

Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

by Lutfar Rahman

THE chunati wildlife sanctuary had been pushed into obscurity before it came to limelight through a seminar on 11th, 12th and 19th February '89. It is a Forest Department project for which voluntary private initiative played the main role through motivation and persuasion of the departmental officials, that is, the officials had to be motivated instead of people being motivated by the officials. Nevertheless, the sanctuary came into being and since then has been protected by the people around it. Indeed, there has been a lot of controversy over and opposition to it on grounds which were mostly flimsy and created by vested interest groups.

My eight years' association with it as honorary warden has convinced me that the officials linked with it have lacked the sincerity with which a sanctuary needs to be taken care of. There is serious contradiction between words and action of the people who are responsible for its administration. No senior concerned official has ever visited the interior of the sanctuary which holds some of the rarest species of birds and animals like 'stros' (wild goat) and peacocks besides many other varieties. I wonder, if the concerned wing of the department has any idea about its inhabitants, their food and habitat and in some cases about the physical existence of the sanctuary itself.

A forest has to be protected from inside and outside. Strangely, no effective step has so far been taken to post any staff other than a forest guard who is also kept attached to different beat offices or other jobs not related to the sanctuary.

Bangladesh can boast two most majestic animals, the Royal Bengal Tiger of Sundarbans and the elephants in concentration in this sanctuary. While the former can boast the tiger, chunati sanctuary is the only place where the country can offer to visitors for observation in a compact area of 19,000 sq acres interwoven by game tracks like spider webs. There are people around it who deplore the existence of wild elephants on the ground that they destroy their paddy and I have observed quite a number of official expressing sympathy for them. But I harbour great doubt about the bonafide of their case in that these clamouring people are in most cases unauthorised occupants of reserve forest including people from their own de-

partment and other local influential non-peasants, either through exercise or their official authority or underhand dealings. A survey, thus, has become an absolute necessity to find out the truth which the department has been avoiding either for dubious reasons or insincerity or may be even negligence none of which is invigoration national environment, to which the government has been putting so much of stress. This action is also vital for the survival of the sanctuary.

Mentionably destructive activities like felling of trees, poaching, reclamation of reserve forest, pollution of water, indiscriminate burning of the woods etc. are going on un-

dermined. The parts of the sanctuary under Harbang, Aziz Nagar and Jaldi are opened daily to poachers and timber lifters after dusk and I am blunt to say that these happen with the connivance of the forest administration. In 1989 indiscriminate fires inside the sanctuary caused havoc destroying three fourth of the habitat of wild fowls, pheasants and similar other bird species, making the deer run from bush to bush, alarming and disturbing elephants. In other words, such fires upset the balance inside the sanctuary affecting each and every forest dweller. After such fires, deer and goats take shelter in small bushes wherever available offering excellent opportunity to poachers and hunters to shoot them.



In the lap of nature

The authorities are required to go into the question of fire immediately which in-

volves special significance in that this is not a normal one but done deliberately by a section of bamboo merchants unofficially patronised by the field staff for gain in the name of 'BANSKATHI' which is transported to towns and cities as fuel offering enormous profit at the cost of national interest. The act of issuing TPs is the charm of field staff who collect their share in the process.

The concerned authorities have so far turned deaf ears in spite of insistence by the people of conscience all around. Since after the seminar of '89 many write-ups have appeared in different dailies of Dhaka and Chittagong. They have put up arguments for and against

on the western side of it which falls under Banskathi U Z where political leadership lies with persons known to be patronising the said trades. They deliberately keep their eyes closed on such anti social and anti environmental activities. It is not the need of the poor people but the greed of the wealthy timber merchants and the conniving officials that destroys the forest. Both these sections wear the mask of love for the people. It may be mentioned that there is not a single permanent homestead inside the sanctuary. So the question of homelessness does not arise here, in case the unauthorised people are evicted. Some hold the view that with human habitation on

carried out. Well, here the animals themselves have done the feasibility study and have selected their place on their own choice, as it fulfilled their requirements. The government has already recognised the facts and also has agreed to let them live there in peace. It is not a zoo that would require a feasibility study against a budget. It is the ability of the concerned human beings to understand what the animals want and where. It is for us to understand their language and not vice versa.

(b) Continuity in the process of land reclamation must be stopped immediately. The interest of the poor people, in most cases, is not involved here. I emphasize that this is

the second day. The visitors and participants, expressed concern about its security in particular and well being in general.

