



RED PANDA

ATREE – EASTERN HIMALAYA
REGIONAL OFFICE NEWSLETTER

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- Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas
- Products Himalaya goes East
- The strange case of the early flowering rhododendrons
- The flight of the Great hornbill
- The golden langur fights for survival

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE PROGRAMME IN NORTH EAST INDIA

As a part of UNESCO's World Heritage Biodiversity Programme for India, ATREE is implementing project activities in two of the natural world heritage sites in India, namely, Manas National Park and Kaziranga National Park. We are now based in Guwahati, with frequent travel to the field sites.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

- Strengthening Capacity for Effective Management
- Involving Local Communities
- Enhancing Habitat Connectivity in the Park
- Research and Monitoring
- Management and Governance
- Raising Profile of World Biodiversity Heritage Sites in Civil Society

An official press meet was organized in Guwahati on 2

December 2008 to hand over various items under the project to the park authorities. The Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of Assam, formally did the honours. Winter jackets were provided to forest staff and solar lanterns were given for beat camps in the national parks. An ambulance vehicle was handed over for each of the two sites, which will serve the local communities in the fringe villages. A number of prominent signboards/signages have been provided to be placed along strategic locations along the Kaziranga corridor to educate road/highway users of potential animal crossing zones.

During October-November 2008, intensive field visits were undertaken to the two sites by an ATREE research team. As a result of this visit and the consultations held, we are now in the process of preparing a detailed research proposal for undertaking activities under the project.

- Niraj Kakati



Minister for Forests, Government of Assam, Mr. Rockybul Hussain hands over equipment to park staff. One of the ambulances handed over to Park authorities for use in the fringe villages (below).



NEWS IN BRIEF

The Conservation and Livelihoods Programme staff at ATREE Bangalore visited Darjeeling to share their experience of working in the Western Ghats and learn from the work in Eastern Himalayas

The CEPF Small Grants Programme has given out a total of 21 Grants so far to independent researchers and NGOs in the Indian Eastern Himalayas

See: www.cepf.net

A team from IFAD project areas in NE India visited Darjeeling to learn from the bamboo artisans in the ATREE field sites and to share their experiences and skills in bamboo craft making

DISCUSSING CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS ISSUES IN THE WESTERN GHATS AND EASTERN HIMALAYAS

A two-day interactive workshop on Conservation and Livelihoods was organized by ATREE's Eastern Himalayas Office at the Fortune Resort in Darjeeling on the 25th and 26th of November, 2008. The workshop brought together researchers, scientists and bio-conservationists from ATREE Bangalore, the Northeast and the Darjeeling Himalayas to share regional experiences and learning.

The aim of the workshop was to enable sharing of experiences and learning from the Conservation and Livelihoods work in the Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas.

A ten-member team from Bangalore interacted and shared their work in the five action-research sites in the Western Ghats. The Eastern Himalayas team presented their work from the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas, and the Grants Programme in the north eastern states.

Local NGOs from the region were also invited to share their work. Among them were DLR Prerna, Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP) and Save the Hills. Amba Jamir, from the NGO Missing Link, made a presentation on the practice of jhum cultivation in the north east.

The workshop was followed by a field visit to villages in Sanchel Wildlife Sanctuary, where ATREE's Conservation and Livelihoods Programme has been working.

The discussions centered around reconciling conservation and livelihoods issues in biodiversity rich areas, the space opened up by the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act 2006, community based resource management and the role of traditional institutions in co-management of forests.

- Akai Mao



All smiles after the workshop.
Photo © Nitin Rai

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING LOCAL INSTITUTIONS



Meeting of SHG members in Rampuria and Rambri forest villages

Photos © Mary Hmar

ATREE is implementing a market based conservation project which is being supported by the Blue Moon Fund. One of the aims of the project on 'Engaging Markets to Sustain Livelihoods and Advance Conservation' is to build and strengthen local institutions.

In order to promote Self Help Groups in the new villages, we held meetings with various groups at the village level from 11-13 October 2008 and 9-10 November 2008. Four new Self Help Groups have been formed during September and October in two villages of Rampuria and Raniban. In some older Self Help

Groups, like Prerana SHG, the members have become master trainers and are now training other groups as local resource persons. This is a significant development at the village level in terms of local capacity building, peer to peer learning and extension.

