

PRESS RELEASE

VDP members instrumental in protecting animals of expanded ONP & TR: Field Director

Guwahati, Feb 28: In the wake of expansion of the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve (ONP & TR) in Assam, the responsibility of all the stakeholders have increased manifold in respect of mounting surveillance for protection of wildlife of the Park.

“However, the role of Village Defence Party (VDP) members have become instrumental in prevention of wildlife crime vis-a-vis ONP & TR as they are the first responders and vigilantes in their respective area of operation on the fringe villages. Their role should be more preventive than curative,” said the Field Director of the Tiger Reserve Pradipta Baruah. The Field Director was addressing members of various VDPs attending a sensitisation workshop on wildlife crime organised on February 21 in Borbhagia Belsiri Gaon Panchayat community hall at Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur District of Assam.

The workshop was organised by Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) in collaboration with the Orang Tiger Reserve Authorities, Sonitpur District Police, Village Defence Organisation (Government of Assam) and District Administration of Sonitpur with support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Field Director Baruah further said, “It has been a dream of the Assam Forest Department to link the two nature’s bounties in the State - Orang Tiger Reserve and Kaziranga Tiger Reserve - so that wild animals can make seamless to-and-fro movements between these two protected areas. The dream was realised after the recent expansion of the area of the Park.” He also took the opportunity to discuss various issues on the park authority-fringe villager’s interfaces.

The sensitisation workshop was participated by members from Photasimulu Gaon VDP, Borbhogia VDP, Isalamari VDP, Pub-nisolamari Non-K VDP, Bosasimulu Teg Bosti VDP, Pub-Photasimulu VDP, Paschim Borbhogia VDP, and Photasimulu Block Non-K VDP.

In his welcome speech, Aaranyak official Sanjib Kumar Bezburuah explained the purpose of the event and highlighted the urgent need for such a workshop on wildlife crime at Borsola after expansion of the Tiger Reserve through its second addition from 78.82 Sq.Km to 200.32 Sq. Km.

The workshop was presided over by Pran Krishna Das, Chairman of the Borsola Bazar Committee, and eminent social-worker of that region.

The Senior Law Consultant of Aaranyak Ajoy Kumar Das explained the organogram of the Village Defence Organisation (VDO) of Assam, which is headed by the Director General of Police. He also talked about the history of how the late Harinarayan Baruah, in 1949, coined the idea by encouraging a team of village youths to look after and safeguard their own village.

“Later, the idea was preferred by many and implemented in their respective villages. The journey led to the formation of an organisation, which was named the VDO and a team in the village was called the VDP. The process culminated in the passing of legislation called the Village Defence Organisation Act 1966,” Das said.

He explained about Section 10 of the Act, which talks about the system of reward. He then went to sections 60A and 60B of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, which also speak about rewards to be paid to a person who renders assistance in the detection of a wildlife crime or the apprehension of any wildlife offender.

Circle Officer of Dhekiajuli Tonmoy Bora interacted with the VDP members and said that in recent times, the district administration had evicted many encroachers from Orang National Park and as a result, the wild animals have been able to move freely in these areas. So, vigilance towards stray animals should be increased and that underlines the demand for active wildlife crime prevention efforts now.

Pranjit Deka, Forester Grade I, stated that the VDP members have immensely helped the Forest Department in the past. However, he also shared his bitter experience with false and fabricated information sometimes circulated by unknown miscreants. He said that VDP members must beware of such fake information and always try to verify the information before passing it on to the authorities.

Second I.C. of Borsola Police Outpost, Naren Phukan requested the VDP members to freely pass-on any vital information pertaining to wildlife crime to the police outpost. The VDP members Babul Das, Ananda Das, Abdul Siddique, etc. took active participation in the discussion.

***Press statement issued by Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
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