

STATUS OF FORESTS AND CONSERVATION APPROACHES OF *TRAGOPAN BLYTHII* IN NAGALAND

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Introduction

Rolling mountains, enchanting valleys, swift flowing streams and above all luxuriant forests predominantly evergreen and semi-evergreen types give ample evidence of the precious gift of bountiful nature bestowed upon the State. Besides adding beauty to the landscape, forests play a significant role in the State's economy. Out of the State's total geographical area of 16,575 km², forests occupy about 52 per cent, of which, 6.08 per cent is under State control and remaining 46 per cent is private and community owned.

Management

It is interesting to note that the whole of Naga hills including Tuensang area known as NHTA, had been under only one Forest Division way back in late 1950s. With creation of the State, the Department inherited what little of the Government Forest then existed in region and was managed by the Assam Forest Department. To begin with, the forest administration and development was placed under the charge of one forest officer of the rank of Deputy Conservator of Forests to look after the administration of the entire area. Subsequently, a Director of Forests was posted in early 1963.

From this single Division, the Department was reorganised and expanded

by creating more divisions and gradually with increase volume of work particularly on the development front, the department is now recognised as one of the major departments in the State.

North-East in general and the State in particular is known for its richness in biodiversity. Apart from timber as a major forest produce, canes, bamboo, medicinal and aromatic species such as Ginseng, *Taxus* and *Agar* are found abundantly in nature. The State also harbours as many as 200 species of epiphytic and terrestrial orchids many of which are rare and endangered such as *Cymbidium tigrinum* and *Renanthera imschootiana*.

During the last 35 years the Department has made notable achievements in creating awareness of the importance of the afforestation programmes in private holdings. Apart from this, the techniques of raising plantation and managing these have reached grass root levels. Having realised the economics of tree farming, the community and the individual land holdings which account for 88.3 per cent of the total forest area have been brought under Joint Forest Management.

Conservation

The campaign for conservation of wildlife has been the most difficult task of

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the Department in a situation where the rights of ownership of the land lie either with the community or individuals. Efforts made in this regard have not been lost or unpaid.

One of the conservation programmes which symbolically represents the State's single minded priority for conservation of wildlife has been the conservation of *Tragopan blythii*, a rare and endangered



species which are found in natural habitat in Nagaland.

Tragopan blythii is found in mid-montane, sub-tropical and temperate forests between 1,800 to 2,800 m. Though the bird is regarded as endangered by IUCN, it has been hunted by the local people as a delicacy. Coupled with this, the timber extraction has greatly resulted in habitat degradation which has made the species highly vulnerable to extinction.

As mentioned in preceding paragraphs in the State much of the forest area comes under community/private holdings. Thus it is imperative that, an awareness regarding the conservation of the habitat of the species is to be made. The efforts of the department have gone a long way in achieving this and the local community has stopped hunting and trading this bird. It is a landmark that, once the most hunted bird has, today, been declared as the 'State Bird'.

The State Bird - *Tragopan blythii*

The most striking characteristic of these birds is their beautiful plumage especially of the males. The hens are not brilliantly coloured. *Tragopan blythii* is roughly of the size of a chicken. The male of *Tragopan blythii* has an orange red throat with a greenish blue patch at the lower side of the face. The feathers are spotted with a brownish red or ochre colouring. The hens are greyish brown and of similar size. In the case of the males the area around the eye is covered by white and black spots. When courting, the cock inflates the large brightly coloured patch on the throat and erects two long fleshy horns above the eyes. Neither of these adornments is visible at other times. Unlike other pheasants *Tragopans* have a rather laterally compressed tail. They spend

much of their time on trees. *Tragopan blythii* belongs to a species that are not by nature prolific breeders.

The approach for conservation of the species is done in two ways :

- (1) *Tragopan* habitat conservation - *in-situ* conservation.
- (2) Captive breeding - *ex-situ* conservation.

Habitat conservation - in-situ conservation :

- (i) Identifying areas or study sites of natural habitats of *Tragopan*.
- (ii) Involving the local people/community in identifying such areas. In this regard Fakim and Puliebadze areas are already identified and declared as conservation areas in Tuensang and Kohima Districts respectively.
- (iii) Declaring such areas as conservation areas.
- (iv) Monitoring such areas.

Captive breeding - ex-situ conservation :

- (i) Captive breeding is being taken up in Kohima Zoo.
- (ii) Multiplication of the breed in other Countries like the U.K.

As major achievement in captive breeding, two pairs of *Tragopan blythii* were sent to England. About 75 numbers have been raised from the original lot and some of them have been sent to Canada. World Pheasant's Association is in the process of doing DNA work on the *Tragopan* in USA and in Canada for setting up a stud book for these birds.

A project for conservation of *Tragopan blythii* is contemplated with extensive field studies so that the habitat features are

identified and at the same time improve the conditions for breeding the bird both in natural environment and in captivity.

SUMMARY

Nagaland is known for its richness in biodiversity. The State also harbours as many as 200 species of epiphytic and terrestrial orchids, many of which are rare and endangered. Under Wildlife Programmes, the conservation of *Tragopan blythii*, a rare and endangered species found in the Nagaland has been initiated to save this bird from extinction.

नागालैंड में वनों की स्थिति और ट्रेगोपान ब्लाइटिआई का संरक्षण करने की दृष्टियाँ

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सारांश

नागालैंड जैवविविधता की सम्पन्नता के लिए विख्यात है। इस राज्य में 200 जितनी जातियों के पररोही और भौमपीनशिफ (आर्किड) भी मिलते हैं जिनमें से कितने ही अति दुर्लभ और विलुप्ति खतरे में आए हुए हैं। वन्य जीवन कार्यक्रम के अन्तर्गत नागालैंड में मिलने वाली एक अतिदुर्लभ जाति ट्रेगोपान ब्लाइटिआई का संरक्षण इस पक्षी को विलुप्त होने से बचाने के लिए शुरू किया गया है।
