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Popular Article

Assam and its one horned rhinoceros' poaching issue

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Abstract

This article provides information about the current situation of the one horned rhinoceros in the state of Assam, the problems in the past, measures taken to tackle these problems and future suggestions to safeguard these creatures.

Introduction:

The one-horned rhinoceros is the state animal of Assam. In India, Assam is the place where a major population of this species resides. But it is a vulnerable species due to the problem of poaching due to which its population has dwindled over the past. Once upon a time, they covered most of the northern part of India. According to the recent 2022 census, there are around 2,613 one horned rhinos present in Assam. It is listed under appendix 1 (CITES) and it is also under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Rhino poaching:

The one-horned rhinoceros is found mainly in the Kaziranga National Park, Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Orang National Park, Manas National Park, Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary and the Dibru Saikhowa National Park in Assam. Rhino poaching is the act of killing rhinoceros for various reasons such as trading of the rare horn with Vietnam and China, these countries use the horn for its medicinal properties. Rhinos are poached even for sport. The horns are seen as “status symbols” too. The population of these rhinos decreased to about 12 during the 1900s due to rampant killing without any protective measures. They were on the verge of extinction but the people and the government came together to protect this majestic animal.

Protection Measures:

1. The 1977 ban on international trade in rhino horn by the Convention on International

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Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

2. Relocation of 18 rhinos since the year 2008 from the Kaziranga National Park and the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary to the Manas National Park by the joint efforts of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Indian government.
3. World Wildlife Fund has made efforts to improve the connectivity between the protected areas and also tried to secure land so that the rhinos get more space to roam freely.
4. The South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) helps regional government to coordinate their efforts with respect to curtailing of poaching and helping the one horned rhinoceros' species to thrive.
5. Indian Rhino Vision 2020: It was launched in the year 2005 to attain a population of 3,000 one horned rhinos in Assam by the year 2020. The main focus was on the transfer of rhinos from the densely populated protected areas to the sparsely populated ones. It was a group approach by Assam's Forest department, World Wildlife Fund- India, Bodoland Territorial Council, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the International Rhino Foundation.

All of these efforts have led to a rise in the one horned rhinoceros' population in Assam and in the year 2022, there were zero cases of rhino poaching in Assam.

Conclusion:

In the future, efforts must be made to create more space for the one horned rhino species to dwell and help them increase their population. The recent successes in protection and conservation of rhinos in Assam must not lead to any rest or delay in enforcing even more stringent protection measures. The government should think of new schemes to reduce the habitat loss of the rhinos along with countering the problem of poaching. The people must spread awareness through social media and group discussions so that the entire world can come together to safeguard this wonderful and rare animal.

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