

## PRESS RELEASE

### **VDP members' role crucial in protecting wildlife: Orang Park Director**

Guwahati, Dec 13: Members of Village Defence Party (VDP) of Singri area on the fringe of the Second Addition of Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve (ONTP&RE) have been sensitised on the important role they can play in checking and preventing wildlife crime at the periphery of state's one of the prized wildlife protection area.

Addressing a workshop on "Combating Wildlife Crime through Awareness" at Paschim Chitalmari Rangamancha Singri in Sonitpur district of Assam, Pradipta Baruah, the Field Director of Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve and Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Mangaldoi Wildlife Division, explained how and why wild animals from Orang park may stray out and the important roles the VDP members of the area can play in securing these wildlife species.

He said, "VDPs are the eyes and ears of the state police department. So, he requested that they also become the eyes and ears of the state forest department. The VDP members can be like a modern-day 'Drone' in monitoring and preventing wildlife crime." He requested that the participants in the workshop alert the forest officials promptly if they see any suspicious person in their village, from outside the state as that stranger may be preparing to go hunting inside the park. He pointed out that the VDP members were rewarded and felicitated in the past by the government of Assam.

The Field Director narrated the history of the Orang wildlife habitat area since the year 1915, when the colonial British authority had declared it an Orang Game Reserve, till its recognition as the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve and the recent expansion of the Park through the Second Addition. After The expansion of the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve to a second addition, from 78.82 square kilometres to 200.32 square kilometres, the eastern boundary of the park has now reached near Singri close to Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district.

The ONP&TR Authority in collaboration with premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak ([www.aaranyak.org](http://www.aaranyak.org)), Sonitpur Police and Village Defence Organisation hence organised the sensitisation workshop on wildlife crime prevention on December 3 this year to raise awareness and elicit cooperation from local VDP members and

the community as a whole in securing wildlife of the park that may stray out from the Second Addition.

The workshop supported by US Fish & Wildlife Service, was attended by about 80 participants, consisting of panchayat members, local villagers, and primarily VDP members. It Was presided over by Gop Bahudur Thapa, an eminent social worker of the area. Rajib Hazarika, Assistant Conservator of Forests, was also present in the workshop.

Rajen Thapa, the secretary of the Village Defence Party of the Singri Police Outpost, set the workshop on the roll by his welcome address. Thapa requested the Forest Department to have a wildlife camp near Shangri. Aaranyak Official Sanjib Kumar Bezburuah, explained the purpose of the workshop and said Aranyak, along with the concerned authorities, was contemplating organising more such events in near future.

The Senior Law Consultant of Aaranyak, Ajoy Kumar Das, spoke about the unique system of the Village Defence Organisation. Das, who is also a practicing advocate of the Gauhati High Court, said that VDPs in Assam have a legal mandate under the Village Defence Organisation Act 1966 and the Rule 1986.

He flagged legal duties of the VDP members, and how they can play a vital role in wildlife crime abatement and nabbing wildlife offenders. Speaking about Section 125 of the Indian Evidence Act 1872 and the 69th report of the Fifth Law Commission, he stated that a police officer cannot be bound to disclose the source of information. He said that therefore, the VDP members must assist the Police and Forest Department without fear, as their names will never be disclosed in their investigation diaries.

The in-charge of the Singri Police Outpost, Raj Kumar Taye stated as the boundaries of the park have reached near Singri village, it has therefore become important that the VDPs remain vigilant all the time against wildlife crimes like hunting or consuming wild animals, trading on wildlife etc., which are considered serious offences.

Forest official Pranjit Deka lauded the VDP members for extending immense help to the forest department in the past and hoped for similar cooperation from VDP members in securing wildlife in the area.

Lata Devi, the president of the Dakshin Singri Gaon Panchayat expressed her concern about the diminishing wildlife and bird species on earth.

The Gaon Burah of Singri, Lankeshwar Sharma, Lat Gaon Burah of Chitalmari, Bhasan Mandal and Gaon Burah of Bachasimulu Hazart Ali were present in the workshop representing the civil administration.

The beat officer of Singri Hemanta Deka, the forest guards Khogen Deka and Sam Bahadur Chetri were present on the occasion.

The Secretary General and CEO of Aaranyak, Bibhab Kumar Talukdar has expressed his gratitude to the Forest Department and VDP members, mainly Rajen Thapa for their role in organising the workshop successfully.

The Circle Officer of Dhekiajuli Tonmoy Bora, and the Officer-in-Charge of the Dhekiajuli Police Station Raja Sarkar, although they could not participate due to their other urgent official engagements, extended support for the event.

***Press statement issued by Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.  
Contact No. 8638229722, Email ID: bijaysankar@aaranyak.org***