

Conservation of Wildlife and Recreation

M. Yasin

This paper gives the experience of a tour study in the Sundarbans forest by the author and Dr. Hubert Hendrich, a West German Zoologist during 1970. It also deals with the present status of wildlife population in Bangladesh. Some hints have also been given regarding suitable sites for recreational purposes in Bangladesh.

১৯৭০ সালে এই প্রবন্ধের লেখক এবং পশ্চিম জার্মানীর প্রাণী বিজ্ঞানী ডঃ হবার্ট হেন্ডরিচের সুন্দরবন ভ্রমণের অভিজ্ঞতা এই প্রবন্ধে লিপিবদ্ধ হইয়াছে। বাংলাদেশের বন্য জীব জন্তুর বর্তমান পরিস্থিতি, সংখ্যা ইত্যাদি লইয়াও আলোচনা করা হইয়াছে। বাংলাদেশে চিত্ত বিনোদন কেন্দ্রের স্থান নির্বাচন সম্বন্ধেও এই প্রবন্ধে কিছু ইংগিত দেওয়া হইয়াছে।

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems that everybody is interested in wildlife. People shoot wild animals for food and sometimes shoot them for recreation. Unfortunately many wild animals that were found in abundance in Bangladesh 25 years ago are now in danger of complete extinction. The rhinoceros has been totally wiped out; once it was found in abundance in the Sundarbans forest. Some of our 910 bird species (Rashid 1967) are now facing a similar fate. The reduction has been caused by many reasons, including shooting and capturing for pleasure, food and hides.

In the 1960's the Pakistan Government asked the World Wildlife Fund to send a team of experts to study the conservation and re-establishment of the dwindling wildlife resources.

Guy Mountfort, a conservationist, led two expeditions, one during 1966 and the other in 1967. In his book "The Vanishing Jungle" Guy Mountfort says that he travelled all through the forest and has

written notes on 99 species of mammals, 423 species of birds and 45 species of reptiles, including species of Bangladesh. He discovered that although Bangladesh had good game laws, these have to be effectively applied to combat the poachers and traders concerned. On his recommendations a wildlife appeal has been set up to create awareness among the public, and the export of skins of wild animals has been completely banned.

Due to the economic value of wildlife, the study of wildlife has become an important field of research. It is against this back-ground that wildlife and its relation with the forest should be viewed. The forest wildlife includes those vertebrates which are adapted to the forest environment, which spend the major portion of their lives there, and which obtain the major portion of their livelihood from the forest. Wild animals such as the Royal Bengal tiger, deer and the wild boar fall under this group. The forest supplies three distinct needs of wildlife: water; vegetation, in which the animals take shelter and stalk their prey; and a sufficient availability of suitable food or prey.

It seems that although food and shelter are the fundamental needs of animals, both the qualitative and the quantitative availability of food are important. The lack of high quality food means physical weakness, loss of vigor, low production, slow decline and slow death. The scarcity of food means starvation, emigration and wandering.

2. ADAPTABILITY OF WILD ANIMALS

Many persons hold the wrong presumption that the conservation of wildlife is best achieved by total preservation. The argument is that wild animals are disturbed by forestry operations. In fact, the animals get adapted to varying degrees. Numerous examples of such adaptations were observed in the forest firewood operation coupes on tours with Dr. Hubert Hendrich, a German Zoologist in the Sundarbans in 1970. The foot-prints of the royal Bengal tiger were seen in the felling operation coupe.

Chetnal deer were seen at all times in the felling coupes. These are not symptoms of disturbance but of adaptation. Such adaptation may even draw the animals into the coupes for more palatable fodder on the ground, particularly in the broadleaved forest.

2.1 Adaptability of the Royal Bengal Tiger

We observed that the ferocity of the royal Bengal tiger was related to the salinity of the water. The more saline the conditions and the less varied the vegetation, the less varied and prolific the fauna and the fiercer the tiger (Anon 1971). Many species of wildlife have become adapted to forest conditions through a long revolutionary process. Forest themselves need wildlife just as wildlife needs the Forest.

3. POPULATION STATUS

According to Guy Mountfort's report (1970) as recently as 1930 it was estimated that there were 40,000 Bengal tigers on the subcontinent. Today experts doubt that more than 2000-2500 survive. They have been hunted for trophies, food and pleasure.