Initially, talking about community-based biodiversity conservation alone was pointless, particularly to those villagers who lived below the poverty line. Unless the biodiversity conservation component is properly linked with the developmental framework, biodiversity conservation and local conservation

action is unlikely to take place. The future economy of most of the rural communities depends on the sustainable use of local biodiversity and viable alternatives. Today, when communities are seeing a greater diversity in alternative livelihood options, it has increased the scope for participation of more households. This is particularly so after the demonstrated success of SHGs in income generating activities, which we hope will eventually contribute to conservation and protection of natural resources.

- Mary Hmar



**PRODUCTS HIMALAYA TEAM GOES EAST
SCOUTING FOR NEW PRODUCTS, BUILDING LINKAGES**

North East: a region which constantly brings up images of turbulence and uncertainty in the minds of our mainstream countrymen. Our trip to the region provided us with an opportunity to explore the largely untold story of incredible diversity, simple lives and dying crafts.

A two member team comprising Sanchita Muktan, the product designer of ATREE's project on marketing rural products and myself left for North East on 10 August. Our fifteen day trip to the region was essentially drafted to scout for new ethnic handicrafts made by artisans there and to understand and learn from their struggles to strengthen a similar society here in Darjeeling. Meanwhile, we have also offered to market the products from north east at our Products Himalaya outlet in Darjeeling to get a first hand feeling about the market trends – among tourists and locals, about these products. This we believe will help maximize the efforts of our local groups. Our little effort is also expected to

help the local artisans in North East who have not yet been able to market their products due to the various problems.

As our trip was short we had decided to limit the number of places to visit and focus on locating the groups about which we had gathered information about during our informal pre-trip research. Thus we hopped and skipped to and fro from Guwahati to places such as Dimapur, Imphal, Tura, Kohima and Kokhrajhar.

It was refreshing to meet groups such as the Sisterhood Network, Priscilla Centre, Lady Bug, Diocesan Self Service Society and Indi Luo, all of which have been working endlessly over the past few years in order to uplift the destitute, marginalized and economically backward strata of society. It was inspirational to see how these organizations have worked extensively towards the holistic development of women and other marginalized groups. Not only socially and economically

but also spiritually - working towards self reliance. Some groups work exclusively to empower uneducated women and girls who are school dropouts as well as HIV positive people who are ostracized and vulnerable as no avenues are open to them. In most of the places we could easily see the rich handicraft traditions of the region. However, lack of enough financial incentives was slowly but steadily forcing the artisans to leave their trade, despite many of the products having the potential of grabbing markets worldwide. Thus, though weaving still finds importance in their lives, complicated and old techniques of basketry are slowly fading.

Innovation however seems to be the key with the people of the region slowly diversifying into merging handicrafts into items of daily use. We discovered this trend when we found that tyres were being used to create buckets and bowls for washing which presented an awe inspiring example of how communities have experimented and honed their skills in the art of recycling. Since our trip was short much remained to be explored; as this first time was just skimming the surface of a vast ocean of treasures! However, our task was done and perhaps given a chance in the future we should explore further. Who knows what we might find?

The North East has a rich handicraft tradition, but the lack of financial incentives is forcing some artisans to leave their trade



A weave of the Kabui ethnic group, DSSS Imphal
All photos © Reena Chettri

- Reena Chettri

CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

The ATREE Eastern Himalayas Regional Office in Darjeeling is implementing the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Grants Programme in the Indian Eastern Himalayas. The CEPF programme in the region consists of a Core



Grant programme that aims at securing landscape level conservation outcomes while the Small Grants programme aims at targeted, high-impact efforts focused primarily on

Critically Endangered, Endemic and lesser-known taxa in the priority areas of Kanchenjunga-Singalila Complex and the North Bank Landscape.

Three grantee reports are presented here. For more visit:



FLIGHT OF THE GREAT HORNBILL

Kamten, a local hunter from the Rima village in the eastern corner of Arunachal Pradesh, once told me the story of how the Great Hornbill got its tail. The then tail-less Great hornbill had helped a *Tikhak* (a sub-class of the *Tangsa* tribe) villager get his kidnapped wife back from a water demon. In return, the man gave the hornbill his dhoti, which was white at the top, black in the middle and white below. The hornbill now wears it as its tail.

