

Assam - a killing field for the wild



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Rituparna Goswami Pande 15 December 2012 Updated 22 Dec 16339 views

Lately every morning we have been waking up to screaming headlines of animal killings in the newspapers. Rhinos being poached with their horns brutally severed and left to die, elephants electrocuted or hunted down, their bodies mutilated and left to bleed to death. Gory pictures of animal atrocities splashed in every newspaper, every channel. It really makes one ponder as to how low humans can stoop to gratify their covetous desire for money. Twisted minds are targetting the animal kingdom, mute creatures, innocent beings who do not care nor bother to know how our world has become a slave to money. The world Heritage site Kaziranga National park has seen 20 rhino killings this year and a few tiger carcasses have also been recovered from the Bornoloni anti poaching camp near Agratoli range of KNP. Our wild life is in clear and present danger.

According to reports by the Union ministry of forests and environment, nearly 1.25 million hectares of ecologically fragile areas have been illegally occupied by humans in the country. And Assam seems to be on top of the encroachment list as 2,59,700 hectares of forest areas in Assam are under encroachment. A forest area of 2,407 hectare has been encroached upon in Batasipara and Hugrajuli in Sonitpur district. The Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary in Nagaon is also facing extinction due to large scale encroachment where it is alleged that in 1983 there were 40 rhinos but now there is none.. There are also reports of large-scale encroachment of forest land in Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD).

A total of 12,029 hectares and 695 hectares of forest land are under encroachment in Haltugaon and Kachugaon forest divisions of BTAD respectively. Encroachment activities are also believed to have been going on in Kaziranga, Dibru Saikhowa and Manas National Park, with organizations often blaming illegal migrants for usurping government land. New settlers are an eye sore on the way to Kaziranga who are not only risking their own lives but also putting the lives of animals in peril.

Encroachment activities are also reported in and around Guwahati hills, including Amsang and the Ramsar site Deepor Beel. The Eastern parts of Pobitora is also under human occupation and the forest department is yet to make a move.

As if encroaching on their territory was not enough now we are on a mad spree of killing our wild treasure and in the process we are annihilating entire species. A handful of worthless humans who have chosen to stealing animal parts as their means of sustenance have hung our head in shame in front of the world community. Our treasure our pride the one horned rhino which has made the world take notice of our humble state is on its way to extinction.

When the world at large is waking up to the concept of animal policing and wildlife conservation we seem to be closing our eyes to such issues. Perhaps our third world attitude makes us ignore our wild. Perhaps illiteracy is a major hindrance preventing our people – our villagers of the significance of protecting our flora and fauna. Perhaps unemployment is the main culprit that forces many to take to poaching and earn some illegal but quick bucks. Too many “perhaps” too little hope.

Allegedly we have all arrangements, every facility that claims to be looking after our wild but the question is , are they doing their jobs? A million dollar question indeed. For had everyone in such departments been doing their jobs than the rampant killings of innocent animals might have been prevented. The man – animal conflict is an issue that has been raised many a times but have any steps been taken to redress it?

Time and again we have seen the appearances of leopards on the city streets which have been either beaten to death by an irate public or killed due to mishandling by forest officials during the process of tranquilizing. Elephants have been electrocuted umpteenth number of times but we are yet to come up with a sure shot solution to curb the problem. What is the forest ministry doing, I would like to ask.

Allegedly the poachers are a better equipped lot than our forest guards as the modern equipment they carry are no match to the primitive arms that our guards carry - arms which would be more suited to a museum rather than on the shoulders of the protectors of our wild. Ill equipped and underpaid and added to the hazards of their work do not want to risk one's own life to save a mere beast.

Unlike developed countries where even the citizens do not hesitate to risk their own lives to save that of an animal our country sadly falls short of such courage and compassion towards the animal kingdom. Perhaps there is something gravely wrong with our sensibilities which is why animals and their lives are considered to be unimportant in our scheme of things. The very first step towards protection of our wild life is sensitizing our masses towards the concept of conservation. Next comes the spirit of dedication in the people who are involved or have the responsibility of looking after and taking care of the wild. If the persons concerned do not have love for animals they will surely fail to protect them for the office or profession of animal protection is no ordinary one and needs a lot of compassion and a humane attitude in order to nurture and treasure our animal kingdom. But till then the massacre of animals will continue and our four legged friends will continue to die and become extinct at the callous hands of inhuman two legged beings.

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BY RITUPARNA GOSWAMI PANDE

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