

Urgent measures for rhino conservation



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Drishana Kalita 11 August 2016 6885 views

Precious one-horned rhino is facing unprecedented threat to its existence, with [as](#) many [as](#) 49 Rhinos already dead in [2016](#) itself. State Forest Minister, [Pramila](#) Rani Brahma, had recently revealed these shocking numbers in a statement. According to the official records, 22 rhinos had dies in natural calamity like the recent floods while the rest were butchered by poachers.

Assam based [Aaranyak](#), which had been working for the past [2](#) decades for rhino conservation in the [state](#) have submitted a set of recommendations for protection of rhinos and to urgently curb the growing cases of poaching of the species in the [state](#). These were submitted at a [workshop](#) titled “NATIONAL LEVEL EXPERT CONSULTATION FOR DEVELOPING A STRONGER STRATEGY FOR PROTECTION OF RHINOS IN ASSAM”, organized by the Forest Department, Government of Assam in Guwahati on August 11, [2016](#), in collaboration with Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity [Conservation](#) (APFBC) Society.

Some of the key recommendations from [Aaranyak](#) were:

1. To involve Village Defence Party in rhino protection.
- [2.](#) To set up [community](#) based vigilance system using modern tools like GPS outside the park for monitoring of stray rhino movement, flood and intelligence gathering.
3. To prepare risk matrix for rhino bearing protected areas, e.g., how to protect rhino during flood, civil unrest etc.
4. To undertake perception studies, in order to find out knowledge and attitude of people towards rhino.
5. To prepare a stakeholders matrix for rhino bearing protected areas to educate local [community](#) on ecosystem services of protected areas and rhino conservation.
- [6.](#) To involve RMSA/SSA for developing schools [as](#) resource centers

around the protected areas.

7. To develop baseline data on socio-economic status of fringe villagers living adjacent to PAs.
8. To identify and address issues and problems of villagers at the fringe of rhino bearing protected areas
9. To provide [training](#), resources, equipment, technical support and market linkage to members of [community](#) based institutions and individuals on different diversified livelihood and monitor [over](#) the time.
10. To make formation process of the Eco [Development](#) Committees (EDCs) more transparent.
11. To declare fringe villages around PAs [as](#) special development zone, where line departments like Agriculture, Veterinary etc. join hands and come forward to provide support towards [community](#) development. Unemployed youth should be trained under the Skill [India](#) Program.

[Aaranyak](#) has taken several measures to ensure effective rhino conservation in the [state](#) and outside. Some of the salient initiatives of [Aaranyak](#) towards rhino conservation includes, supporting wireless communication system in [Kaziranga National](#) Park for enhancing rhino protection, contributions towards strengthening anti-poaching infrastructure of the forest department, introducing for the first time in [North East India](#), a K-9 Dog Squad for rhino anti-poaching operations, legal orientation programme for the forest officials working in the [Wildlife](#) Sanctuaries and [National](#) Parks in Assam in 1996, in order to increase the rate of conviction [as](#) part of anti-poaching efforts and awareness and [training](#) of law implementing authorities and initiatives for obtaining judiciary support. In addition, the organization is actively involved in development of expertise on translocation and reintroduction of rhinos, in house laboratory based optimization of DNA technology for forensic identification of individual rhinos from dung and other types of biological samples, being recognised by [IUCN](#) SSC Asian [Rhino](#) Specialist Group. The organization also carried out first ever successful

genetic population size estimation of rhinos through dung DNA analysis at Garumara [National](#) Park of West Bengal. At present, the Ministry of [Environment](#), Forests and [Climate Change](#) of Government of [India](#) is planning on developing a national [level Rhino](#) Horn DNA Indexing [System](#), based on the technology that [Aaranyak](#) has developed through multi-year research. In addition, [Aaranyak](#) has carried out scientific investigations on the genetic threats to long term survival of rhinos in small populations, which has provided valuable inputs in planning population management of the species in Eastern [India](#).

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