

Media Communique

Aaranyak loses K9 squad's prized possession Sheela

Guwahati, August 9: The much-acclaimed K9 unit, the anti-poaching dog squad, of Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) lost one of its celebrated member Sheela early this morning. She died at her place of posting at Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary near here casting a pall gloom in the entire Aaranyak family as well all those involved in conservation of wildlife in the region.

Sheela, a Belgian Malinois dog, one of the smartest breeds in the world, joined duty as a member of the elite K9 Sniffer Dog Squad of Aaranyak in June 2019, after rigorous training.

She was first deployed in Bagori Range of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, then in Manas National Park to assist the Park authorities and the forest department in anti-poaching and wildlife crime prevention/detection measures. She also served in Raimona National Park. In her last days, she was posted to help the authorities in the rhino-abode of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary under care of her handler Rahul Das.

One of the very successful and memorable assignment accomplished by Sheela was tracking down criminals that were involved in poaching of a baby bear in Manas National Park. It was in the month of June in 2022, the Panbari Range of Manas National Park (MNP) witnessed a surge in conflicts between bears and humans. During that time carcass of a baby bear was recovered on the outskirts of Panbari Village close to the National Park.

The ensuing police investigation came to a nought as it could not elicit any cooperation from the local villagers. Faced with this challenge, the Park authority turned to Aaranyak's K9 unit member Sheela for assistance. With an incredible display of her tracking prowess, Sheela led her handler to three specific households within the village. Subsequent inquiries revealed the involvement of members of these households behind the killing of the baby bear.

This successful endeavour of Sheela underscores the important role that can be played by trained K9 squad member like Sheela in solving wildlife-related cases, reinforcing peaceful coexistence between human beings and wildlife.

Aaranyak's CEO, Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, an internationally renowned rhino conservationist and wildlife crime expert, has expressed his deep sorrow over loss of Sheela. "In respect of various wildlife crime incidents, our K9 squad including Sheela, helped forest officials locate wildlife criminals' escape routes that led to arrest of the criminals. We will always remember Sheela's contribution to protection of precious wildlife during her lifetime. We regard her as a conservation hero," Dr Talukdar said.

The K9 dog squad, now comprising five Belgian Malinois dogs along with their handlers, have been actively assisting forest and police officials in Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, Manas National Park, Orang National Park as well as other rhino bearing areas in Assam resulting in the arrest of many poachers by law enforcement agencies. It was NABU International which supported operational cost of Sheela.

“Poor little girl. Such a bright spirited, loving and determined soul. She was an example to us. Rest in peace dear Sheela,” Dr. Barbara Maas of NABU International said condoling the demise of Sheela.

*Press statement issued by Dr Alolika Sinha, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak. Contact No. 9435021312,
Email ID: alolika@aaranyak.org*