Awareness about environmental question is growing faster in recent times and the people who opposed the sanctuary one year back are now on its side. Now the last to understand and appreciate it are those who are in the employment of the government, to administer it. If and when they understand it, they should immediately go for certain steps with a little built of sincerity and feeling of patriotism for the survival of the sanctuary. These steps are:

- i) Earmarking a set of staff for the sanctuary only led by a range officer or any one of that rank.
- ii) Closing of unauthorised human tracks through the sanctuary connection east and west as a short cut, to prevent disturbing the silence inside it, as there are alternative public roads with bus service.
- iii) Pending building of permanent watch towers, reaching which will be a time-consuming process. Kutch Watch Towers are to be made available for guards to protect them and for visitors to observe its inhabitants.

iv) An early survey to recover land from unauthorised occupants, irrespective of influence and status. The reclamation process is continuing unabated and unless immediately halted, it will reach a stage beyond repair.

v) Steps to stop fire in the forest which is devastating and threatens all will inhabitants including elephants, who live on bamboos and other shrubs, for want of which they frequently come out of the forest to find food on paddy lands damaging standing crops.

- vi) Getting the licenced guns around it registered with the nearest beat office as provided in Article 37 of the Wild Life Preservation Act of 1974.
- vii) Constant motivation steps by the field staff posted to protect the sanctuary.
- viii) All saw mills and brickfields around the sanctuary are to be shifted to places beyond five miles from the boundary of the sanctuary.
- ix) Replanting those varieties of trees which normally provide food for wild animals like 'Horitaki' 'Boira' 'Amloki' which have been totally destroyed creating food shortage for deer and goats.

abated. The parts of the sanctuary under Harbang, Aziz Nagar and Jaldi are opened daily to poachers and timber lifters after dusk and I am blunt to say that these happen with the connivance of the forest administration. In 1989 indiscriminate fires inside the sanctuary caused havoc destroying three fourth of the habitat of wild fowls, pheasants and similar other bird species, making the deer run from bush to bush, alarming and disturbing elephants. In other words, such fires upset the balance inside the sanctuary affecting each and every forest dweller. After such fires, deer and goats take shelter in small bushes wherever available offering excellent opportunity to poachers and hunters to shoot them.

this particular sanctuary. From a glimpse at them, it will reveal that most of these arguments have been put up for argument's sake only. They have stressed human requirements around the sanctuary. But the pattern of requirements has not been analysed. They stress that the poor people have to live on firewood collected from this sanctuary. This is disputable from the point of view of national and environmental necessity. Nevertheless, I stress that such head-load collection of forest materials, though harmful, does not destroy the forest. The real threat of destruction comes from the following:

- a) Timber merchants who employ people for felling big trees for making slippers on the eastern side of the sanctuary having base at Adunagar under Lohagara UZ and indigenous boat builders

these sides, it is unsuitable as a wild life habitat. In reply one must remember that wild animals have been living in this patch of forest since centuries with those people around it. If they succeeded in co-existence for centuries, there is no reason, why all of a sudden, the creation of a wild life sanctuary should upset the balance. The question of population growth is sometimes put forward as an argument opposing the sanctuary's existence here. But then enough is left beyond this meagre 19,000 sq acres of forest for their plunder. In all arguments the fact has been ignored that wild animals need a particular sort of environment created by nature in a natural forest which makes it an abode for them and it exists here.

Some have claimed that before establishing the sanctuary, no feasibility study has been

done by influential people around it, in the name of "poor cultivators to expand their already existing unauthorised land. This section includes people of the department itself and its agents. The Chunati Range Office, from where the sanctuary is to be administered, is surrounded by such unauthorised occupants. It is strange if any one recommend even a "benefit of doubt" to the intention and ignorance of the officials administering it. Destruction or creation of farm home without any legal right within one thousand years around the range office can hardly escape the notice of the field staff as well as higher officials visiting it from time to time. Here the question of the seminar mentioned earlier, dealt entirely on the matter relating to the sanctuary, on

Serendipity and Botany

by Leigh Ann Hurt

EARLIER this year, Alan Hamilton, WWF International Plant Conservation Officer, hiked up Mt Mulanje — one of Malawi's most striking and biologically diverse mountains — intent on finding a special grass-like plant recorded in the area.

Meandering through a boggy plateau above the mountain's treeline, Dr Hamilton found what he believed must be the one species of the plant, *Restio*, known to the re-

gion. He collected a small sample for checking, then returned to the mountain hut where he was staying.

A day later, it became apparent that the plant was not in fact the known species *Restio mahonii*, but in fact another species of the same genus, previously unknown to science. This discovery emerged because Peter Linder, who accompanied Dr Hamilton to Mulanje, found what was

ample, agricultural — will react. Studies of past climate fluctuations help to set modern changes in context.