Even today when they shoot a Great hornbill they throw a stone or stick on the hornbill pretending that it was the stone or stick that killed the hornbill and not the hunter's weapon. Since the hornbill is dead, the hunter is 'merely picking it up' just so that the meat isn't wasted!

Now, he said that hornbills aren't hunted during their breeding season because killing the male results in starvation and death of the female, a sin too severe to commit. It is amazing to hear these stories percolated down generations, but somewhere along the way the hunting restriction on the Great hornbill was relaxed and is now almost forgotten. The next day as I was walking with Kamten in the verdant rainforests near his village he

told me how the Great hornbills are now a rare sight compared to the past. Today if I wanted to see one, I must reach the fruiting fig tree in the forest before dawn. This predictability in hornbill behaviour led to its undoing. The fruiting trees are now a death trap. Many hunters across Arunachal Pradesh have told me how they wait under a fruiting tree for an unsuspecting hornbill to arrive.

Hornbills, especially the Great hornbill, are slowly and steadily vanishing from the still intact forests of Arunachal Pradesh. More than habitat loss, from logging and shifting cultivation, hunting is a far greater threat. Throughout my survey across the state where I walked more than 200 km, I managed to detect hornbills in only five of the 21 sites. At six sites, the hunters maintained that the Great hornbills were locally extinct.

Great hornbill body parts especially the casque and feathers are an important part of the traditional rituals and customs of many tribes. A single tail feather can cost as much as 1000 INR in the Upper Wancho areas of the Tirap district. A single Great hornbill can fetch several thousand rupees. Many locals are now aware of these

economic opportunities. They know exactly where to sell each part of the hornbill.

Recently, a Nocte hunter from Mopoya, in the lower Tirap district told me how he and a few others had desperately gone looking for a pair of Great hornbills which he had seen flying around. Hunting is deeply ingrained in the local culture across the state and may be across many a tribe in north-east India. Weaning them is an exceptionally challenging task. The younger generation is slowly forgetting the hunting rules which their ancestors revered. I remember Kamten telling me how some of his younger village mates continued to hunt hornbills into the forbidden breeding season. Unless we wean them from their dependencies on the forest, not only for their protein requirements, but also for timber, conservation of forests and its denizens in the landscape will continue to pose a serious challenge to biologists. Finding economic alternatives to hunting lucrative species like the Great hornbill is no easy task and requires much more effort than just finding economic solutions.

- Rohit Naniwadekar, PhD
Scholar, NCF
CEPF/ATREE Grantee

Great hornbill body parts especially the casque and feathers are an important part of the traditional rituals and customs of many tribes.



Top: A Nishi elder wears a cap with a hornbill casque; a Wancho man wears a tail feather in his head dress
All photos © Rohit N/NCF

THE GOLDEN LANGUR FIGHTS FOR SURVIVAL



A golden langur male; and, below, a typical golden langur family group

Photos © Jihosuo Biswas

The IUCN/SSG/
PSG CAMP
assessment has
categorized the
Indian
population of the
golden langur as
'critically
endangered'

Golden langur, locally called 'makhre gophur' or 'sonali bandar' is a leaf eating Colobine monkey. With an extraordinarily small range of distribution Golden langur, *Trachypithecus geei* is prerogative to the Manas Biosphere Reserve. It is endemic to adjacent areas of western Assam, India and south central Bhutan.

Known only since 1950s, the species is believed to have recently diverged from one the con-generic Capped langur (*Trachypithecus pileatus*) in western Assam, and represents a fascinating and unusual example of evolution in action, with increasing levels of divergence from north to south. Mythologically, the species is believed to be the sole representative of the Indian character "Sugriva" – the monkey king, in the great epic Ramayana and has tremendous cultural and religious value.

Golden langur is a prolific leaf-eating canopy dwelling primate and lives in sub-tropical monsoon fed forests. They live in social groups of 8 –21 individuals, which is mainly male centred. Compared to other primates, social life of golden langur is more peaceful with low levels of aggression, vocal and socio

-sexual interactions among the troop members because of their folivory feeding habit, which reduces inter troop feeding competition.

