

# No Roads, Only Directions

K. H. Redford and S. Sanderson

**S**ocial scientists and indigenous advocates have critiqued conservation organisations for displacing local people in order to create protected areas (PAs). By pointing out that some protected areas, including Yellowstone, the model for the modern concept of national parks, were established by expelling local people, the critique shines a harsh light on conservationists and can undermine the moral arguments for protecting biodiversity. The competing ethical positions of those defending wildlife and wild places and those defending the rights of people living in the same area has led to a tortured, ideological stand-off with no obvious solution and little documented positive experience to inform it.

Protected areas now cover approximately 20 million sq. km of the globe. While this may suggest that a lot of wild areas are protected, less than 9 % were established to conserve biodiversity in the absence of human use. This means that most protected areas have people living in them, engaged in a full range of human activities, and therefore do not fully conserve biodiversity.

In some of the stricter protected areas, there is no doubt that local communities have been displaced. However, there is little documented evidence that this is a systematic and widespread problem. Even in protected areas that are not supposed to have human inhabitants, it is not clear to what extent enforcement was the cause of displacement.

Some critics of protected areas have amplified their argument by claiming that protected areas have displaced tens of millions of people. However, published numbers are often speculation based on disparate case studies or include assumptions of human population densities applied across diverse regions.

At the same time, conservation organisations are not helping to alleviate the potential for human displacement. For too long, conservationists have failed to clearly identify the conservation goals for each protected area. In the absence of a clear articulation of targets and conditions, it is impossible to determine if, and how, local human populations threaten conservation goals. Such planning would help

determine to what extent displacing local populations should even be considered. Toward that end, the Wildlife Conservation Society has developed landscape-scale conceptual modelling to define conservation targets and evaluate the relative importance of the actions of people living in or near a park.

The debate between allowing people full access to a protected area versus prohibiting access results in ideological skirmishes. Yet reconciling academic disciplines will do little to alleviate the struggles between poor people and endangered species conservation. A more careful study is required at the scale where humans and wildlife live out their activities and needs – not in the abstract. Conservation organisations must work to fill the information, knowledge, and policy gaps, while conservation and human development organisations should work on interdisciplinary engagement tailored to specific sites. Unfortunately, we do not have an ethical court to evaluate the rights of the



Photo: K. H. Redford

Ocelot skin in Kayapo village, Brazil



Photo: K. H. Redford

Yuqui hunters in the Bolivian Amazon

remaining tigers against the rights of the resident people. Nor does our political and economic system assign a value to the protection of the biosphere upon which we all depend. Nevertheless, we must secure the guarantees of public servants and private actors that they will act with the respect and care due to the world's remaining wildlife and to the rural people who co-inhabit these under-served areas.

#### Originally published as:

Redford, K.H. and S.E. Sanderson. 2006. No Roads, Only Directions. *Conservation and Society* 4(3): 379–382.

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## Shifting Livelihood Options and Changing Attitudes of Communities in the Garo Hills, Western Meghalaya

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The Garo hills in western Meghalaya in India comprise gentle undulating forested slopes at the edge of the country, adjacent to the Bangladesh plains. Although a significant portion of the state is reported to be under forest cover (ca. 70 %), ownership of over 65 % of land in the state by autonomous

councils, shifting cultivation, and intense hunting pressure are some of the factors that thwart traditional conservation themes here. Further, in the last decade, mining and monoculture plantations (e.g., cashew and citrus orchards), have replaced past occupations of communities in the Garo hills, such as paddy and shifting cultivation.

The Garos belong to the Tibeto-Burman stock; they drifted into eastern India through Tibet in 5,000 B.C. in search of fertile lands to cultivate. More than thirty villages, locally called *akings* are interspersed between the Balpakram National Park (220 sq. km) and the Baghmara Reserve Forest (44.4 sq. km) in the South Garo Hills district (Khan