"The evidence of past climates based on the occurrence of fossil *Restio* gives another reason for conserving plants in addition to the normal arguments based on ethical and economic considerations," said Dr Hamilton. "The study of the conditions in which modern plants live is essential for evaluating the climatic significance of their fossil occurrences," he added.

Dr Hamilton argues that this discovery gives added weight to arguments to introduce further measures to conserve Mulanje's flora. "More plant species are endemic on Mt Mulanje than in the whole of the British Isles," he said. Approximately 30 plant species exist only on this mountain.

Malawi has established several conservation sites, and Mt Mulanje already receives considerable protection as a forest reserve. In many ways, the country's Forest Department has achieved a great deal on Mt Mulanje, but there is a need for certain further specific measures aimed at conserving the flora, and ensuring that the mountain continues to play a major catchment role.

Jutting up abruptly nearly 2,000m from the plains in the country's southern region, the mountain has peaks as high as 3,000m above sea level. It also



Dr Alan Hamilton, WWF International Plant Conservation Officer (right) at work in the field. Aided by a Ugandan assistant, he is using a probe to sample sediment in order to investigate the past history of vegetation and climate in south-western Uganda.

clearly *Restio mahonii*. The *Restio* collected on the first day was quite different. There is no doubt about this finding, because Dr Linder is the international expert on this group of plants.

Fifteen years earlier, Dr Hamilton had discovered 28-32,000 year old fossil pollen of *Restio*, while working at a fossil site in Rwanda. More recently, the French scientist, Raymonde Bonnefille, has encountered the same pollen type of the same age in Burundi. Dr Hamilton was well aware of the *Restio* common to Mt Mulanje, but never imagined he would discover another new species there.

Blue-green in colour with long, thin leaves, the plant Dr Hamilton discovered is believed to flower annually, at a different time of year from the previously known species *Restio mahonii*.

Restio mahonii is found in its sole, modern, central African locality, Mt Muhi in Zaïre, above 3000m — that is above the treeline. Both this and the new species grow on Mt Mulanje at about 2,000-2,200m. Though this is a much lower altitude, it is still above the treeline, which is less high as a result of the more southerly latitude and very humid climate.

embraces the country's only extensive low altitude forest, along with grasslands, mountain thickets and montane evergreen forests. In addition, it is one of only two sites in Africa with blanket peat — peat occurring on sloping rather than flat ground. The other site is Rwenzori, the Mountains of the Moon, on the Uganda/Zaire border. This indicates an exceptionally humid climate.

According to Dr Hamilton, deforestation due to human encroachment, agriculture clearance and logging have already had a dramatic impact on some parts of the mountain. Serious landslides earlier this year — perhaps caused in part by tree clearance — have made as many as 40,000 Malawians homeless in the area, and over 500 people are said to be dead or missing, according to the Independent.

In addition, more than half a million people in the region are dependent on Mt Mulanje for their water. If degeneration of the forests continues, then this vital lifeline of free water from the mountain will be threatened.

The problems caused by human interference also spread their effect beyond the human population. Pine trees growing from seeds dropped from trees on the edges of plantations on the mountain's high altitude plateaux have been spreading, the invading native vegetation, suppressing the indigenous plants. And the extremely valuable native conifer, *Widdingtonia nodiflora* — with wood worth about 200 times that of the pines — is not regeneration properly, and is, in fact, being replaced by another invasive, introduced tree *Cupressus lusitanica*.

The Third World Speaks out

"I don't have time to worry about ecology. I need food, clothes and housing. Hunger can kill me tomorrow," says 17-year-old Brazilian office boy Wilson das Neves when asked for his views on the states of the environment.

His answer encapsulates many of the responses in the Third World survey unveiled in the latest issue of *Panoscope* magazine, and illustrates the growing rift between people in the developing South and those in the industrialised North.

While environmental protection is a major concern in North, the informal survey by journalists in Brazil, Mexico, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda shows that the business of day-to-day survival is uppermost in the concerns of ordinary people in the developing world.

Nevertheless, the survey reveals that throughout the developing world men and women from all walks of life are well aware that the planet is in the grips of an environmental crisis.

One women's group in Kenya plants potatoes both on and off season; rains have become so unpredictable that the women cannot be sure when they will reap a harvest. In neighbouring Uganda, weather patterns changed in the south-west as a result of swamp drainage, bringing malaria to areas that previously were too cool for mosquitoes.

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Says Wilson das Neves, struggling to make ends meet in his Rio de Janeiro home:

Global warming is a problem particularly high on the North's environment agenda. But the Panoscope round-up finds that it is not a priority for people in the developing world.