As per literature, the estimated global population is 4500 – 5000 individuals, with small percentage of immature compared to adults of which Manas Biosphere Reserve holds 75 percent of Indian population. The population in Bhutan appears to be doing well in the contiguous protected areas of the Royal Manas National Park, the Black Mountain National Park, the Trumshingla Wildlife Sanctuary and the Pibsoo Wild Life Sanctuary. But in Indian side, except the core area of the Manas Tiger Reserve and Chakrashila Wild Life Sanctuary, a substantial number of populations live in Reserved Forests, Proposed Reserved Forests, Un-Classified Forests and in Non-Forested fringe areas.

During the last few decades, the entire distributional range of Golden langur in India has been under severe ecological pressure due to large-scale destruction and encroachment of their habitat. Their habitat has reduced by 50 percent in the last 30 years. These forests have now been converted into many isolated secondary forest patches or open scrub, their populations are trapped and virtually cut-off from each other as well as from the main breeding population. These isolated populations range from few tens to as many as 500 individuals and continue to decline. The opportunity for exchange of individuals between the populations is totally blocked, thereby destabilizing the population and placing them at considerably greater risk of extinction.

The figure of 4500 - 5000 individual may misled us into believing that Golden langur is safe. But a closer look at data are alarming. This is not one contiguous population but an aggregation of few sub-population most of which are small and isolated. Over 50 percent of forests where Golden langur are now found in India are less than 20 sq. km, with an average population of less than 50 individuals! Such small population of a highly social animal make them extremely vulnerable. Extinction process may act simultaneously on each of the populations, with the result that they will be lost far sooner than one large continuous population. Everyone knows that Golden langur population has declined in the past and that it continues to decline, and our figures also indicate the fact.

Our population viability assessment (PVA) indicates that most of these small populations, if not all in India, have very little chance of long-term survival if some meta-population management is not implemented.

In this situation many questions come to mind. Do we need to address the cause of population decline before we manage the species? How much do we need to know before we get involved? How do we involve local people in conservation? Let's take a look at the threats facing these populations at a local scale. After all it is the actions of individuals that are causing the current crisis.

- Dr. Jihosuo Biswas

Primate Research Centre—NE

CEPF/ATREE Grantee



THE STRANGE CASE OF THE EARLY FLOWERING RHODODENDRONS

During the rhododendron fieldwork in the Darjeeling and Sikkim hills this spring a few species were found to be showing instances of early flowering, and two of them much earlier than their usual recorded time.

These were *Rhododendron campylocarpum*, *R. decipiens*, *R. edgeworthi*, *R. maddenii*, *R. pendulum*, *R. thomsonii* and *R. wightii*. A comparison of flowering time with that of Hooker (*The Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya*, 1849) and Pradhan & Lachungpa (*Sikkim-Himalayan Rhododendrons*, 1990) showed the hints of shift in flowering period.

The shift in time is more remarkable in the case of *R. thomsonii* and *R. wightii*. The flowering was pretty much over for *R. wightii* by the middle of May this season (see accompanying picture.).

The effect of global warming and the consequent lift in ambient temperature might be working on the progression in rhododendron flowering

time. However, still more work is required to substantiate the hypothesis.

Apart from the above phenomenon it was also observed that *Rhododendron niveum* has started gaining higher grounds. Instances of new seedlings and saplings above Yakchay (its natural habitat, at 3000masl within the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary) shows the gradual ascent as a clear suggestion of upward movement of the population.

- Lalit Kumar Rai

GBPIHED, Gangtok

CEPF/ATREE Grantee

Rhododendron wightii in bloom,
Yumthang Valley, 3500masl

Photo © Lalit Kumar Rai

SPECIES	FLOWERING TIME		
	Hooker, 1849	Pradhan & Lachungpa, 1990	Observation in 2008
<i>R. campylocarpum</i>	Jun	May-Jun	Apr-May
<i>R. decipiens</i>	N.A.	May-Jun	Apr-May
<i>R. edgeworthi</i>	May-Jun	May-Jun	Apr-May
<i>R. maddenii</i>	Jun-Aug	Jun-Aug	Apr-May
<i>R. pendulum</i>	N.A.	Apr end-May	Apr-mid May
<i>R. thomsonii</i>	Jun	May-Jun	Apr-May
<i>R. wightii</i>	Jun	May-Jun	Apr-May



