

Wild boar, a new threat to the Manipur Brow-antlered deer - the *Sangai* Khuraijam Jibankumar Singh, Rajkumar Robindro, Mayengbam James and Meiraba Nongmeikapam*

The Manipur Brow-antlered deer (*Rucervus eldii eldi*) or *Sangai* (Manipuri) is now threatened by its co-inhabitants, the Wild boar. Previously *Sangai* were threatened mainly by hunting practice of the local inhabitants living at the vicinity of the Keibul Lamjao National park. During a survey conducted in August 2011 at Keibul Lamjao National Park by a team of NECEER, a young *Sangai* was found killed by wild boars. It was noticed that the lower abdomen and thigh part of the fawn were eaten by wild boars when it was collected by the forest guards (FGs) of the park. This is the first report of *Sangai* being killed by wild boar and it is a serious concern for the conservation of this endangered mammal. *Sangai* breed only once in a year and breeding lasts from September to December. One female delivers only one fawn at a time and the life span of *Sangai* is about 20 years (Sanayaima, 1988; Tombi, 1991). Hence the death of this young deer is a serious threat to the already small number of deer in the park. The number of wild boars in the park is increasing as they give birth to several offspring per year. Wild boar lives in grass or reeds and avoids hilly area. It is an omnivorous animal feeding on roots, tubers, insects, snakes and carrion (Singh, 1978). Due to increasing population of wild boar in the park, the snake population has also reduced significantly. There is urgent need to study the sudden change of food habits among the wild boar which led to the killing of much bigger mammals like *Sangai*. Improvement in the monitoring practices by the forest guards in the park is required and the highly advanced communication facilities should be provided which would help in proper management of the park.

***Sangai*, the dancing deer of Manipur**

The deer is one of the most endangered cervids of the world and *Sangai* was considered to have gone extinct in 1951 when a small population of deer was re-discovered by the auspices of IUCN in 1953 (Ranjitsinh, 1975). *Sangai* is threatened by poaching (as it is hunted for its hides and antlers), floods, epidemics, habitat infringement and habitat loss (due to the thinning of *phumdis* due to Loktak Hydel project, transformation of grasslands to agricultural lands), environmental perturbation, due to small size of the population the animal is threatened by inbreeding depression and loss of genetic diversity. Due to the intensive



Forest Guard verifying the deer

poaching the species is threatened with risk of extinction and hence was listed in the Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972).

Brow-antlered deer is a medium-sized deer with uniquely distinctive antlers which are bent forward and down before continuing outward to the side. The full grown deer is usually 115-125 cm in height and weighs 95-110 kg. The hooves of these deer are specially adapted to walk on *phumdis* which is the characteristic feature of their habitat and because of which they are also referred as "Dancing deer". The *Sangai* deer is one of the three sub-species of Eld's deer, which is found in Manipur, North east India, with the

other forms distributed in Myanmar and Thailand.

Sangai prefers open woodland or grasslands in close proximity of water courses, especially the marshy areas. In India the *phumdi* in Loktak Lake is the potential habitat of the deer. The Keibul Lamjao National Park conserves the small population of the deer in Manipur, North east India. They are herbivorous and the diet mainly comprises of aquatic vegetation

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The young *Sangai* with a portion of the leg eaten by wild boar



A male *Sangai* in Keibul Lamjao National Park, Manipur, India

(usually plants that constitute phumdis), herbs, shoots and grasses. *Zizania latifolia*, *Saccharum munja*, *Saccharum bengalensis*, *Erianthus procerus*, *Erianthus ravennae* etc are the favourite food plants of *Sangai* (Singh, 1992).

The Keibul Lamjao National Park is the exclusive habitat of *Sangai* deer so it was declared as Wildlife Sanctuary by the Government of India in the year

1954 with purpose to promote *in-situ* conservation of the species. With the sustained efforts of Forest Department, local people and clubs and support from the Central Government, the population of *Sangai* has increased from 14 in 1975 to 162 in 2000. The population of *Sangai* in latest survey conducted in 2003 was estimated to be 180 animals 65 stags, 74 hinds, and 41 fawns (Singsit 2003). A *Sangai*

protection forum was developed by youths of adjoining villages of Loktak lake for the effective management of habitats of *Sangai* and to halt the abject illegal poaching. The *ex-situ* conservation of *Sangai* was promoted by development of *Sangai* Breeding centre at Iroishemba Zoological Garden, Imphal where the species is bred in captivity to increase their population.

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