The rich should take care of this warming issue. They have cars. How can we, the poor, reduce our energy consumption? My family has one old fridge and one black and white TV set. Do you want me not to use them? Are you crazy, man?

much room for abstract concerns about global environment. Says Mexican farmer Reynaldo Huanzi: "My priorities would be combating

hunger, injustice and having a land reform. The environment is next."

Huanzi's priorities are representative of the people questioned by *Panoscope*. Asked to locate the environment on a sliding scale of one to five, about half placed it fourth or fifth. Kampala businessman

Small Mugerwazo was among those who placed it last: "When environmental experts make projections, they quote the year 2000 and beyond. I don't even know whether I will still be alive by then."

As far as the people interviewed by the magazine are concerned, economic development and environmental protection go hand in hand and tackling one without the other fails to address the problems they consider most pressing.

Says Brazilian engineer Severino Resende: "Ecology is a key component of any development plan, but it is not a target in itself."

the North for a trade ban on tropical timber.

In the run-up to the United Nations 'Earth Summit' in Brazil next year, government leaders and international agencies are busy consulting each other about setting the agenda for action on environment and development for the 21st century.

As the magazine points out, however, the people themselves have never been consulted about whether environmental protection is important for them or how they feel about proposed solutions to problems such as climate change or deforestation.

Panoscope's survey suggests that unless people are asked about how environmental protection fits in with their day-to-day existence, caring for the environment will ultimately lose out to short-term survival needs. (PANOS)

Looking at Green Revolution

COUNTERING recent criticism, a new study says the Green Revolution in India and elsewhere in the developing world led to major gains in income and nutrition for small and large-scale farmers, and even for the landless poor.

The 153-page report, *The Green Revolution Reconsidered*, is an effort to rebut charges that technological innovations brought to Third World agriculture in the 1960's, chiefly benefited wealthy, large-scale farmers at the expense of poorer peasants.

The Green Revolution itself was brought about by improved varieties of wheat and rice, combined with the expanded use of fertilisers and other chemical inputs.

Conducted by the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the new report is the first to study the effects of the Green Revolution on the non-agricultural sectors of the economy.

By collecting and analysing data from the same villages in southern India both before and after the introduction of Green Revolution agriculture, authors Peter Hazell and C. Ramasamy concluded that the changes introduced by the new technology benefited virtually all sectors

of the society. "It is imperative that the lessons from the Green Revolution be understood by agricultural researchers and policymakers," said Hazell, who led the study.

"With a burgeoning population expected to double in many developing countries within the next 25 to 30 years, they must understand the social and economic effects of the Green Revolution if they are to ensure that future agricultural technology can equitably feed all who are hungry," he said.

The two authors argue that many critics of the technology's impact reached their conclusions too early. Thus, while large-scale farmers were the first to benefit, smaller farmers were also found to adopt the techniques after an initial lag time of three to five years.

Critics also were concerned that wealthier farmers would evict "tenants" from their property or raise rents to gain more from the increased value of the land. But the study found "no evidence" that the patterns of land distribution had been skewed to benefit landlords at the expense of the tenants.

farm equipment. But Hazell and Ramasamy found there has been little use of tractors, despite an initial increase after the technology was introduced.

In addition, the authors claim the increased mechanisation in irrigation pumping

A new study rebuts claims that technological innovations brought to Third World agriculture in the 1960's benefited only well-to-do farmers at the expense of poor peasants.

and paddy threshing which have become widely mechanised has not displaced large amounts of hired labour.

As for fears that the Green Revolution would worsen absolute poverty and unemployment, they, too, have proved largely unfounded, according to Hazell.

"Though there was a modest decline in the use of hired labour, the supply of workers declined faster and real wages increased 10-20 per cent," he

said. "As a result, annual wage earnings almost doubled for small-scale farmers and landless farm labourers."

These gains were possible, the authors said, because farming became more profitable and growing seasons multiplied.

Medium-scale farmers, who often supplemented their incomes by working on other farms, for example, gave up second jobs to respond to the demands of their own farms, thus increasing the number of working hours available for others. Overall, income increased for small, medium and large farms, Hazell argues.

As for the impact of the changes on non-agricultural households, the study found economic growth in non-farm activities in villages and local towns, including the businesses such as in tea shops, restaurants, transportation and personal services.

Agri-business spin-offs, such as rice milling and seed distribution, also grew, if found.

"This economic growth trickled down to the non-farming rural poor," said Hazell. "They experienced a virtual doubling of their incomes, and this improved their standard of living and nutritional levels." — [PS]



Taking care of kitchen garden is a regular household chore for most housewives in the countryside