

Enforcement training for KNP staff



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Subhamoy Bhattacharjee 11 June 2014 14515 views

In order to tackle low conviction rates in wildlife crimes in the country, the International Fund for Animal Welfare - Wildlife Trust of India (IFAW-WTI) has initiated a pioneering training to facilitate accurate offense report filing.

"One of the major reasons for wildlife cases extending for years (or decades) or even offenders going scot-free is weak offense reports," said Vivek Menon, Executive Director - WTI and Regional Head - South Asia for IFAW. An offense report is the first report prepared by officials at the crime scene. "This forms the pillar on which an entire case is fought. If this foundation is weak, the entire structure turns against the prosecutor," he added.

The first 'Advanced Enforcement Training for Offense Report Writing' is being held in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department at Kaziranga National Park, under IFAW-WTI's Van Rakshak (Guardians of the Wild) Project. The ten-day training, beginning today, will see 15 frontline forest officials - 7 from Kaziranga National Park and 4 from Manas National Park, and 2 each from Pobitora and Bura Chapori Wildlife Sanctuaries.

The training is being carried out under the guidance of senior conservationist Mr Bhupendra Nath Talukdar. The training team comprises two senior lawyers, one public pleader, apart from IFAW-WTI staff.

"This training is very helpful and essential for our frontline staff. It is basically a skill-will combination which will enhance the conviction rate among the specially trained forest field officials while filing the offence report on any wildlife crime." said S K Seal Sarma, DFO, Kaziranga National Park, who was present at the inauguration at Bagori Range office.

It is to be mentioned here that the 'Advanced Enforcement Training for Offense Report Writing' initiated by IFAW-WTI is first of its kind in the conservation history of the two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Kaziranga and Manas National Park.

"Our aim is to get a new range of trained professional forest officials who thoroughly investigate the crime scene and accurately document the offense report. We have selected the frontline staff those who have been actually doing offence report writing in their respective departments. So, with this long and intensive advanced training they will effectively implement it on ground. we are proud to host this in Assam," said Dr Bhaskar Choudhury, IFAW-WTI Regional Head, adding that the state was selected considering "two of the organisation's critical projects - Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation and Greater Manas Conservation Project, which are based here."

Over the next ten days, the 15 forest officials will undergo intensive training on crime scene investigation, methods of seizures and arrest, Indian wildlife laws, their interpretation and effective use to prepare and file legally correct papers in court.

The Van Rakshak Project (VRP) builds capacity of India's frontline staff providing them appropriate training, and equipping them. Till date, over 13,000 in more than 130 of the country's protected areas have been trained on 'wildlife crime prevention' and equipped with field gear.

The project has also provided free insurance cover to 20,000 frontline staff in the country. Victims of accident or death on duty and their families receive up to 1,00,000 rupees under this unique scheme.

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BY SUBHAMOY BHATTACHARJEE

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