

# CONSERVATION REVIEW

Words reviewing the conservation efforts in India for everyone



## Editorial Desk...

*A Forest tragedy.....*

*The British system led to an exploitative system of forest management being put in place instead of the indigenous forest base social structure. The tropical forest management based on the European concept has failed and leading us to a major political turmoil throughout the country. The north-eastern states lurches through a cycle of hatred, violence, suspicion and ethnic division, with the state government an impotent observer despite its talk of action and ministers scurrying from one press conference to another, the question that needs to be asked is not just how did this happen or what can be done, but also what it means in the larger context of Assam's complex social milieu and India's policies. Sanjay Hazarika of C-NES had already stated these lines as Assam, an Indian tragedy ([www.hazarika.c-nes.org](http://www.hazarika.c-nes.org)). This is not only a political disturbance that affects our social life. If one analyzes the long run of history, it will be clear that how our traditional peace and social structure get destroyed with the virgin forests, the base of North-eastern societies. There is not just one monolithic society. The North-east has no less than 220 distinct ethnic groups, with a number like the Monpas and Nagas, Mizos, Garos and Khasis having kin in neighbouring countries — whether it is Tibet of Myanmar or Bangladesh. A state like Assam is home to no less than 20 ethnic groups, large and small, many of which function as exclusive entities, without a role for those outside of the specific ethnic group. These groups are of different stages of economic growth and political mobilization based on the Land and Forest resources at large. The only answer to maintain the sustainable peace in the society may be in terms of the governance of the natural resources through Co-management providing the ethnic groups with economic opportunities and equal rights, which will carry them a global identity. This will be the best part to restore the social as well as the forest structure of the region.*

*Rakesh Soud  
Managing Editor*

# Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre

*Dorien Braam*

There is a small town in the north of Holland, called Pieterburen. It only has 390 inhabitants, but every summer it attracts dozens of tourists each day, being the start of the 'Pieterpad', a 500 kilometer trail crossing the entire country from the northern tip of the Netherlands to the south. The other, even bigger attraction is the Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, founded in 1971, where young and sick seals get rescued and rehabilitated for a life in the wild.

The Netherlands is a small country in the west of Europe, bordered by Belgium to the south, Germany to the east, while the rest of the border is coastline, running along the North Sea and the 'Waddenzee'. In the Waddenzee, there live two different types of seals: the Grey (*Halichoerus grypus*) and the Common (*Phoca vitulina*) seals. The Waddenzee is a special habitat, where seals thrive. When the tide is outgoing, sandbanks appear everywhere and it gets difficult to navigate for the ships. However, seals use these bars to take a rest from hunting during high tide and to feed their pups after giving birth.



The Waddenzee is a small sea and a crowded one, water sports, fishing and even hikers, so called 'wadlopers' disturb the animals while resting and feeding, causing them to flee back into the water. The small pups who are too young to follow their mothers into the safety of the sea, stay behind and start crying for their family to return. These cries can be heard from a far distance, and nowadays along the Dutch coast there is a network of people that know exactly what to do when hearing these cries. First aid teams help catch the pups or injured seals, and bring them to the Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre. They also help rescuing sick seals, weakened by pollution and disturbed by noise and people.

In the seal centre they are weighed, get a health check and are put into quarantine, to make sure they do not bring any diseases from outside to the other seals in the centre. For the next couple of weeks they will be fed and medicated if necessary, until they are strong enough to go out into one of the big pools outside, the last stop before they are returned into the wild. Rehabilitation takes an average of three months and extensive research has been done, showing that even when a pup is only one day old when picked up by the rescuers, within two weeks after release they have fully readapted themselves to their natural living environment.

Seals are never released individually, but always in groups of three or four animals, so that they can find support in each other once they are released. They are transported in special baskets, with openings in the front as well as the back for easy release. They are usually released near the area where they have been found, which sometimes means travelling by boat to an island or sandbank to make sure they will find a bigger group of seals to join up with.

Every year about 200 baby seals and sick seals are rehabilitated in the centre. All the money needed to do this comes from private donors, local businesses and fundraising events. It is possible for individuals as well as groups to 'adopt' a seal, the adoptant can name the seal when it is brought into the centre and can joint its release several months later for a symbolic amount.

## Decline in crane numbers linked to loss of farmland



Photo: L.Gogoi

The Bumdeling Valley in Trashiyangste in eastern Bhutan resonates with the trumpeting of about a hundred lacknecked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*) each winter. The birds flock here attracted by the valley's paddy fields and farmlands, where the cranes forage for food. Although the number of cranes in the valley has never been over 200, there has been a decline in crane numbers recently with only 105 cranes recorded in the winter of 2009-2010, the lowest number counted since 1992. This decline has been attributed to the loss of paddy fields to floods. Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund( CEPF) grantee Sherub predicts a loss of one crane for every acre of paddy land lost. Sherub's study aimed to understand changes in the birds' wintering grounds in Bumdeling, and to determine the valley's carrying capacity.

The Black-necked Crane is an endangered bird with an estimated population of 8000 in the wild. This is the only crane species that winters in Bhutan.

For more information

Sherub

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## A Man made incident

To protect the fishes in the pond, pond owners use a fishing net to cover the pond, which is killing a large number of birds every day. Most of the fish-eating birds are from rare or endangered species, their numbers are counted and decreasing every-year. Last day, near Raj Rajeshwari Seva Math, Konnagar, I captured few proofs of cruelty on a white breasted Kingfisher at adjacent pond of Raj Rajeshwari Seva Math.



This is a rough violation of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and can be categorized as animal cruelty for making financial profit. Is this murder is needed for fish production? How many fishes can be taken by few kingfishers when river Ganga is adjacent with the pond?

