

Sensitizing local communities through training and awareness to conserve the Greater One-horned Rhino

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The Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong OPCFHK sponsored a project to organize training workshop for educators on Rhino conservation education and to create awareness about Rhino conservation among local communities in and nearby Rhino range areas in India. The project also assisted to create a network of educators to promote species conservation with particular reference to Rhinos and other local species. The entire programme was coordinated and conducted by Zoo Outreach Organization in collaboration with the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society NWCS, Jalpaiguri and the West Bengal Forest Department (Division II), Jalpaiguri. The event took place at Lataguri, 25-30 July 2014 and a total of 46 educators from 20 institutes and 6 wildlife divisions took part in the workshop and about 400 school children and local communities took part in the awareness programmes. As a follow up of the project, many awareness programmes have been conducted and planned by the trained participants during and after the completion of the project period.

Human being sharing space with wild animals, need to develop a very strong appreciation of wildlife in order to develop the level of behavioural and attitudinal changes needed to foster conservation. The Greater one-horned rhino, *Rhinoceros unicornis* that was declared as an Endangered species in 1986, is now listed as Vulnerable (Talukdar *et al*, 2014). Most of the rhino populations occur exclusively within the Protected Areas in India (Assam, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) and Nepal. The IUCN SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group (2013) reported that about 3,339 rhinos live in the above areas. It



Dr. P.T. Bhutia, IFS delivering a lecture on Rhino population status in India. Photo: Alakshya



Manas Majumder the coordinator of the programme introducing Rhino taxonomy to the community. Photo: Daniel

also reports that the Greater one-horned rhino populations are increasing over all, however, some populations are decreasing in certain parts of Nepal and northeastern India. The population is severely fragmented and over 70% of the population is in Kaziranga National Park, Assam.

Implementing education and awareness programmes is one of the recommendations of Indian Rhino Vision 2020 and the Nepal Rhino Action Plan. To achieve this ZOO with the financial support of OPCFHK planned a trainers training programme for the educators of selected Protected Areas having rhinos in India and to

reach out the common public and children through them. NWCS in consultation with the forest department did the tedious task of carefully selecting the participants representing all sectors of the community while ZOO designed, developed and printed all required education materials for the training and the awareness programmes. A wide range of participants such as school and college teachers interested in wildlife teaching, forest personnel

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Drama on Ecotourism. Photo: Alakshya

involved in education, NGOs, business people, physicians, advocates and artists involved in wildlife conservation took part in this training programme. The number of participants was limited to 45 and they were selected on first come first served basis.

As part of the project, targeting the educators, *the Greater one-horned rhino conservation teaching toolkit* was developed. The aim of the toolkit was to translate scientific data about the rhino into stimulating concepts and messages that appeal to stakeholders and connect with their emotions and personal benefits. The approach in this Toolkit was to teach and to attract non-traditional as well as traditional educators to adopt new teaching techniques and activities, which are more effective in influencing comprehension, retention and behavioural changes. Thus the toolkit provided education about rhino in general. It has four sections featuring the Greater one-horned rhino conservation, which can be used as a medium for conveying a wide range of active learning techniques for both experienced and casual educators. The teaching toolkit teaches basic facts about the Asian and African rhino species, tools to assess the audience, taxonomy, its behaviour, biology, distribution, threats, status and recommendations for conservation. In addition to the teaching guide, educational packet featuring Greater one-horned rhino were also developed. Each packet has a booklet, mask, stickers, placard, fact sheet and *rakhi* (friendship band) etc., in local language which are useful in teaching different target audiences.

The methodology involves a combination of active teaching/learning tools to spread the message of conservation. The highlight of this approach is that there is no need for any 'high tech' equipment such as Projectors and thus a very effective programme can be planned only with minimum expenditure.

The training programme was inaugurated by Dr. P.T. Bhutia, IFS, Special Additional PCCF & CF, Northern Circle, West Bengal. During the inaugural he

suggested that 'Rhino Vision 2020' has been developed by the Assam State government and the West Bengal also need a similar vision to improve Rhino population in the state.

