

# Training on Amphibian Biodiversity Conservation at Assam Forest school, Jalukbari

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## Why Amphibians

A variety of threats are impacting amphibian species around the world, causing the massive declines documented during the Global Amphibian Assessment (GAA) SSC IUCN.

Habitat loss and degradation are by far the greatest threats to amphibians at present, affecting nearly 4,000 species. The number of species impacted by habitat loss and degradation is almost four times greater than the next most common threat, pollution. Although disease appears to be a relatively less significant threat for amphibians, for those species

Although habitat loss clearly poses the greatest threat to amphibians, a newly recognized fungal disease is seriously affecting an increasing number of species. Perhaps most disturbing, many species are declining for unknown reasons, complicating efforts to design and implement effective conservation strategies.

## Why training is required for foresters?

The Assam Forest Department has a large pool of manpower in various strata of its hierarchy from top to bottom. The personnel manning the top



affected, it can cause sudden and dramatic population declines resulting in very rapid extinction. In comparison, although habitat loss and degradation affect a much greater number of species, the rate at which a species declines is usually much slower, and there are a number of strategies, such as the creation of protected areas, to counter this threat (Source GAA).

Nearly one-third (32%) of the world's amphibian species are threatened, representing 1,896 species. By comparison, just 12% of all bird species and 23% of all mammal species are threatened.

As many as 165 amphibian species may already be extinct. At least 34 amphibian species are known to be extinct, one is Extinct in the Wild, while at least another 130 species have not been found in recent years and are possibly extinct.

management posts get various opportunities to upgrade their skills and knowledge, whereas there are virtually no opportunities for the personnel serving in the grade of Forest Guard, Forester and Forest Ranger. The bottom stratum forms the bulk of the manpower, and yet is not fully equipped to handle the modern day challenges of management in the wildlife, Joint Forest Management JFM, public participation, eco-development and resolution of conflicts, to speak of only a few emerging trends in the field.

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The field staff is constantly engaged in battling with basic issues of conservation, and thus faces the greatest challenge and needs the right inputs for a good decision making. It is very necessary to impart right skill sets to these personnel to make habitat management and wildlife conservation a



reality. Northeast (India) is very rich in its floral and faunal diversity and this area covers two Biodiversity Hotspots i.e., Himalaya and Indo Burma. Northeast India represents the bio-geographic gateway to the Indo-Burmese hot spot at the junction of the Indian Sub-continent and the Indo - China Bio-geographic Regions (Dinerstein, 1997) and is unique for its genetic diversity. Being the core component part of NorthEast India, the states' of Assam have the important feature of Indo-Malayan, Indo-Chinese characteristics contributing to its biodiversity.

Unfortunately, biodiversity loss is increasing at an unprecedented rate, threatening the very basis of sustainable development. The main threats are habitat loss, habitat alteration, habitat fragmentation, over-exploitation, invasive species and climatic change to name a few. The cumulative result of all these factors in many cases resulted into increase in human animal conflict and in extreme cases leading to extirpation of several species from many habitats.

A proper training program in wildlife conservation and habitat management involves a long term commitment to a single region and a major emphasis on proper field research technique. Training in planning and fieldwork must not only be specifically geared to a region's needs but should contribute to the setting up long term research and monitoring programs that begin to meet these needs.

At present, there are only two institutions (one at Makum and the other at Jalukbari) in the Department which impart training to forest guards and foresters. Since the courses are long duration, it is not possible to increase the number of trainees beyond a certain reasonable limit. Further, to train all the staff on a 12 month course, by these institutions would take not

less than another 100 years. Therefore, it is most pressing need of today to build capacity of these institutions, and bring in new innovation in training methodologies, so that skill up gradation and attitudinal changes can be brought in by providing faster exposure in shorter duration without compromising on quality.

This course will help not only in the conservation of the individual and target species (Amphibians, Hoolock Gibbon, Asian Elephant, Great Indian Rhinoceros and Tiger) but also will focus on the monitoring of the selected habitats (in the initial years PA's only), the trainees will develop skills to reduce human-animal conflicts and adaptive management techniques. These activities are expected to help in the proper management of the PA's and adjoining habitats.