A Somnath Paldas Report /Courtesy: Greencamp

## Pit Vipers of The Western Ghats

Vivek Philip Cyrac

Pit Vipers are a group of snakes belonging to the subfamily crotalinae. The Asian pit vipers are characterized by a stout body, a short prehensile tail and a broad sub triangular head with specialized heat sensing pits between the eye and the nostrils. They are venomous with specialized movable front fangs. Most of them are ovo-viviparous giving birth to live young.

The unique habitats of the Western Ghats is home to 6 species of pit vipers of which 4 are endemic to the Western Ghats and is found nowhere else in the world. Like all pit vipers they are venomous but their venom is not as toxic as other Indian venomous snakes and has resulted in very few fatalities. Their venom is adapted mainly to kill prey such as frogs, lizards, birds & rodents. The pit vipers of Western ghats belong to 4 genus which are

**Trimeresurus:** These are a group of stout snakes with a broad triangular head with small scales. The scales may be slightly keeled. They are mostly arboreal but can also be found on rocks. They are mainly found close to streams. They include 3 species in the Western Ghats.

- Malabar Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus malabaricus*)
- Bamboo Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus gramineus*)
- Horseshoe Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus strigatus*)

**Peltopel:** This is a monotypic genus containing only a single species. They are characterised by their triangular head covered by large scales. They have a prehensile tail adapted for its arboreal habit. They can also be found on rocks close to streams. The distribution of this snake is restricted to a few highly elevated localities of Tamilnadu and Kerala. As mentioned above, it includes only a single species

- Large-scaled Pit Viper (*Peltopel macrolepis*)

**Hypnale:** The genus hypnale consists of small sized snakes with weakly keeled scales on the body. The head is broad, flat, and triangular and has large scales. The tip of the snout in these snakes is slightly upturned. They are mainly nocturnal and terrestrial inhabiting evergreen, moist and dry deciduous forests. This genus is distributed throughout the central and southern western ghats and Sri Lanka. Only one species is known from the western ghats.

- Hump-nosed Pit Viper (*Hypnale hypnale*)

**Tropidolaemus:** This genus is characterised by distinctly keeled small scales on the snout and head and strong keels on the gular region. This group consists of a single species in India which is known only from two specimens from the southern Western Ghats.

- Hutton's Pit Viper (*Tropidolaemus huttoni*).

Though most of these snakes except the Huttons Pit Viper are common throughout the western ghats, They are found nowhere else in the world. In recent days habitat loss and habitat fragmentation in the western ghats has caused a major threat to their existence. Hence conservation of the western ghats should be a major priority.

The author is a young Herpetologist focused in the Western Ghats of Southern India. Courtesy: [www.westernghatherpetofauna.blogspot.com](http://www.westernghatherpetofauna.blogspot.com)



Malabar Pit Viper



Large Scaled Pit Viper



Hump Nosed Pit Viper

Photo Courtesy: [www.westernghatherpetofauna.blogspot.com](http://www.westernghatherpetofauna.blogspot.com)

### Book Release.....

**Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa**, a book that tells us about a relatively little-known wilderness encircled by two rivers – the mighty Brahmaputra and Dibru. Well put together, it is a welcome addition to the wildlife archives of India. The Editors, K.K. Dwivedi, A.J.T. Johnsingh, Anwaruddin Choudhury and Kashmiri Kakati are to be congratulated for a job well done. With a long list of accomplished writers that includes Sumit Sen, Anwaruddin Choudhury and A.J.T. Johnsingh, the text is both lively and credible. The book takes readers on a journey through the origins and history of the park and focuses on the ecology of its different constituents, both plant and animal. Chief Minister Sri Tarun Gogoi releasing the coffee table book 'Incredible Dibru - Saikhowa National Park' edited by K. K. Dwivedi in presence of Sri Rockybul Hussain, Minister, Forest and Environment, Sri Akon Bora, Minister, Social Welfare, former editor of Sentinel D. N. Bezbarua in a function held at Assam Secretariat, Dispur on Feb 2, 2010.



## Feeling a TIGER

Inamul Hazarika

I had a passion for Tiger and whenever I visit Zoo, I always hang around the Tiger enclosure. My relation to a living tiger always ended with a close iron enclosure. I never thought of a live tiger just few feet away passing a road. However, it become true on the last week of January this year. A tigress and her cub slinked out of an enclosure at Assam State Zoo on Saturday morning of 30<sup>th</sup> January, triggering fear among 10,000-plus visitors present. Dibya, the eight-year-old female, had a taste of human blood two years ago when she mauled a visitor to death along with another tiger. For an hour and a half on Saturday morning, Dibya prowled around the zoo, covering nearly 400 metres, even as we screamed and ran helter skelter. Zoo authorities first deployed five elephants to shield visitors from being attacked by the big cat and then evacuated them. The thrilling drama finally ended around 11 am when the Bengal tigers were tranquilized and put back into the cage.



## Environmental Law in India

Jyotirmoy Talukder

Among the various aspects of conservation, the legal aspect deserves our special attention. A society in transition against a background of conflicting influences nurtures a wide range of public opinion on an emergent issue like conservation. Divergent views often arising from misrepresentation of facts can generate confusion in the public mind. This necessitates a definite set of rules and regulations clearly stating the norms to be followed in all matters related to environment and wildlife.

Environmental law as the name suggests is law to preserve and protect the environment by curbing pollution and by prohibiting degradation of vegetation and destruction of wildlife. The Supreme Court has declared the right to clean environment as part of the fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. Directive principle of state policy in Article 48A says that "the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard forests and wildlife". Article 51A (g) enumerates the fundamental duty of citizens to protect and improve natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife.