IFAD TEAM IN RAMPURIA FOR TRAINING

A five day training cum exposure programme on bamboo handicrafts was organized for lead farmers from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) project areas in NE India. The four lead farmers were from Meghalaya (West Khasi Hills district & West Garo Hills) and Assam (Karbi Anglong & North Cachar Hills) with the main purpose of exchange in ideas and areas of development. The training programme was from 24-28 November at

Rampuria village and was led by Mr Ajit Sharma, Marketing Coordinator, NERCORMP, Shillong. On the first day the team visited ATREE office and had a brief interaction. The IFAD team also visited the Products Himalaya store to see various products promoted by SHGs of ATREE. The participants then departed for Rampuria and the participants were welcome by the village coordinators and ecotourism committee. Brief report on project

activities of ATREE was given by the field coordinator Prakash Tamang, followed by self introduction, objectives of the training programme, experience sharing and visit to the workshop for bamboo handicrafts work. Mr Gopal Rai was the resource person for the five day training programme and he was paid a resource fee by IFAD team to encourage his work and to boost his morale.

- Mary Hmar



The IFAD team visiting the workshop at Rampuria

Photo © Mary Hmar

NEW STAFF AT ATREE

Mary Hmar has joined the Eastern Himalayas Programme of ATREE. She will be working as Programme Coordinator on the Blue Moon Fund-supported project on 'Engaging Markets to Sustain Livelihoods and Advance Conservation'. Before joining ATREE, Mary worked as Natural Resource Management Organizer (NRMO) for 7 years in North Cachar Hills Community Resource Management Society (NCHCRMS), Assam. This project was jointly funded by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) & Government of India (NEC & DONER).

Mary has a Master's in Botany from the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Rural Development (2nd Year, 2007-08) under IGNOU Shillong and has registered for a PhD in Assam University on "Forestry Based Livelihood in N.C Hills District, Assam". She has served as Education Secretary in Hmar Student Association, as Vice President of the Botany Club, NEHU; and, as Publicity Secretary in the Research Scholar Student Association, NEHU. Mary is proficient in English, Hindi, Mizo and Khasi.



other news

Dr. Santosh Kumar Chettri was a resource person at the Wildlife Week celebrations which was observed on 9th and 10th November 2008 in Lava, Darjeeling. The programme was organised by the Forest Department in collaboration with ATREE's Eastern Himalayas Office. Local communities, staff and children of various schools, local EDC members and Forest officials participated in the programme.

Mr. Gopal Rai, a master craftsman from the project village of Rampuria was the resource person for a five-day training cum exposure programme on bamboo handicrafts organized for lead farmers from IFAD from the 24th to 28th of November, 2008. The training was organised in Rampuria for a team of 4 artisans from Meghalaya and Assam and was led by Mr Ajit Sharma, Marketing Coordinator, NERCORMP, Shillong.

Manjulika Vaz, a Organisation Development Consultant from Cocoon Consulting, Bangalore organised a two-day organisation development workshop at ATREE, 1-2 December 2008.

The Darjeeling NGO Network had its annual planning meeting on 5th and 6th December 2008 at Divya Vani, Darjeeling. A brainstorming session on expected roles for the Darjeeling NGO Network was also carried out and the overarching principles decided upon. Targeted events for the year were decided and activities planned.

Suman Rai attended the Climate Change Leaders workshop which was organised by LEAD India from 19 - 21 November, 2008. The workshop took place in Kaziranga, Assam where nearly thirty participants from all over the Eastern Himalayas interacted on various issues regarding climate change. Suman made a presentation on the programme being undertaken by ATREE in the Eastern Himalayas. Suman along with two other participants from Mizoram and Nagaland will be documenting cases of climate change and impacts on traditional knowledge in the Eastern Himalayas.



ATREE Eastern Himalayas Programme organized a workshop for CEPF grantees from North East India for stock-taking and understanding the role of traditional knowledge in CEPF supported projects, at Kalimpong on 21 September 2008.

Samuel Thomas attended a training workshop on 'Multimedia Local Content Production' organized by Panos South Asia in Kathmandu from 22-29 September 2008.

Suman Rai and Niraj Kakati presented a project update to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and UNESCO, outlining achievements and challenges in implementing the World Biodiversity Heritage Project, 15 December, New Delhi.

NEWSLETTER

FEEDBACK

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