

# WILDLIFE CONSERVATION WITH PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION

## The Right to Live

Nature has created several ecosystems and millions of animal and plant species including micro-organisms within each ecosystem on mother earth and every life form has specific roles to play for auto-run of the ecosystem. All life forms are interdependent either to render services to one another or become food for the higher trophic level animals through a food chain or food web. If one species gets eliminated due to some reason or other, the food chain breaks consequently affecting the ecosystem automation process.

Man (*Homo sapiens*) is one of the species among millions of species created by nature and every animal or plant species has equal rights to live on earth as man has. We should also understand that they are not created to render services to the mankind alone, but to the nature as a whole. Man should not be a cause of extinction of other species, if not helpful for their existence.

## The Services Rendered

Animals cannot prepare food for themselves. They get food directly or indirectly from plants (autotrophs), which make food by photosynthesis. Man and other animals get medicines from plants to cure their ailments. Wild animals, by sheer instinct know herbal therapy as we know many medicinal plants. Our study in this regard has not yet discovered many other useful and medicinal plants on earth. Besides, Homoeopathic medicines like Apis, Vespa, Bufo, Tarantula, Moschus, Naja are prepared from living animal's body of Honey bee, Wasp, Frog, Spider, Musk of Musk deer, Venom of Cobra respectively to cure numerous human diseases. Cubans and Afghans now claim that cancer and vitiligo (white patches on skin) can be cured by medicine prepared from scorpions. Our knowledge has not yet explored the quality available within the wild animals. It can be safely stated that very little is known in this context and much more is yet to be explored.

Soil microorganisms help in decomposition of animal carcasses and dead plants into organic manure for the sustenance of plant kingdom. Scavengers like Hyena, Vulture, Crow, Wild pig, consume the dead animal bodies rapidly to make environment clean. Snakes control rodent population in our crop fields, thus in turn they prevent food grain loss. Frogs control insect and mosquito population by devouring their larvae and protect us from parasitic diseases (Insects act as vectors of the parasites) and our crops as well. These are just a few visible examples to establish the role of wild animals in our ecosystem. Think for a while, if they are not there who will perform their role? And surely there is enough reason to protect and conserve wildlife and their habitat and to live in harmony with wildlife on this planet.

## The Conservation Strategy

Wildlife is meant by all biotic elements on the Earth including all species of plants and animals excluding human beings, domestic animals and cultivated plants. Since time immemorial, our wildlife has been closely associated with our beliefs and folk lores. References on this can be drawn aplenty from our great epics and our rich history. Wildlife with their varied forms build up the balance of nature aside from making our lives more beautiful and meaningful on the planet. With a view to preserve the wildlife of India, particularly to take urgent steps to prevent extinction of any species, Government of India established the Indian Board of Wildlife (IBWL) in 1952, the highest body in the country established for laying down policy and issuing directives for proper management of Protected Areas. The Board

has since been doing pioneering work to create public consciousness in favour of wildlife preservation. Therefore, in order to create a mass movement for protection of wildlife, the IBWL decided to observe the **Wildlife Week from October 2 – 8 every year**. 57<sup>th</sup> Wildlife week has been observed across the country.

The World Bank estimates that forest provides habitats to about two-third of all species on the earth, and that deforestation of closed tropical rain forests could account for biodiversity loss of as many as 100 species a day. The destruction deplorably continues at an alarming rate due to encroachment, urbanization and industrialization resulting in reduction of forest density and extent. The depletion of wildlife can be attributed largely to deforestation and inroads of human civilization into the forest. Fragmentation of habitat and corridors isolate wild animals to small patches inviting inbreeding which starts the process of extinction of the species from the earth. Wild animals are being poached ruthlessly to satisfy the greed of few rich persons for their luxury. International smuggling of wild animal trophies is next to narcotics smuggling and at par with arms smuggling.

