

## How safe is our wildlife?



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Rituparna Goswami Pande 25 October 2007 15485 views

Another rhino bites the dust in Kaziranga National Park as poachers struck again in the supposedly conserved abode of these rare species. Altogether 17 rhinos have been killed by poachers or have drowned in floodwaters since January 2007. On September 16, poachers shot a rhino at Hatikhuli tea estate near the national park. This time the rangers stumbled upon the carcass of the female rhino on October 23 from near Bandorkhal area under the Borbeel forest camp in Bagori range of the park.

Five rhinos were poached in 2006, while seven were killed in 2005 in Kaziranga. According to a departmental source poachers in KNP killed nearly seventy rhinos since 1985. The forest department is worried about the rising number of killings of rhinos in the park. Though a number of preventive measures including new deployments have been done in the park area and police have also been put on alert the poachers still are actively depleting the rhino population. Despite the security arrangements a series of killings in the park area is still a regular occurrence. Another cause of concern is the migration into neighboring areas from KNP due to flood and other natural reasons. Nine rhinos were killed outside park area taking advantage of lack of the adequate security measures in those areas. According to official sources more than a hundred rhinos are still roaming in different parts of Upper Assam and also in north bank after crossing the mighty Brahmaputra.

Kaziranga has been declared as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO and widely acclaimed as a successful conservation story worldwide. KNP is a home to almost 75 per cent of world's rhino population. Kaziranga is situated in the Bokakhat subdivision of Golaghat district, stretching over an area of 430 kilometers.

Reports suggest that some foreign gangs and terrorist outfits are also

involved in poaching apart from local criminal gangs. Some drug peddlers accept rhino horn and some other organs.

According to sources, a rhino horn weighing one kg costs 10, 000 US Dollars in international black market. In some Asian countries, the rhino horn is believed to be used as the zoological alternative of Viagra. But scientists refute all beliefs as false notions and declared that no such merits were found in a series of tests. Some people in China, Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea also believe that it has medicinal properties.

The KNP was declared a reserve forest in 1908 and elevated to a Game Sanctuary in 1918. In 1950, KNP was turned to a Wildlife Sanctuary. In 1974 it was declared a National Park. UNESCO put a World Heritage Site tag on it in 1985. Besides rhinos, the park is also home to Royal Bengal tigers, Asiatic elephants and Asiatic buffaloes.

Similarly another recently declared wildlife sanctuary Amchang is reeling under apathy and neglect as the infrastructure is inadequate to man the 78.64 square km park. The sanctuary was put under the Guwahati Wildlife Division in July 2006. Moreover, it is fast becoming a hub of illegal activities like charcoal burning etc which is causing serious threats to the wildlife.

We need to act fast if we seriously want to protect our wildlife for simply touting conservation issues is not a solution to the diminishing wild heritage.

*Photo: Uttam Saikia, Kaziranga*

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