

## Status Paper of Rara National Park

Gopal Bahadur Chimire

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation

### Abstract

Rara, the smallest National Park in the country, was established with the objective of maintaining the natural beauty of Rara Lake by protecting its watershed area. As a result of the implementation of strict conservation practices, the majority of grasslands in the National Park have been invaded by pines, while some other parts are experiencing illegal livestock grazing. The impact of grazing on biomass production, species composition, and livestock-wildlife competition has to be studied in detail in order to manage the grasslands more efficiently.

### Introduction

Rara (RNP), the smallest National Park in the country covering an area of 106 sq.km, is located in the Mugu and Jumla Districts of the Mid-western Development Region of Nepal. The unique Rara Lake and the beautiful landscape around the lake are the main attractions of the park. A few ungulate species found in Rara NP such as barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), ghoral (*Nemorhaedus goral*), jharal (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), and musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*) are also important. This is the only park in the country established after the evacuation of local people from the area. The main objective behind the establishment of RNP is to maintain the natural beauty of Rara Lake and protect it from sedimentation and other adverse impacts of human activities.

The park is surrounded by nine Village Developments Committee areas (VDCs) from two districts. The second major activity of the local population is animal husbandry. Although the local people have no right to graze within the national park area, occasionally livestock do enter the park and graze and thus have some impact on the grasslands within the park.

### Grasslands: Status and Use

Rara National Park is small and only about 20% of the area is covered by grassland. After the establishment of RNP, livestock grazing was legally prohibited. As there are only a few wild herbivores within the park, part of the grasslands has remained unused ever since. However, in some areas people graze their livestock inside the park, and these areas show signs of overgrazing.

### Grassland Management Activities

Apart from protection from illegal grazing, no management interventions have so far been carried out.

### Management Issues

#### *Livestock-wildlife competition*

In the southern part of the park, i.e., in Jumla District, there are a few spots where local people keep cattle-sheds next to the park border and graze their

livestock inside the park. People around the park are compelled to graze their cattle within the park area because there is no buffer area outside the park boundary. Although there is no peruse information available on the change in biomass production and number of grass species, personal observation shows that towards the Bota side of Jumla District and around Ghuchchi, there might be overgrazing and grazing competition with wildlife.

#### ***Invasion by tree species***

Invasion of the grassland by pines in some places is the major management issue of the park.

#### ***Trampling effect***

During winter, a few local people use the route along the grasslands to take their livestock to drinking water, causing severe trampling effects in the grassland areas.

#### **Research Gaps**

Although livestock grazing takes place within the park area, no research has been done on the impact of grazing on species' composition and biomass production in the grasslands. There may be competition between livestock and wildlife for food, at least in some parts of the grasslands, and this needs to be studied in detail. Similarly, the reason for the invasion of the grasslands in some areas by pines is not well understood. The presence of only a few wild herbivores within the park coupled with the exclusion of livestock grazing from most of the park areas, could be the cause. But this needs to be confirmed.

#### **Management Recommendations**

1. Once research has been done to discover whether livestock grazing is an essential part of grassland management in the park appropriate steps will need to be taken.
2. Water resources in the buffer zone area outside the National Park should be managed so that livestock do not need to be taken through the National Park to drink. This will avoid any negative impact from trampling.
3. If the research shows signs of competition between wild herbivores and livestock for food, appropriate measures should be taken to prevent the problem.
4. Controlled burning has been shown in many areas to suppress the invasion of grasslands by tree species, thus it needs to be applied in Rara National Park.