Early environmental laws in India like wild Birds and animals Protection Act 1948, River Boards Act 1956, prevention of Cruelty to animals Act, 1960, etc. were limited in their spheres of operation and outreach. The 1970s witnessed the beginning of comprehensive environmental legislation in India in a trend which sustained itself well into the 1990s. The major enactments herein were wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Water Act 1974, Air Act 1981, Forest (conservation) Act 1980, Environment (Protection) Act 1986 and National Environmental Tribunals Act 1995.

Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 classifies wildlife into five schedules. Schedule I comprises rare and endangered species totally protected throughout the country. It includes pygmy hog (Nol Gahori), hispid hare (Khagori Kota), slow loris (Lajuki bandor) gangetic dolphin (hihu), chinese pangolin (corner), rock python (jaalpohia ojogor), white winged wood duck (deohah), clouded leopard (godha futuki) etc. schedule II consists of special game species which can be hunted with license issued under special circumstances. Such animals are common fox, jackal, weasels, Himalayan Black bear etc. Schedule III contains big game species and schedule IV is for small game species, whereas schedule V is for vermin or pests. The Act provides for establishment of National Parks. The Act provides for establishment of National Parks and wildlife sanctuaries and for control of trade in wildlife products. Its penal provisions make offenders liable to imprisonment for up to six years and fine up to Rs. 25,000. A subsequent offence attracts at least two to six years in prison and minimum Rs. 10,000.

Water Act provides for establishment of pollution control boards at both Central and state levels. It is an important law keeping in mind that pollution of water bodies poses a serious threat to the habitat of water birds and aquatic fauna such as Gangetic dolphin, Ghrial, turtles, others crabs and fish. In 1976, India as species only with licenses and through the four metro cities.

Forest (conservation) Act sought to prevent deforestation, check diversion of forest land for non forest purpose and to promote afforestations of wastelands. It made prior approval of the Centre mandatory for a state government to dereserve a reserve forest. Environment (protection) Act, 1986 was enacted under Article 253 of the constitution to implement decisions made at the UN conference on Human Environment at Stockholm. This Act meant to supplement existing laws has however failed to achieve desired results and has been invoked in very few cases.

National Environmental appellate Authority Act, 1997 sanctions an authority to hear appeals under the Environment Act. With exclusive jurisdiction and powers of a civil court, with a time limit of 3 months for disposal of appeal. The Supreme Court under a writ petition can make a reference to this authority comprising a Supreme Court judge or High Court chief justice, an environment technical expert and 3 other technical members.

Procedural options available to an environmental lawyer are common law tort action, public nuisance action under Criminal Procedure Code, writ petition, public interest litigation (PIL), class action, citizen suit and the right to know. Of these the first two are relevant for pollution cases where the second provides a faster remedy. Writ procedure is faster, cheaper and provides access to the highest courts. In conservation matters, writs invoked are complicated questions of facts to be resolved after recording evidence, a suit is the appropriate remedy. Citizens' suits under the Environment (P) Act extend to citizens the power to prosecute under environment law which hitherto was exclusively the government's prerogative.

Most environment actions in India are PILs where the petitioner pursues a public cause either as representative (representative standing) or in his/her own right as members of citizenry (citizen standing). In most cases relief is in the form of interim orders which call for a halt to further damage on the environment. Success stories include closure of limestone quarries in Dehradun tanneries on the Ganga, eviction of encroachers from Delhi Ridge forest and regulation of mining leases in shivalik hills and saproon valley. The late 1990s witnessed the Supreme Court playing a proactive role in conservation. In 1996 it ordered that any land having some forest would be regulated by the Forest Act regardless case of 1995, also a PIL, re-interpreted by the state government is to be approved by the Centre. Herein the apex court imposed a total ban on felling trees in Arunachal Pradesh and on movement of trees and timber from any of the seven government's sanction and Center's approved.

Environmental law in the present context is based on three guiding principles: pollution pays doctrine, public trust doctrine and precautionary principle. The pays doctrine, public trust doctrine and precautionary principle. The first requires the polluter to bear financial cost of preventing or remedying damage caused by pollution. Public trust doctrine holds the government as trusted to protect resources like running water, forests, air, sea etc. for public enjoyment as against private ownership or commercial exploitation. The precautionary principle holds it mandatory for the state government to anticipate, prevent and attack causes of environmental degradation. Where there is a threat of irreversible damage, lack of scientific certainty cannot justify postponing cost effective precautions.

*The author is associated with Green Guard News & Features, Nature's Green Guard, Guwahati, Assam.*

## International Year of Biodiversity 2010



Every year when the 'Red List' of the IUCN gets updated we observe a different set of species being added to the category of threatened species. The statistics appear horrifying to those who consider it more than a mere list of species. We are at the brink of losing some of the precious plant and animal genomes that may not return in future. We are aware that biodiversity has been changing, but are we aware of the measures to minimize its loss caused due to anthropogenic activities? To safeguard the biodiversity and to bring awareness about the significance of biodiversity, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). The official launch of the event will take place on 11 January 2010 in Berlin, Germany. With the slogan 'Biodiversity is life. Biodiversity is our life', the IYB will be celebrated throughout the world with various activities. UNESCO Biodiversity Exhibition will be launched in Paris, France during 21–22 January 2010. In India, the 'Sustainable Development Summit' will be held from 12 to 28 February 2010 at New Delhi. Some of the other activities include: 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna) from 13 to 15 March 2010 in Doha, Qatar; the Ecological Conference: Climate change and natural resource use in Eastern Africa – impacts, adaptation and mitigation in Nairobi, Kenya from 19 to 21 May 2010; and UNESCO International Congress on Biological and Cultural Diversity in June/July 2010 at Montreal, Canada (for further details see IYB website: <http://www.cbd.int/2010>).

