

Eco Development Committees for Orang National Park formed



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Jayanta Kumar Das 4 October 2010 10343 views

In a bid to garner fringe villagers' goodwill and cooperation, the authorities of Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park have formed 11 Eco Development Committees (EDCs) from amongst the peripheral villages. Thus 11 villages have been covered for EDC formation during 2009-10 through this first of its kind concept in the National Park.

The strategy was necessitated by several factors including increasing chasm between the Forest staff and fringe communities and mutual feelings of mistrust and suspicion. While the Park administration's biggest concern was the local guides from these villages who were in league with rhino poachers, the villagers would look askance when house to house raids were conducted after every rhino poaching. In certain segments of the Park boundary, the villagers let loose their unproductive cattle for grazing inside the Park. As a result, there are several cases of cattle falling prey to tigers. The villagers are not entitled to compensation if a tiger hunts the cattle inside the Park's boundary but can claim it if the incident occurs outside the Park boundary. At times, tigers venture out of the National Park and kill cattle available in the vicinity of the Park. This leads to incidents of retaliatory tiger poisoning by villagers. At least 6 tigers have been poisoned since 2005 the last one being in August 2009. There are occasional reports of crop raiding by wild animals specially wild boar and deer.

In order to resolve these vexing problems, the Forest authorities have taken a slew of measures. For instance, if a cattle is killed by a tiger outside the Park, urgent relief is paid to the affected party within 24 hours which prevent retaliatory tiger poisoning. An electric fencing in the vulnerable 2 km stretch is also coming up along the boundary to bar animals from straying out of the National Park. A couple of field guides to poachers have surrendered and are engaged by the Forest officials as informers by paying them reward money commensurate with the significance of the information provided.

Above all, each of the 11 villages have been provided with drinking water facilities (hand tube wells), solar lights and village roads in the current year which has enabled the Forest staff win people's confidence and support. Some of the EDC members have been found extending support to the extent that they actually keep vigil along the Park's boundary even during late night and share information with the Forest officials. In the month of November-December, around 5000 nos. of cattle in the fringe villages will be vaccinated to avoid possible disease transmission to the wild animals of the National Park. Human health camps will also be organized by the Forest Department for the fringe communities during the same period.

The EDC model seems to be providing the intended benefits to the village communities as also the Park authorities.

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BY JAYANTA KUMAR DAS

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