Assam Forest School, Jalukbari was set up in 1948 to meet the training requirements of the Department. However, the infrastructure requires several civil, electrical and other inputs to keep it totally up to the mark. However, under the present project, minimum building related civil and electrical components have been kept, without which it may become difficult to run the proposed program.

#### **The Course**

Wildlife Areas Development and Welfare Trust in collaboration with Zoo Outreach Organisation and Assam Forest Department organized a two days training programme on **Habitat Management and Wildlife Conservation** for the Foresters at Assam Forest School Jalukbari.

Training on Amphibian Biodiversity Conservation was a part of a bigger programme to train the forest staffs on Habitat Management and Wildlife Conservation (23 - 24 October, 2007). Three hours were exclusively dedicated for the conservation of amphibians on 24th October, 2007. A one hour lecture was delivered by Dr. Nripendra Kr. Choudhury on the Conservation of Amphibians in Northeast India followed by several education activities. Later Mr. M.C. Malakar, IFS Chief Wildlife Warden of Assam; Mr. H.K. Choudhury, IFS (Retd.), Chairman, WWT and Mr. R.P. Agarwalla, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests, RE, Ed & WP, Assam handed over the T-Shirts to the participants.

#### **Acknowledgements :**

On the very onset we want to thank Fred Bagley for supporting the programme under Great Ape Conservation Fund of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sally Walker, Founder of ZOO, for supporting the materials (T-shirts and Educational Kits). We are also thankful to B. A. Daniel and R. Marimuthu of Zoo Outreach Organisation for helping us to develop the programme. We are grateful to the Director, Assam Forest School, Jalukbari, Assam.



## Signature campaign

Date	Organisers	Institution / State	Country	No. of Signature
27.09.07	Mr. L. Muthu Andavan	Ecology & Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry	India	1
29.09.07	Dr. G. Prasad	University of Kerala, Kariavattom, Kerala	India	2
03.10.07		Wildlife Protection Society of India, New Delhi	India	9
09.10.07	Dr. G. Umapathy	Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad	India	8
09.10.07	Dr. K.K. Ramachandran	Kerala Forest Research Institute, Thrissur, Kerala	India	51
09.10.07	Dr. G.S. Solanki	Mizoram University, Mizoram	India	2
15.10.07	Mr. Kishore Kotecha	Wildlife Conservation Trust, Rajkot	India	84
22.10.07	Ms. Shivani Jadeja	Gujarat	India	122
22.10.07	Mr. Kishore Kotecha	Asiatic Lion Protection Society, Rajkot	India	39
26.10.07	Dr. Rajmohana	Zoological Survey of India, Kozhikode	India	51
31.10.07		World Wide Fund for Nature – Pakistan, Lahore, Pakistan	Pakistan	13
31.10.07	Conservator of Forest & Field Director	Tadoba – Andheri Tiger Reserve, Chandrapur	India	12
31.10.07	Mr. Aswin Vayiravan	T.V.S. Matriculation School, Madurai	India	72
05.11.07	Dr. Jayanthi Alahakeen	National Zoological Garden, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	75
06.11.07	Prof. Dr. M. Farid Ahsan	University of Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh	Bangladesh	6
12.11.07	Mr. Ram Krishan Singh, DFO,	Sohagibarwa Wildlife Division, Maharajganj	India	37
23.11.07	Mr. B. Rathina sabapathy	Coimbatore Zoological Park, Peelamedu, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	India	776
26.11.07	Ms. Dammika Malsinghe	National Zoological Gardens, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	38
26.11.07	Mr. Joseph Prem Kumar	Corporation Middle School, P.N. Palayam, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	India	89
04.12.07		Isha Home School, Semmedu Post, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	India	132
Sending	TK Sajeew	Bombay Natural History Society Conservation Education Centre, Delhi	India	~ 1000
Sending	S. Mamtha	Teacher, De Paul International Residential School, Mysore, Karnataka		~ 2000
Sending	Mr. B. Rathina sabapathy	PSGR Krishnammal Ed. Institutions, CBE, TN		~ 2500
<b>Total signatures received/confirmed as on 12 Dec 07</b>				<b>~ 7119</b>