## Waste Management in the Eco-Tourism Spots of Manas Biosphere Reserve and Bongaigaon

In view to address this environmental hazard related to Waste Management, a series of workshops on Waste Management was organized by Help Tourism, Kolkata, Action for Conservation & Tourism (ACT), Siliguri in association with Astha Nature's Tours & Travels, (Abhayapuri), Bongaigaon, Directorate of Manas Tiger Project, Tourism Department, Bodoland and local Tourism Service Providers of Manas Biosphere Reserve

The workshops were conducted by Mr. Klaus Schaeffe from Germany, who has introduced a simple system of waste separation to avoid smell and hazardous smoke; only burning the "light plastic" (Plastic-bags and wrappers) with paper in a self-built incinerator. Mr Klaus has experience of launching Waste Management programme in several destinations of Nepal, Pakistan & India including Darjeeling Hills, Chilapata & Jaldapara in the Dooars and at Sunderban. The first workshop was organized at Bamungaon Picnic Spot of Abhayapuri where the members of the Joint Forest Management Committee of Bamungaon Picnic Spot under the guidance of Astha Nature's Tours & Travels, (Abhayapuri) took part in the workshop and learnt the process of separation of wastes and incineration of the light plastics under the supervision of Mr. Klaus. The second workshop was conducted at the entry gate no 2 at Basbari of Manas National Park. Basbari was selected as the venue of workshop as that is the main place for tourist arrivals till date in Manas. The workshop was attended by the staffs and officers of Manas Tiger Project, Tourism Service Providers of Manas viz. Basbari Lodge, Manas Ever Welfare Society (MEWS), Basbari and Manas Maozegendri Ecotourism Society (MMES), Kokilabari. The highlight of the workshop was that the young school children from Basbari also took part in the workshop. The third and last workshop was conducted in the Ultapani village of Bodoland under Manas Biosphere Reserve. The programme was held in the village market of Ultapani, one of the most promising tourism destinations of Bodoland. The participants from Ultapani and Labanyapur village, mostly Bodos and Nepalese ranging from minor children to senior citizens under the initiative of local community conservation organization-Biodiversity Conservation Society, Ultapani learnt the process from Mr Klaus.

Compiled by: Mr. N.K.Dey

### A TIGER ALARM

# 66 tigers dead in 8 months

Avijit Ghosh | TNN

**New Delhi:** Tiger deaths continue at an alarming rate. Statistics collated from different parts of India by a prominent wildlife NGO show that between January 1 and August 19 this year, at least 66 tigers lost their lives.

Of these, 23 died due to poaching. The list includes seizures of skins, bones, claws, skeletons, canines and paws by police and wildlife authorities during this period. The remaining 43 died of a variety of reasons such as infighting, old age, tiger-human conflict, accidents and disease, according to statistics provided by Wildlife Protection Society of India.

"In the last few months, Uttarakhand in the north and Karnataka in the south have recorded particularly high numbers of tiger deaths, which illustrates that the problem exists throughout the country," says Belinda Wright of WPSI.

One incident occurred near Pataur area in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh where a tigress was found dead on Tuesday. "It could be a case of poisoning. But right now we can't say for sure. The samples have been sent to the forensic lab in Sagar and to the veterinary college, Jabalpur," says S K Patil, field director of the re-

## STATE OF AFFAIRS

State-wise break up of tiger deaths from January 1 to August 19, 2009

**ANDHRA PRADESH** | 1 tigress poached and 1 skin seized

**ASSAM** | 6 tigers found dead, 1 found incapacitated dies, 1 shot dead by forest dept, 1 tigress poached, 5 kg bones, 4 canines and other body parts seized in two separate cases

**GOA** | 1 tiger poached

**KARNATAKA** | 6 tigers found dead, 4 tiger skins seized

**MADHYA PRADESH** | 1 skin seized, 1 tigress poached, 10 tigers, including 3 cubs, found dead

**MAHARASHTRA** | 7 tigers, including 3 cubs, found dead. Another tiger poached, bones and 10 claws seized in two separate cases

**MANIPUR** | 2 skulls, 2 paws and 16 kg bones seized

**ORISSA** | 1 tiger poached

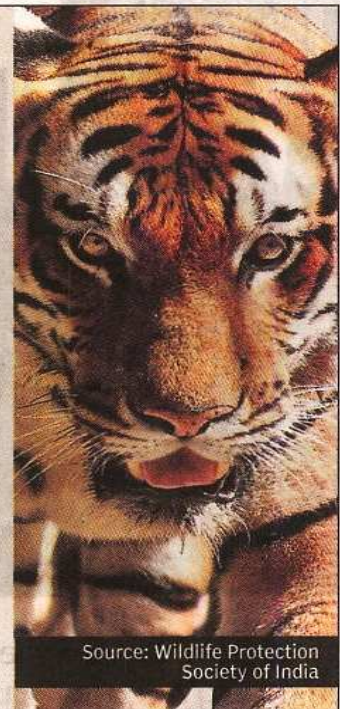
**RAJASTHAN** | 1 tigress found dead

**TAMIL NADU** | 1 skin seized, 1 cub found dead.

**UTTAR PRADESH** | 2 tigers found dead, 1 tiger shot dead by forest dept, 2 skins and 30 kg bones seized

**UTTARAKHAND** | 6 tigers found dead, 1 skin & skeleton seized

**W BENGAL** | 1 tiger found dead, 2 skins & one skeleton seized



Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India

serve. The tigress had three cubs. "Two have been spotted. We are trying to trace the third," says Patil.

National tiger census figures released in Jan 2008 showed a mere 1,411 tigers alive as compared to 3,508 in 1997, a drastic drop of 60%.

K Ullas Karanth, Bangalore-based senior conservation scientist, says decline of tigers since 1990s can be attributed to "the collapse

of field protection and patrolling."

