



The North Bank Landscape

The Last Refuge for Elephants in the Eastern Himalayas

In the Eastern Himalayas, the North Bank Landscape's lush evergreen forests and grasslands are home to a wide array of species including the Asian elephant, greater one-horned rhino and Bengal tiger. The landscape encompasses a geographical area of about 21 million acres in the northeast Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, covering an area the size of South Carolina. The Brahmaputra, one of India's magnificent rivers, defines the southern boundary of this landscape, while the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas border the north.



In addition to being amazingly biodiverse, India's North Bank Landscape is a meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. It is the home of more than 166 separate tribes that speak a wide range of languages. The Assamese are the dominant ethnic group and live mainly in the plains. Diverse mixes of ethnic and linguistic groups are found in the hills; the Bodo, Bengali, Nepali, Mishing, Rabha, Karbi and many other tribes are among them.



Threats

Since 1972, 65 percent of forests in the lowland Brahmaputra Valley have been destroyed due to expanding human population, agriculture, logging and other development. And now there is an immediate need for action to stop a wave of forest conversion that is rapidly moving up the plains toward the Himalayan foothills.

Habitat destruction has led to intense conflict between elephants and humans. The growing need for farmland has eroded traditional support for elephant conservation, and wild elephants whose forests are disappearing wander into villages and destroy crops and settlements – sometimes resulting in human fatalities. Poaching of both elephants and tigers also remains a serious threat.



WWF Vision

To ensure that Asian elephants, tigers and greater one-horned rhinos continue to exist in viable populations while living in harmony with people.

The Landscape at a Glance

Country: India

Area: 21,000,000 acres

Fauna: Asian elephant, Bengal tiger, greater one-horned rhino

People: 78 million

Tribes: 166



Indian Rhino Vision 2020

Conservation of one-horned rhinos in India has been a great success. In 1905, the species was on the brink of extinction. Through strict protection this population has recovered to over 1,700 individuals today. But now, more than 93 percent of India's rhinos live in just one national park – Kaziranga. The species is therefore exposed to risks such as disease outbreaks and poaching that could devastate an entire population. Human-wildlife conflict is another result of insufficient habitat. The rhinos in Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary, for example, have outgrown the sanctuary and need more land to mitigate their increasing conflicts with local communities.

By 2020, the Indian Rhino Vision – a joint project of WWF, the government of Assam and the International Rhino Foundation – will achieve a population of 3,000 wild rhinos in Assam by

- improving the protection and security of rhinos in all rhino areas in Assam
- expanding the distribution of rhinos over seven protected areas to reduce the risks associated with having a whole population in one area
- translocating rhinos from two source populations (Kaziranga and Pabitora) into five target protected areas (Manas, Laokhowa, Buracharpori-Kochmora, Dibrusaikhowa and Orang)



Working with local communities

The landscape's Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forest remains largely untouched and well connected. This presents an ideal opportunity for proactive conservation to ensure that this forest remains in pristine condition for the long term while also contributing to sustainable livelihoods and cultural conservation for local communities.

WWF works with these communities to decrease human-wildlife conflict by implementing strategies to reduce confrontation and casualties. We couple those efforts with educational and income-generating activities. We organize and equip village-based squads to protect their crops from raiding elephants in nonlethal ways and to mobilize trained elephants called Kunkies during the height of harvest season to drive back wild elephants before they can reach conflict hotspots.

In addition to addressing human-wildlife conflict, we are supporting protected areas with antipoaching work with the participation of local communities. We are also curbing illegal wildlife trade in close coordination with enforcement agencies.

We are working at all levels to establish and maintain wildlife corridors between reserves and to reclaim encroached-upon land for long-term solutions to human and human-wildlife conflict. Wildlife research, regular monitoring of wildlife status and the evaluation of instituted management practices will further enhance our initiatives in the North Bank Landscape.



Shubash Lohani
Senior Program Officer – Eastern Himalayas
shubash.lohani@wwfus.org
202-778-9796
1250 24th St. NW
Washington, DC 20037-1193
worldwildlife.org