signed between The British Embassy and WWF Nepal Program for a project "Raising awareness on Climate Change among Eco Clubs in Kathmandu Valley" for the period of one year effective from 1 August 2005.

Regional Workshop on Himalayan Glacier Project

A two-day Regional Workshop on Himalayan Glacier Project was held in Kathmandu to explore the possibilities of scaling up the existing Himalayan Glacier Project into a larger regional project that integrates the Climate Change and Freshwater programs. The workshop, organized by WWF Nepal Program on 20-21 July 2005, was attended by representatives from WWF offices in Nepal, India, China, Pakistan, International, Australia, UK, and the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology and the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology.



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The Gangetic River Dolphins, *Platanista Gangetica*, belongs to the order Cetacea and are the largest freshwater mammals found in the Indian subcontinent. They are considered vulnerable species under CITES Appendix 1. The IUCN revised the threatened status of the dolphin from Vulnerable to Endangered (IUCN 1996) but they are not mentioned in the 2003 IUCN Red List of endangered mammals of Nepal. Although its status remains endangered, dolphins are classified as Not Evaluated since there has been no combined assessment of the species (IUCN 2004). Dolphins are legally protected animal in Nepal as endangered mammal and fall under Schedule I of the protected list of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973.

The status of river dolphins in Karnali River has been reported as,

- Shrestha (1989): 20 in Karnali, (Kothiaghat to Solta, 104 km range) in 1983
- Smith (1994): 7 in Karnali (Kothiaghat to Kachali, 73km range) in 1990
- Timilsina, (1999): 3-4 in Karnali (range of 16.5 km from Kothiaghat) in 1999

Project Executive Committee (PEC) Meeting

Project Executive Committee (PEC) Meeting was held on 27 July 2005. The meeting was co-chaired by Director General of DOF Dr Uday Raj Sharma and Director General of DNPWC Dr Tirtha Man Maskey. Likewise, officials of DOE, DNPWC and WWF Nepal Program attended the meeting. Project Managers of TAL, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project, Sagarmatha Community Agro-Forestry Project and Northern Mountains Conservation Project presented achievements of the respective projects. Financial progress of FY 05 and program and budget for fiscal year 2006 were also presented in the meeting for endorsement. PEC endorsed progress (programmatic and financial) of FY 05 and program and budget for FY 06. Several programmatic issues were also discussed in the meeting.

- Joshi (2004): 4 in Karnali (range of 16.5 km from Kothiaghat) and 17-28 in Mohana (western tributary of Karnali) in 2004

The Dolphin Conservation project in Karnali River and its tributaries started in TAL in June 2005 will document the current statues and distribution of the Gangetic River Dolphins in the Karnali and identify key direct, underlying and root causes of various threats and issues of dolphin conservation. The project will also work together with local communities to raise awareness on the significance of dolphin and its habitat conservation!

"Dolphins keep
watch on the state
of freshwater: their
decline signals a
decline in
freshwater for all"

WWF Nepal Program, PO Box 7660
Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: 4434820/4434970/4410942, Fax: 977-1-4438458
Email: info@wwfnepal.org
Website: www.wwfnepal.org