

Chapter 6

Wildlife and National Parks

With the objectives of conserving wildlife, in general, and endangered species, in particular, the Forest Department has constituted four National Parks, nine Wildlife Sanctuaries, and one Game Reserve. These protected areas cover an area of 1,175 sq. km. This forms about five per cent of the total forested areas and 0.8 per cent of the total area of Bangladesh. In CHTs, there are two wildlife sanctuaries.

6.1 Wildlife Conservation Policy and Legal Enactments

Historically, wildlife has always been the responsibility of the forest management authority. For example, the Wild Birds and Animal Protection Act (1912) vested responsibility in the forest service, and in 1959 two sets of rules to regulate hunting, shooting, and fishing were declared under the provision of the Indian Forest Act (1927) and the East Pakistan Private Forest Ordinance (1959), respectively. The Government of Bangladesh announced the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) Order in 1973. The Order was amended for the first time within a year as the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preser-

vation) (Amendment) Act 1973 and for the second time as the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act 1974. This act, along with the Forest Act 1927 and the Private Forest Ordinance 1959, provides the legal basis for management of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and game reserves in Bangladesh.

The government may declare any area to be a game reserve, national park, or wildlife sanctuary by notification in the official gazette and may frame rules to be observed in these areas. According to these rules, cultivation, damage, or destruction of vegetation; hunting; killing or capturing of wildlife; and water pollution are forbidden. The government may for various reasons (scientific, aesthetic, or others) relax all or any of the prohibitions. Rules prescribing the management of these areas may also be made.

6.2 Wildlife Protection and Management Authorities

For the management of wildlife in Bangladesh, a Wildlife Advisory Board was con-

stituted at the national level for the first time in 1977. The function of the Board was to advise the government in any matter relating to preservation, conservation, protection, and management of wildlife. A Wildlife Circle within the Forest Department, with specific responsibility for wildlife management, was established in 1973. This circle was to provide the requisite infrastructure to carry out the Forest Department's wildlife development and management programmes. The Wildlife Circle worked independently for 10 years from 1973 to 1983. Shortcomings of wildlife conservation in Bangladesh received attention from the government. The Wildlife Advisory Board decided in 1985 to revive and strengthen the abolished Wildlife Circle and advised the government to constitute a Wildlife Task Force to study and recommend appropriate action. The Task Force was constituted in 1985 and it submitted its report in 1986. Among other things, it recommended immediate revival and strengthening of the Wildlife Circle. It stipulated job responsibilities of the Wildlife Circle. The matter is still under consideration by the government.

6.3 Wildlife and Biodiversity Projects

During the lifetime of the Wildlife Circle, the Forest Department undertook projects for the development of wildlife and national parks (Sarker 1989). The Wildlife Circle executed the Development of Wildlife Management Project, while the territorial conservators executed a National Parks' Development Project through their respective divisional forest officers. The wildlife development scheme included projects on tigers, elephants, waterfowl, deers, apiculture, development of wildlife in the forest areas, survey of wild animals, and development of public relations. The scheme was well implemented until 1982 when it was dropped. After the abolition of the Wildlife Circle in 1983, a Wildlife Section

under the Conservator of Forests centrally controlled the activities of wildlife development projects. The Forest Department is now in the second phase of wildlife conservation and management projects and has initiated biodiversity projects.

6.4 Policy of Wildlife and Biodiversity Projects

The current National Forestry Policy has emphasised the promotion of wildlife and ecotourism in protected areas and is committed to increasing the amount of existing protected areas to 10 per cent of reserved forest by 2015. In general, the policy for current wildlife and biodiversity projects includes boundary demarcation of protected areas; infrastructural development for support staff and ecotourism; maintenance of biodiversity in protected areas; enforcement of a legal system to protect fauna and flora from illicit hunting and felling; surveying and monitoring of wildlife population; promotion of research and development on biodiversity and wildlife; improvement and management of wildlife habitat; promotion of regeneration of diverse plants within protected areas; introduction of wild animals from one area to another; and promotion of educational and publicity programmes.

6.5 Wildlife in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

The CHTs were rich in wildlife but indiscriminate shooting and poaching, large-scale trapping and, above all, invasion and destruction of natural habitats by humans in the recent past have either destroyed or driven away most wildlife in the area. However, from local information and from existing records, it is observed that elephants, which were once the most common and valued wildlife in this region, still inhabit the area. Sambar, barking deer, wild pigs, deer, wild dogs, jackals, goats, antelopes, monkeys of different species, hares, squir-

rels, mongooses, wild cats, porcupines, civet cats, leopards, tigers, and so on can be found along with a large variety of snakes, lizards, and other reptiles. Wild birds are also present; for example, pigeons, doves, jungle fowl, partridges, chat robins, swallows, bee-eaters, hoopees, teals, quails, and wild ducks. By the early 1960s, it became desirable to set aside certain areas for the purpose of wildlife conservation. This realisation resulted in formation of wildlife sanctuaries in CHTs (Choudhury 1972).

Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary covers 42,087 ha in the southeastern part of Kassalong Reserve. It was established in 1962 and declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1983 under the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act 1974 (Sarker 1989). It is situated 112 km from Rangamati town.

Rampahar-Sitapahar Wildlife Sanctuary is situated 48 km northeast of Chittagong Port city about five km short of Kaptai town. It covers an area of 3026 ha. The Forest Department has formally proposed to declare the area a wildlife sanctuary. The government has not yet officially done so. However, the area has been maintained as a wildlife sanctuary by the Forest Department from 1973 and is incorporated in the current Forest Management Plan (Working

Plan) of Chittagong Hill Tracts (South) Forest Division (Sarker 1989).

6.6 Social Impacts of Wildlife Conservation and Bioreserves

Although hunting is defined in the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act 1974 as 'killing, capturing, poisoning, snaring, and trapping of any wild animal...' and is strictly prohibited by law, local residents of CHTs selectively hunt wild animals, birds, crabs, and snails for consumption as food to supplement their protein requirements. This means that, at least in the case of some wild animals, the existing law is unacceptable to the local society.

The current National Forestry Policy looks for expansion of existing protected areas to 10 per cent of reserved forests by 2015. If the policy is implemented in CHTs, conflicts may emerge in certain areas currently used for rehabilitation of *jhumias*. Bioreserves may enhance the growth of some wildlife populations such as elephants, monkeys, wild boars and seed-eating birds. Overgrowth of such wildlife populations may be socially unacceptable if there is substantial damage of crops by wildlife. It appears that such anticipated social impacts of wildlife conservation and expansion of bioreserves should be critically examined before implementation of policy directives.