This, he says, is fallout of "a mission drift in forest department" which has moved away from its "core task of protection, towards eco-development, needless habitat modifications and such other distractions." He also points out that both tigers and prey are being poached where field protection has collapsed.

"In areas where these protective measures are still reasonably in place tigers are doing okay. The key issue is not just poaching of tigers, even more important is the issue of their prey species being hunted out. There are vast extents of forests in India where tigers are absent not because of direct poaching, but because their prey has been hunted out," Karanth says.

## Know Yeti.....

The Yeti or Abominable Snowman is a mythological creature and an ape-like cryptid said to inhabit the Himalayan region of Nepal and Tibet. The names Yeti and Meh-Teh are commonly used by the people indigenous to the region, and are part of their history and mythology. Stories of the Yeti first emerged as a facet of Western popular culture in the 19th century. The scientific community largely regards the Yeti as a legend, given the lack of evidence,<sup>[2]</sup> yet it remains one of the most famous creatures of cryptozoology. The Yeti may be considered a sort of parallel to the Bigfoot legend of North America. Sir David Attenborough, the prominent wildlife expert also believes there is 'very convincing' evidence that yetis exist. Speaking on Friday Night with Jonathan Ross, the revered wildlife expert said: 'I'm baffled by the Abominable Snowman - very convincing footprints have been found at 19,000ft. 'No-one does that for a joke. I think it's unanswered.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1157965/Yeti-evidence-convincing-says-wildlife-expert-Sir-David-Attenborough.html>.



## Mysterious trails of a Yeti

*Rakesh Soud*

The iciness of the December came with the most mysterious tales of my life in field. I had found myself engaged with such a case study, which perhaps the most unbelievable storey for many of us including me. That's the storey of a Yeti, fortunately or unfortunately stuck to me those days. During the end of 2008, I was engaged with World Wide Fund for Nature-India for a project on Red Panda in the western most part of Arunachal Pradesh. That may be my second assignment as a professional guy after completing my Post-Graduation. The Yeti is commonly known as Bigfoot and local Monpa tribes named as Gretpu. I had also came through the tales of yeti or forest man, that existed in the wide range of jungles of North-East Indian state for centuries during my college days in different literatures. As per my familiarity concerned, the scientists have determined that hairs picked up in thick forest in the Garo hills in the mountains of Meghalaya in north-east India, is the best evidence yet of the existence of the mythical creature. According to a report published in [www. andhranews.net](http://www.andhranews.net) as Yeti spotted in Meghalaya may actually exist, reveals hair analysis, that tests at UK's Oxford Brookes University on hairs which local people believe came from a yeti in the Indian jungle have failed to link them with any known species and are said to bear "a startling resemblance" to those brought back from the Himalayas by Sir Edmund Hillary half a century ago. The habitats of that areas were

reported to be similar to several other places in the world where similar creatures - Bigfoot in the US, the sasquatch in Canada, the sajarang gigi in Indonesia, and the yeti in Nepal - are part of local legend and from where occasional sightings are reported.

There was always a petite base of truth in my mind about this enigma hearsay. However, the vagueness stuck to me on 5<sup>th</sup> December morning through our officer in charge Mr. P.K.Dutta. He had been informed by the Range Officer, Dirang regarding a mysterious animal that has killed one person near the foot trek of Naga GG on his way to Lubrang village, working as a GREF labor. Both of us rushed to the hospital, where the dead body was brought for postmortem. On the first hand discussion with the inmates of the victim and other person accompanied the body from the spot; we were told that it was done by Gretpu. They informed us that the body was with opened eyes and a terribly shocked face. There was no cloths above his waist and hasn't any single wound in his body. The death was only because of the broken backbone near shoulder. According to the local people gathered in the placed told us that only Gretpu can kill a man in such way and a similar incident had been occurred in the same place about ten years back. This was just a beginning and I get entered to the incident for another few months in an irregular pattern. We have been to the



local Police station and discussed the matter with the Officer –in-Charge. He was also worried about the murder symptoms and the tales of Gretpu. As he was also a native Monpa and heard a lot about such mysteries from his young age. However, there was no excuse of such a mysterious tales in the jurisdiction of legal systems. Till today it Gretpu was just in the print pages for me, but now I am assembling the information on a living creature. There were a lot of arguments in my mind about the existence of Gretpu. We had been to the Naga GG area to investigate the reality of the incident on the next day with the Ranger and Police officials. The Naga GG. area (27°19'45.1"N, 92°09'07.8"E; 3448m) of West Kameng district is a potential Red Panda habitat. The dominant forest type of Naga GG. is temperate conifer forest in the higher ridges and Subtropical pine forest with temperate broadleaf forests in the lower ridges. *Abies* and *Tsuga sp.* along with other various species of oaks, magnolias and Rododendrons are dominant in the area. Though it was a remote foot track where the incident took place but there was a continuous movement of few harder and their cattle after the incident. The specific foot track was along the cutting on ridge with slope in both side of the ridge where the body was found was nearly 50m from the main road connecting Mandla with Naga GG. There were both SSB and GREF camps along the road side. In both side of the track the soil is sandy loam and loosely bonded. After a thorough investigation we had identified few unclear impressions, which appears as footprints of 15inch length and also some scratch marks. On the jungle in the northern side of the track there were some clear impressions form due to pressure exerted by walking on the herbs and leaf litter scattered on the ground after every 3-4 feet. As I had some previous experience on the elephant tracks, which was also of similar foot impressions. However, there was not any possibility of elephant presents.