The following species are now extinct : bongora (benteng), bonchagal (serow), deochagal (goral), rhinoceros, bonmahish and the Indian hunting cheeta.

The following species are rare and threatened : gaur (Asian bison), goyal (Chittagong bison), cheetabagh (leopard, panther), bholluck (sloth bear), and bagdasha (large civet).

4. WILDLIFE AREAS

Areas devoted wholly or partly to wildlife may vary in ownership, organisation and purpose : public/private, grass, and allowable use. The logical designation and the functions for each can be listed as follows :

Name	Purpose	Other allowable use
1. Sanctuary	Absolute protection	None
2. Reserve	Scientific study	None
3. National Park	Protection and preservation of scenery.	Access for public recreation, education and research may be allowed.

A wildlife sanctuary is an investment in the future. It requires a capital outlay, upkeep and proper management before substantial returns are realised. We have in the Bangladesh forests insufficient national parks and sanctuaries. Man can live in harmony with nature, and forest parks and sanctuaries afford us one of the finest ways to do this ; therefore our existing wildlife sanctuaries should be improved by strictly prohibiting forest operations including the collection of minor forest products inside the park area. Appropriate land use should be carefully planned and the purpose for which the land has been put must be fully kept in mind. Most specialists agree that national parks are highly esteemed by the people.

The improvement of a park can be done in many ways. Visitors reception and parking should be properly organised. It is possible to let large numbers of people to enjoy the parks in such a way that they don't feel crowded or pushed or delayed. Rest houses should have a library ; competent biologists should be encouraged to conduct research in the park. Check lists of the flora and fauna should also be completed both for the information of visitors and the forest staff. Artificial salt licks

should be established where the wildlife suffers from an inadequacy of salt in the forest.

4.1 Bird Sanctuaries in Bangladesh

There is a large number of bird species on the off-shore islands as well as in the haor areas of Bangladesh. Our Forest Department can exercise a varying degree of management and control over these areas. Birds are an important and integral part of the forest resources of the country and like trees, should be managed for the greatest benefit of the people. Considering the importance of our bird resources, a bird sanctuary may be established on off-shore islands and in the haor-areas of Bangladesh.

4.2 Roadsides for Wildlife

There are thousands of miles of roads in our country. The roadside trees may serve as good nesting and winter cover for birds. The nesting habitat is rapidly diminishing due to the felling of roadside trees and the insufficient planting of new trees. Something can be done to counteract this trend. Roadsides if properly managed can provide the needed nesting cover for many wildlife species.

The importance of roadside trees to nesting pheasants, the Hungarian partridge and water fowl is substantiated by studies conducted in the U. S. A. (Montag 1975). These studies found that roadsides, though comprising only four to six percent of the available land produced 15 to 25 percent of all pheasants in the area.

Similar results were found for water fowl, with roadsides containing the highest number of nests per acre.

5. RECREATIONAL USE OF FORESTS

Due to mechanisation in mills and factories, working hours have decreased, and urban people have more time for outdoor recreation. Forest lands are major outdoor recreation areas. Forests should be developed near major urban centres for outdoor recreation.

The following areas are proposed for recreational purposes : Biraldaha lake in Rajshahi, Karerhat and the Lalutia forests in Chittagong, Sherpur in Bogra, Teknaf forest in Cox's Bazar, Alikhyong in Chandraghona, Lowachea in Sylhet and the Rajeshpur forest in Comilla.

REFERENCES

- Anon. 1971. Pakistan wildlife news. 1. Project 440/690 Sundarbans. The Outdoorman 2(2) : 13.
- Chowdhury, M. 1969. Wildlife of Chittagong Hill Tracts - A list of mammals. Forestdale News 1(2) : 40-48.
- Montag, D. 1975. Roadsides for wildlife. The Minnesota Volunteer 38 (219) : 26-32.
- Mountfort, G. 1970. The Bengal tiger goes in the 'Red Book'. Abstracted from The Pakistan Times, May 10, 1970. The Pakistan Journal of Forestry 20(4) : 397-401.
- Rashid, H. 1967. Systematic list of the birds of East Pakistan. The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca. 144 p.
- Wing, W. Leonard. 1951. Practice of wildlife conservation. Wiley, New York. 412 p.