During the workshop, the contents of the teaching toolkit was covered and the participants got sufficient time to practice the activities. In the process active teaching tools were introduced. The activities covered during the workshop were know each other, assessment tools, know your species, mini drama, past and present distribution, illustrated history of rhino, rhino in our culture, rhino status, threats and conservation, rhino conference and tips for planning education programmes. The assessment tool was repeated before and after the workshop to assess the knowledge they gained during the workshop period. At the end of the training the participants committed to take action within the next three months from the date of the training (see box 1 for pledge). This

Box 1. Pledge by the participants

I will share what I learned in this training with all other members of my organization as they can also become a resource person and can deliver this type of activities - *Goutam Kumar Saha, Alipurduar Birders Club, Alipurduar*

Educating local people especially those who have tendency of doing anti-social as well as illegal activities which affects the ecosystem of that area - *Pukar Rai, Forest Ranger, Manas Wildlife Sanctuary*

I will share the information with my friends, family, local community and my organization - *Anup Datta, Siliguri Green Environment Preservation Society.*

Box 2. Feedback about the workshop

The workshop was very interactive, innovative, interesting and really I have gained lot of experience in these two days. Looking forward to practice such workshop in my forest and forest fringe villages. Though some more information brochure or booklet can be supplied in this workshop regarding Conservation of Rhino – Smriti Rai, Beat officer, Goumara National Park.

Rhino conservation education workshop was very practical and easily understood the concept of training as well as prepared very well for guide the grieve communities of adjoining area - Bimal Pradhan, Dy Ranger Kunswing Forest Division.

It is a remarkable workshop. It was delivered in such a commendable way, I love the concept very much and apply in my local level. It should be organized in regular basis - Bikki Kr Sah.

I found this Rhino training workshop to be very interesting & helpful from conservation & Proection point of view. Excellent methods have been implemented to learn by the participants. Similar workshop on "Elephant & Tigers" in near future is highly expected from your side – Pukar Rai

helped the organizers to do the follow up and to encourage them to fulfill their commitments. Dr. P.T. Bhutia, IFS gave a lecture on the status of Rhino

population in West Bengal. Mr. Soumitra Adhikary, President, Nature And Wildlife Conservation Society (NWCS) closed the workshop by issuing participation certificates. The feedback about the workshop by the participants was very useful for the organizers (see box 2). At the end the participants were given a set of education tools for them to do programmes immediately with their audience.

As part of the project a series of awareness programmes were planned in five selected villages in and around Gorumara National Park. Trained educators under the monitoring and guidance of the authors conducted the awareness programmes. The programmes include: 1. a school programme for Municipality run children school, Jharmatiali, Matiali Block, Jalpaiguri District. About 70 children of age group 12-14 and 10 staff from the school took part in the event; 2. a village community programme in the primary school of Ramsai Village – A mixed group of audience of all age group particularly children attended this event. This was coordinated by Ms. Smriti Rai, beat officer and the Ranger. About 80 people attended this. 3. Eco tourism guides, Wildlife



Trained educator Ms. Smriti Rai with her students in Ramsai Village. Photo: Daniel

joined the community programmes at different locations. More awareness programmes have been planned by the educators in the near future. A network of educators has been formed and they were made members of ZOO's Educator Network. As a member they will be receiving all future communications related to education activities and given priority to order for education materials of ZOO.



Lataguri workshop participants. Photo: Daniel

Division II and Jalpaiguri territorial division that held at Nature Interpretation Centre, Lataguri – 27 invited tour guides attended this half a day event. This was organized by the West Bengal forest Division II. 4. Urban school students of Fainindra Bev Institution, Jalpaiguri – this was conducted mainly for the National Cadet Corps students of the school who are involved social work activities of the region. About 90 students took part in it, and 5. Howrah South Point, a NGO for poor children, Mohitnagar Unit, Jalpaiguri District – about 30 people of different age group took part in it.

The aim of the awareness programme was to reach out the people who live in the fringe area of the Protected Areas and to promote Rhino conservation. The other objective was to create an opportunity for the trained educators to conduct programmes utilizing the new toolkits and to practice what they learned during the training. About 11 educators who attended the training volunteered their time and

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