### The Protected Area Network in Odisha

National Parks and Sanctuaries have been notified to protect the habitats and corridors of wild animals. **Odisha has 18 wildlife sanctuaries, one National Park (Bhitarkanika), one proposed National Park (Similipal)** covering an area of 8226.69 Sq.Km which comes to 5.28% of the total geographical area of the State (155707 Sq.Km). All the sanctuaries were notified between 1975 and 1997 after the enactment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. These are Bhitarkanika (April, 1975), Satkosia Gorge (May, 1976), Hadgarh (December, 1978), Similipal and Nandankanan (1979), Baisipalli and Kotagarh (1981), Chandaka, Karlapat and Khalasuni (1982), Kuldiha and Balukhanda (1984), Lakhari and Debrigarh (1985), Badrama and Chilika-Nalabana (1987), Sunabeda (1988) and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary (1997).

Besides the above National Parks and Sanctuaries, Odisha has 2 Tiger Reserves (Similipal and Satkosia), 3 Elephant Reserves (Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur and Mahanadi), 1 Biosphere Reserve (Similipal) and 2 RAMSAR sites at Chilika and Bhitarkanika for protection of wetlands, the habitat of aquatic and avian fauna. There are 7 mini zoos/deer parks besides one large zoo at Nandankanan in our State for educating the people, ex-situ conservation and captive breeding of endangered species like gharial, vulture, and pangolin etc.

### The Flagship Animals in Protected Areas (Towards Focused Conservation)

The common wild animals seen in most of the protected areas are Tiger, Leopard, Sloth bear, Elephant, Jackal, Hyena, Wild pig, Spotted deer, Sambar, Barking deer, Peacock, Hornbill, Snakes and Reptiles. But there are specific sanctuaries notified for conservation of particular wild animals. Gahirmatha is the only marine sanctuary notified for protection of breeding site of Olive Ridley sea turtles. Satkosia Gorge sanctuary was notified for conservation of Gharial and Mugger crocodile. Chandaka was notified for conservation of elephant population. Estuarine Crocodile (*Baula Kumbhira*) and Bottle nose Dolphin are seen only in Bhitarkanika. Black bucks are largely seen in Balukhanda-Konark (100 nos.) and at Balipadar-Bhetanai (Ganjam district) (above 1100 in number). One has to visit Debrigarh and Karlapat to see Gaur (Indian Bison), Satpada (Chilika) to see Irawadi Dolphin (300 nos.) and over 95 species of migrating birds during winter. Tiger with more and wider black stripes on body, called **Melanistic tiger**, are now camera trapped in Similipal Tiger Reserve. Wild buffalos (*Arana mainsi*) are only sighted in Sunabeda sanctuary bordering Sita and Udanti sanctuaries of Chhatisgarh State.



Melanistic Tiger in Similipal Tiger Reserve  
(Camera Trap Photo)

### The Eco-tourism Destinations: A Human Interface

Sighting of wild animals and birds gives us immense pleasure. Wilderness of forest gives us peace and serenity. People often search for such places to get away from the madding crowd and mounting mental tensions of urban life. In order to provide tranquil avenues to the nature lovers, several eco-tourism destinations have been developed at Chilika, Bhitarkanika, Satkosia, Similipal, Debrigarh, Kuldiha and in several other sanctuaries. Ideal season for most of these eco-tourism destinations is winter and spring (October-March). Infrastructures have been developed to provide accommodation to eco-tourists during night time, catering facility, travelling and boating facilities. Local communities have been involved to render services to the visitors for cooking and serving food, supplying utensils, fuel wood etc. for day picnickers. Trained eco-guides are locally available to provide interpretive services to the visitors. The interested eco-tourists may contact the concerned Divisional Forest Officers well in advance to reserve these facilities in these eco-tourism destinations.



### The Wildlife Management Principles

Wildlife conservation aims at active and planned wildlife management under which all forms of life would progress side by side with human progress, each in its own sphere of influence and utility and without any loss of human interests. In fact, it is with this end in view that wildlife sanctuaries and national parks have been established and developed in suitable localities all over the country.