Then a question automatically knocks my mind that what will be this heavy animal. From different types of marks of claws and foot prints, it appeared that some has come from the southern side of the track and after killing the person has moved away from the jungle in the northern side of the track. I can just conclude that there may not be any clear evidence to establish the presents of Gretpu, but it was cleared to all of us that a huge animal was there and was definitely very strong physically. After a through search of the spot we had returned to the near SSB camp for our lunch. There we had talked to a local officer Mr. Lama and came to know that they were confident about the presents of Gretpu. I had asked him about the possibility of Himalayan Black Bear attack but he straightly denied as bear always on the face of human beings. There is also a local saying that a person always goes for hunting bear only after marriage as before marriage if bear attack it will become difficult for him to get a suitable bride. In this area there are many stories regarding Gretpu and local communities considered it as guardian of mountains. As a mark of respect to the creature, when any one goes to the high mountain areas has to follow different restrictions such as no to burn onions and garlic peels, after roasting meet in fire one has to burn Juniper leaves for purification, one should not put shoes in front of fire for drying and also not to make noise in the area.

As the time passes, I always tried to get more information about such mysteries from the local people. One of my friend Mr. Lohit Gogoi, working with the same organization helped me a lot by obtaining other informations with his investigative mind. As he had been assigned with a high altitude wetland project, he had also traveled many remote places of the area. During the month of March 2009, the episode again takes another spin to our mind, as a team of Aaj Tak news agency had contacted us to cover the possibility of Yeti in those areas through Dr. Dipankar Ghose. He was a Delhi base coordinator of Network Initiative programme of WWF-India. As our office staffs had a good relationship with him, we had to aid them out. Mr. Sidhearth had come from Delhi with his team and other equipments to take some shoots and bites from peoples related to that case.

Dutta sir had given me the responsibility to take them around the spots. I myself and Lohit had again gone to Naga GG and show them the site with the help of SSB staff. We had again planed to visit the nearby village Lubrang to gather some more information. However, due to heavy snow fall it became impossible to track the area. Regarding the appearance and behaviour of the animal, there

## A Tribute to Billy Arjan Singh.....

are many stories most of which are based on shared imaginations and doubtful. However, some information came out during this period has been found to be most common among the villagers of this area with the available literature about the mysterious creature. This perhaps a strong base to believe the presents of Gretpu that cannot be discarded easily.

Though I am unable to conclude the write up with a strong base about the presence of such a cynical creature, but it was a truth for me and our team that we had feel the presence of the unseen creature. There was also a brawny stand for keeping the existence of the Gretpu in terms of the spiritual base for conservation of such high altitude forest areas. There were lots of examples related to the secret believe for the forest conservation viz. conservation of secret groves, which is totally based on the religious believe. If such believe can get a base of conservation, then why not Gretpu. As these kings of mountains always keep the local attitude away from destructing their secret forest areas of higher ridges.

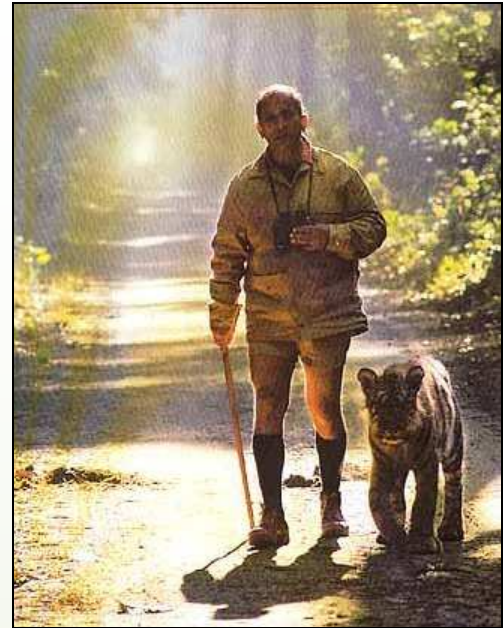
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The author is an Assam base conservation worker allied to Natures Beckon. He is focusing on the long term people participation in conservation of Critical Ecosystems. He is also heading this newsletter as a Managing editor.



“Animals are not our enemies. We are all interdependent; every animal has a role to play in the ecology by being a part of the food chain. If you remove one layer, the entire chain is affected. Even while talking in the interest of human beings, by saving wildlife, you are ultimately helping yourself,” said His Holiness the Karmapa, addressing the audience at the TCV Upper School, Dharamsala.

(Source: [www.wti.org.in/current-news/090629\\_karmapa\\_appeals\\_for\\_wildlife\\_conservation.html](http://www.wti.org.in/current-news/090629_karmapa_appeals_for_wildlife_conservation.html))



*Tiger Patrol*

**Billy Arjan Singh** is a term to denote the India's renowned 'tiger-man', and one of the world's greatest conservationists. Billy Arjan Singh's has been an extraordinary life by any standards. Born into a prestigious family of Sikh landowners, the young Singh was a relentless hunter and killer of every creature imaginable, until, guided by his conscience and observation of the impact of man on nature, he became one of the most tenacious champions of wildlife India has ever produced. "Honorary Tiger" is an affectionate portrait of a man who has devoted fifty years of his life dedicated to the cause and conservation of wildlife, and in particular, of India's threatened tiger population, which he had written in his books such as "Tiger, Tiger, Prince of Cats" and "Eelie and the Big Cats". Singh was a second lieutenant with the British Indian Army and fought the second World War in 1946. After returning to India, he purchased a small farmland in Lakhimpur Kheri district near the forest area, and created his house naming it Tiger Haven. The forest area was later developed as the Dudhwa Wildlife Sanctuary, with Singh said to have played a major role in it. Along the way, Singh has encountered official corruption, apathy, and public scorn but has remained a champion of the forest, and it was due to his tireless creation of India's Dudhwa National Park. He is perhaps most famous for the creation of Tiger Haven, his extraordinary home on the edge of the jungle, where he lives with his tigers and three orphaned leopards. In his eighties, he received the J.Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation award - a global honor administered by the World Wildlife fund - in recognition of his outstanding contribution to international conservation.

