

NEPAL'S WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SUCCESSES

RHINO POPULATION INCREASE AND YET ANOTHER 365 DAYS OF ZERO POACHING

Recently, Nepal announced some positive news from the recent rhino census: a 21 percent increase in the population, and zero poaching instances between May 4, 2014 and May 3, 2015.

RHINO POPULATION UP, RHINO POACHING DOWN

According to a press release from Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), in the last four years, the population of greater one-horned rhinos has increased by 21 percent, from 534 to 645 rhinos, and poaching has dropped even more significantly, with only one rhino killed in 2012 and one in early 2014. These numbers were verified during a recent official census performed by the Government of Nepal, with financial support from USAID through the Hariyo Ban (Green Forest) program.

Counting the number of rhinos in Nepal is a difficult task. According to Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal, Under Secretary of the DNPWC, "Thirty-four elephants and 134 staff were deployed for nearly a month-long census starting from April 7, 2015 to May 2, 2015. Altogether, 1,024 elephant-days and 5,099 man-days were expended to carry out the count." The count continued despite the April 25 earthquake. Elephants are critical for accessing the core of the national parks, which is too difficult and too dangerous to visit on foot due to the large tiger population. Chitwan National Park alone is home to 160 Royal Bengal Tigers, with a total national population of 198 as per the 2013 census. Still, according to Judy

Oglethorpe, Chief of Party of USAID's Hariyo Ban

program, counting has become easier in recent years due to the addition of "ID-based monitoring". In ID-based monitoring, rangers are trained to identify individual rhinos, and track them regularly. This form of

monitoring was introduced in Chitwan National Park two years ago, with support and training by Hariyo Ban staff.

SAVING WILDLIFE REQUIRES TEAMWORK

Mr. Tika Ram Adhikari, Director General of DNPWC, said "Increasing the rhino population is a result of team work." Saving a species requires participation from many different actors, and the success in Nepal is



PHOTOS: KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA - USAID

due to the high level of coordination between the Nepal Army, National Park staff, the Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation (a quasi-governmental organization), NGOs like World Wildlife Fund, law enforcement agencies, and local communities. The last piece – gaining the trust and support of communities – is critically important, as community buy-in and pride in their wildlife heritage are necessary to reduce outside threats.

Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units are a relatively new effort in Nepal to engage communities in the management and protection of wildlife in the buffer zones around the parks. Protecting the buffer zone makes protecting the core conservation area much easier for park staff. USAID has been a major supporter in the creation of these units, which rapidly grew from a few dozen to more than a thousand over the past few years. During a recent interaction with a Community-Based Anti-Poaching Unit supported by

USAID, located outside of Annapurna Conservation Area, the USAID Environment Team Leader learned of the group's success and pride in their work. "We coordinate our patrols with the village on the far side of the valley so we can cover all the forests," Mr. Durga Prasad Poudel, the chairperson of the community forest told visitors. "Since we've been patrolling we no longer see lights [of poachers] in the forest at night, and we've noticed a lot more barking deer."

The pride in Mr. Poudel's voice when describing the Community-Based Anti-Poaching Unit's success and the value he places in having wildlife in his forest is another piece of conservation efforts. He feels the loss of a few crops is a small price to pay for the value of having a healthy population of barking deer in his forest. Human-wildlife conflict— which can happen when people encroach on wildlife habitats, or in the case of Nepal, where conservation success

leads to wildlife leaving their protected areas – can undermine conservation efforts because it leads to discontent in local communities over the presence of a protected area. Community discontent can even lead to retaliatory killing or aiding and abetting of poachers. Building community pride in the resource can help lessen the discontent.

Nepal's success in countering poaching and protecting its parks is evident in the increase in wild rhino populations. In January 2015, Nepal marked another success against wildlife crime when the notorious rhino poacher Raj Kumar Praja was arrested in Malaysia and deported to Nepal. This is also a remarkable success for coordinated efforts by INTERPOL, the South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network, and Nepali authorities. With such success comes the risk of increased human-wildlife conflict. For example, earlier this year, on March 30, a rogue rhino made its way into the large town of Hetauda, north of Chitwan National Park. The rhino killed one person before being chased away by DNPWC staff on elephants. However, Nepal, with USAID support, will continue to maintain the teamwork necessary to mitigate that conflict and protect the wildlife. USAID is continuing to support these priorities, especially in the wake of Nepal's recent earthquake.

BUILDING NEPAL BACK GREENER

The USAID-funded Hariyo Ban program, upon the request of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, and with active participation of other sectoral ministries, was actively involved in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) process and provided technical assistance for a Rapid Environment Assessment. The assessment team, headed by Dr. Shanker Sharma, former Vice-Chairperson of the National Planning Commission and former Ambassador of Nepal to the U.S., drafted 10 principles of Green, Resilient, Recovery and Reconstruction to include in the PDNA process, aiming to ensure that reconstruction and recovery activities help Nepal build back greener.

The Hariyo Ban program was also heavily involved in relief and early recovery activities and reached about 5,000 people (49 percent women) in earthquake-affected communities with relief and temporary recovery items in Lamjung, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Dhading, and Nuwakot districts. USAID's Hariyo Ban program, while essential to protect wildlife and biodiversity, is also committed to Nepal's earthquake relief and recovery. ●

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