Protection of wild animals and their habitats is being achieved through deployment of anti-smuggling squads, anti-poaching squads at vulnerable points within the protected areas. They conduct foot patrolling as well as vehicular patrolling being equipped with vehicle, boat, arms and ammunitions, VHF sets, mobile phones, search lights, uniform, GPS and binoculars etc. to render services. Preventive measures are taken to protect forest from fire and grazing. Habitat condition is improved by eradication of invasive weeds, creation of meadows and maintenance of grass lands. Water requirement of wild animals are met by digging large water bodies inside forest. Mineral supplements are provided through salt licks. Vaccination to domestic cattle living in fringe villages, in and around the PAs (Protected Areas) is done to check spread of infectious diseases like Foot and Mouth Diseases, Rinderpest, and Anthrax to the wild animals. Anti depredation measures are taken to prevent wild animals from straying into human habitation and their crop fields and also to drive them back to forest. Compassionate amount is paid to the victims of wild animal attack to make up for the loss sustained and to pacify the antagonistic attitude of people towards wild animals. Eco-development activities are undertaken in the adjoining villages to aid livelihood opportunities of people living inside sanctuaries and to build up local support for existence of protected areas. Local youths are provided employment in sanctuary activities to avoid nexus with poachers and to divert them from doing illegal activities within the protected areas.

### The Funding

In order to carry out above activities in protected areas, there is an annual budget of around Rs.70 crore in Orissa. Funds are sourced through several schemes operated under State Plan, Central Plan, Centrally Sponsored Plan and CAMPA. Important schemes include 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission Grant and Elephant Management under State Plan, Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat, Project Elephant, Project Tiger and Conservation and Management of Mangrove under Central Plan and Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme.

## The People in Wildlife Conservation

Conservation of wild animals and their habitats is not possible without strong political will and unless the people of the nation desire to conserve them. A fit case in site in our state is conservation of **Black buck in Balipadar-Bhetanoi** of Ganjam district. About 1100 Black bucks (*Baliharina/Krushnasar mruga*), an endangered species of antelope group have preferred the human inhabited areas of 100 Sq. Km spreading over about 70 villages to live in harmony with people, who have been protecting them from several generations. The habitat is dotted with cultivated crop fields and rocky elevation interspersed with little forest cover and mango groves. This area is being notified as a 'Community Reserve' u/s 36 C of the Wildlife (Protection) Act to provide better protection. The Black buck Management Committee of the area has been awarded with Biju Pattnaik Award during 2005 (Highest Award of the State for Conservation of Wildlife).

To encourage people's participation in conservation of forest and wildlife, Govt. of Orissa, Forest and Environment Department have issued a Joint Forest Management Resolution in 2008. As per the resolution, the Protected Areas (National Parks and Sanctuaries) excluding their core area and mangrove wetlands, have been brought under Joint Forest Management. The villages located within the PAs as well as adjacent to the same are being involved in protection and management of wildlife and their habitat, through formation of Eco-Development Committee (EDC) at the village level.



Villagers protecting Black buck in Balipadar-Bhetanoi area

## The Wildlife Week

The objective of observing the Wildlife week is to generate awareness among school students and general public. Senior and junior school students participate in sit and draw competition on wildlife issues and best 3 students of the state in each category are awarded with cash prize Rs.2000 to Rs.4000 at a State level function. Best wildlife photographers are awarded Rs.3000 to Rs.5000 cash award for talking photographs. Best essay on wildlife topic is given away a cash prize of Rs.4000 at the State level. Biju Pattnaik award of Rs.2.00 lakh in cash, is given by the Honourable Chief Minister of Orissa on the occasion of Wildlife week celebration to a person or to an organization for making significant contribution to the cause of awareness, study, research and protection of wildlife in Orissa. On 4<sup>th</sup> October during the week, Elephant Day is observed. In Nandankanan zoo the day is observed by decorating all the captive elephants with colours and clothes for display to generate love for elephants, the national heritage animal. Wildlife week is also observed at Division level where students participate in 'pada yatra' reciting slogans for wildlife conservation. Quiz, essay and debate competitions on wildlife subjects are held and thereafter the winners are felicitated on stage.

## Conclusion

The precious wild animals and plants of our nation can be protected, their habitats can be restored, man-animal conflicts can be resolved if people of all sections/ classes/ age groups and organizations whether in public sector or in private sector wholeheartedly support conservation of forests and wildlife and have passion and compassion for wildlife and wilderness.

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Source : Harsha Bardhan Udgata is the writer of this article published in Orissa Review, September-October, 2011.