The renowned personality died at his home in Lakhimpur Kheri late on January 1, 2010. Singh, whose house 'Tiger Haven' was situated in the vicinity of the Dudhwa National Park, was ailing for quite some time. He was 94. Singh had been conferred with a number of national and international awards for his wildlife conservation efforts. The Indian government presented him with the Padma Shri in 1995 and the Padma Bhushan in 2006. In 2004, the World Wildlife Fund conferred on him the J Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution to international conservation. The Uttar Pradesh government had also conferred the Yash Bharti award on him.

## Tales of a vanishing Tribe: The Jummas

Yesain Ali mazumdar

The Jummas constitutes two largest tribes in habited in Bangladesh with the 350,000-strong Chakma and the Marma, are both Buddhist, while other tribes are Hindu, Christian or practice their own religions. Their living hill Tracts of Chittagong are rugged and steep, making it difficult to grow food. They live as an inseparable part of the area as an ecosystem people. To make best use of the land, the Jumma tribes practise a form of 'shifting cultivation', growing food in small parts of their territory, before moving on to another area and allowing the land to recover. This is known locally as 'Jhum' cultivating, the origin of the term 'Jumma'. The Mru people live further away from the other Jumma peoples, on the hill-tops. They generally live in houses built on tall stilts.

Reliable sources report that recently at least six Jumma tribal people were killed, and hundreds of houses burnt to the ground, in an attack by soldiers and settlers on tribal villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh on Saturday. The attacks took place in the Sajek region, where tensions have been rising since Bengali settlers, supported by the army, have been expanding their settlements on Jumma land. Local reports state that soldiers shot indiscriminately at Jumma villagers after one soldier was injured during clashes. Many other Jummas were hurt. Settlers, aided by the security forces, set fire to, and destroyed, five villages, consisting of at least 200 houses. A Buddhist temple and a church have also been burnt down. Thousands of Jummas have fled to the jungle to escape from the soldiers and settlers.

The local administration has imposed an order known as section 144, which prohibits the assembly of five or more people and the holding of public meetings. This is hampering the Jumma's efforts to establish the whereabouts of missing people and to confirm the numbers killed. Two bullet-ridden bodies have been recovered (those of Mr Lakkhi Bijoy Chakma (40) and Ms Buddhapati Chakma (36)), but tribal leaders report that the army has removed the bodies of several other Jummas who were killed during the incident. Hundreds of thousands of settlers have been moved into the Hill Tracts over the last sixty years, in a policy supported by successive governments, displacing the eleven Jumma tribes and subjecting them to violent repression. In 1997 the government and the Jummas signed a peace accord that committed the government to removing military camps from the region and to ending the theft of Jumma land by settlers and the army. The accord offered hope, but military camps remain in the Hill Tracts and violence and land grabbing continue.

The director of Survival, Stephen Corry said, 'This horrific incident is just the latest in a long line of brutal attacks on the Jumma tribal people. They have been killed, tortured and raped, and their lands stolen, for far too long. We call on the government of Bangladesh to put an end to army violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to withdraw the army camps, as promised in the peace accord. Those responsible for this atrocity must be brought to justice.' Survival has been working with the Jumma peoples for many years, protesting against violations of the Jumma's rights and the violent repression they experience. Survival's work put pressure on the Bangladesh government, helping to push them into signing the peace deal in 1997.

The Bangladesh government has long seen the Chittagong Hill Tracts as empty land onto which it can move poor Bengali settlers, with scant regard for the area's Jumma inhabitants. In the last 60 years, the Jummas have gone from being practically the sole inhabitants of the Hill Tracts to being almost outnumbered by settlers. As well as being displaced by the settlers, who are given the best land, the Jummas have long faced violent repression from the Bangladesh military. Ever since Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, the Jummas have experienced waves of murder, torture and rape, and had their villages burnt down in a genocidal campaign against them. A Jumma political party, the Jana Samhati Samiti, with a military wing, was formed in response to these attacks. In 1997, the Jummas signed a peace deal with the government which put an end to some of the worst atrocities. However, ten years after the signing of the peace deal, arrests and intimidation of activists, rape of Jumma women and

## Tiger killed, eaten by villagers in Arunachal Pradesh



Photo courtesy: Anand Mishra, Itanagar

A full grown Royal Bengal Tiger was hunted down by villagers of Numuk in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district. Villagers gathered around the tiger after the kill. The meat was then consumed by the people but even more disturbing is the information of a possible wild life trade racket flourishing in that area. The skin of the tiger was allegedly sold to a certain businessman from Assam for 1.5 lakh rupees.

"They must have gone for some small animal hunt and came across this tiger and killed it. It is about 30 km from Along. It was a heavy animal, even four persons could not carry it properly, you may have seen the picture. Gun ammunition was used to shoot. The skin was sold to some trader from Guwahati at Silapathar. Wildlife authorities talk about penalties but wildlife crime is going on. This is the season of deer hunting and deer is being hunted regularly," said Tapak Kato, an eyewitness from Namuk. In the last one year this is the third incident of tiger hunting in the area but the first time that there was photographic evidence.

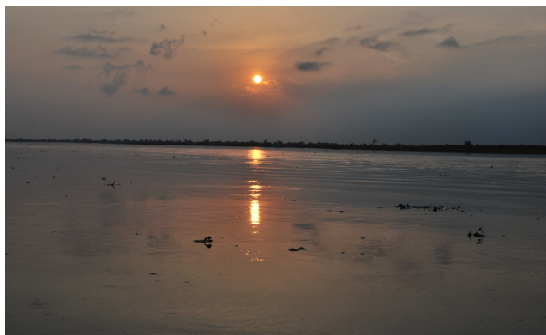
Courtesy: Greencamp



other human rights abuses remain rife. Land continues to be stolen from the Jumma tribal people by both the army, and by settlers who are supported by the government.

However, the Jummas' problems are not yet over, and Survival continues to work with the Jummas, calling for the return of the land stolen from them, an end to military occupation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and some autonomy for the Jumma peoples, so that they can regain control over their land and future.

The author is a freelance writer based at Dhaka. He is interested on the ecological relation of tribes and forest around the world.  
 Courtesy: [www.survivalinternational.org](http://www.survivalinternational.org)



The **Banasree Eco-camp** invites you to enjoy the green scenarios of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park as well as a Biosphere Reserve having an area of 340 sq. kms. in Tinsukia district, Assam. An unique habitat which has undergone radical transformation after the great earthquake of 1950. Besides The Feral Horses and Gangetic Dolphin, the Grassland birds and Water fowls are a major attraction to the park.

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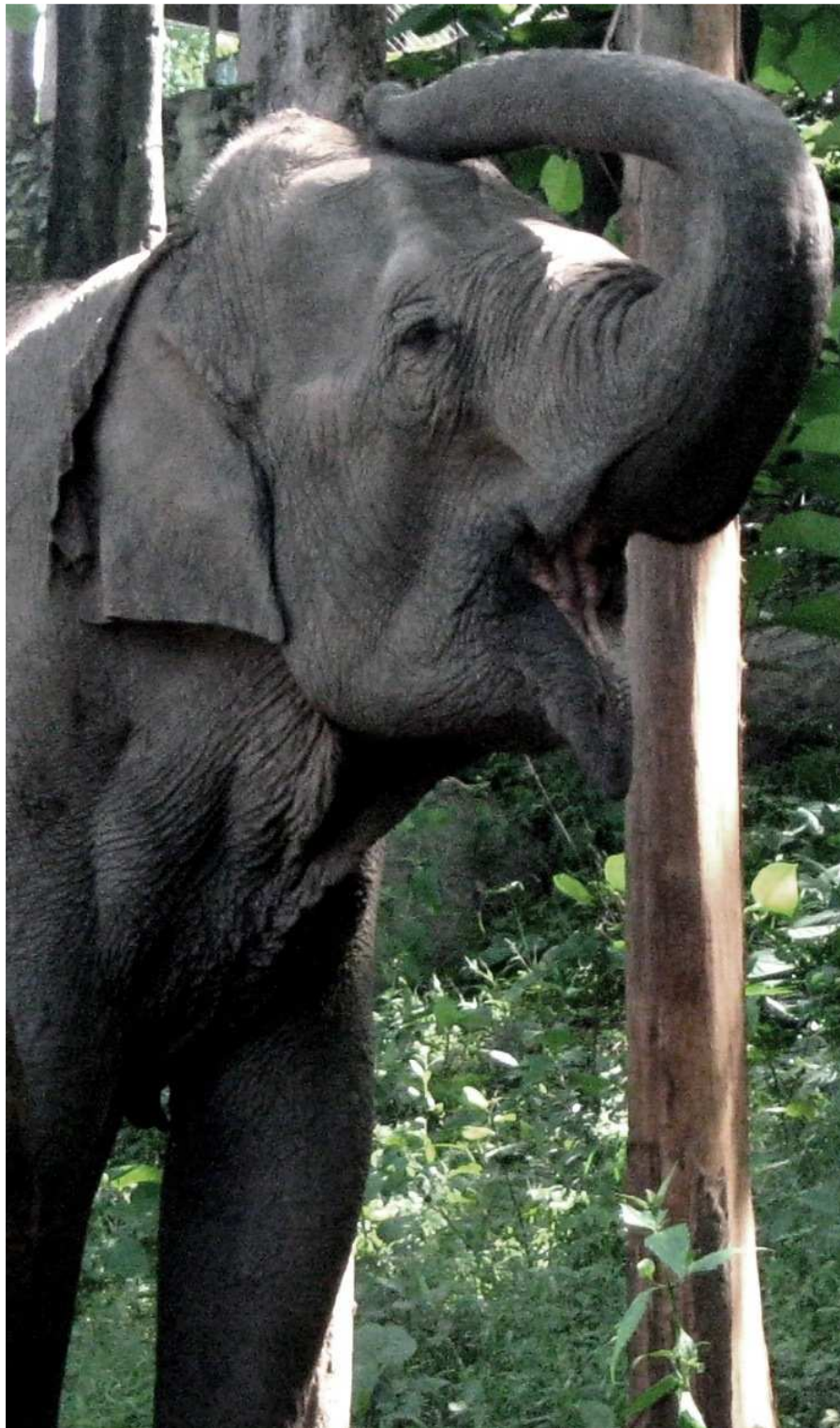
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Contributions should reach to the Managing Editors via.

E-mail: [conservationmails@rediffmail.com](mailto:conservationmails@rediffmail.com).

**Cover Picture:** The Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* photographed by Aditya Singh. The species' historic range extended from the Middle East in southern Turkey, Israel and northern Syria eastward to southern China, and south from the Himalayas into Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Though the Brown Fish Owl is still common in Sri Lanka, it has become rare in most other portions of its range.



*The next issue of CONSERVATION REVIEW will be on Asian Elephants conservation, research and management. We invite serious write-ups on the cause of the species. We encourage to submit any form of semi-scientific and popular write-ups (500-700 words) on different research, case studies, visits and other specific issues including photographs which have a direct correlation with the basic ethics of conservation of Elephants. Contributions should reach to the Managing Editors via. E-mail: conservationmails@rediffmail.com by last week of October 2010.*