

Developing Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary has come to this stage of existence through all legal and procedural formalities after consideration of all aspects of its merits and demerits for a long period of five years beginning from May 1982. Its concept was accepted by the administration in principle in that year.

After detailed discussions and deliberations the idea of declaring it as a sanctuary was accepted. Then the process started with an area covering 19,177 sq acres of reserve forest on both sides of Dochailla hills with Jaldi Range on the west, Chunati Range on the east, Madarsha Range on the north and Barabakia Range on the south, keeping a corridor open for wild animals to move into the dense forest of Cig Hill Tracts extending upto Indian and Burma borders.

Since its inception the Sanctuary has been administered by the Forest Department.

Legal protection
Under Clause 23 of Wildlife Preservation Act of 1974, none is allowed to enter the sanctuary and disturb the peace and security of its inhabitants, not to speak of making fortunes out of its resources through illegal felling of trees, reclaiming forest land, poaching or any in anyway disturb the peace of its inhabitants, damage or destroy its food sources or pollute water.

The justification of the sanctuary's existence should be viewed from the environmental and ecological angle in addition to its primary purpose of preventing extinction of rare species and arranging protection to its traditional inhabitants.

Nobody questions the inevitable horror that is to befall the area if the depiction of forest is further tolerated. The effects of cyclone of April '91 is an eye opener. The absence of mangrove forest along the coast in the south and south-east belt from the Sunderbans to Teknaf has taken a heavy toll in terms of human and animal lives and properties. When the cyclone struck, no obstruction stood to resist or face its onslaught which ravaged the belt with unprecedented fury. The belt has been stripped of its natural barrier for purposes like shrimp projects and making a way for a handful of persons to make fortunes at the cost of the interest of lakhs of inhabitants. A close look into the drama will show that the indiscriminate destruction of mangrove forest for shrimp projects have, instead of national progress, made us vulnerable to natural onslaught.

The total gain from such projects including shrimps is much less than that could be had from a 'calamity free' area which does not need foreign help after each onslaught. This

goal can be largely achieved by keeping our natural barrier of trees and mangrove forest standing in its original place and shape along the coastal belt and hill range mentioned above. Such natural onslaughts were normal phenomena in our seas i.e. Bay of Bengal which never succeeded in unleashing such ruthless terrors on our people and region as revealed in the East Pakistan Gazetteer edited by S N H Rizvi who says that "cyclones of extreme severity used to occur in October and again in March and April though they sometimes occur in other months as well." This indicates that our recent cyclone is neither new nor may be unprecedented. What is new here is its severity over larger areas which is obviously the result of deforestation. The mangrove forest in the coastal belt and tree cover on the hills range behind it forms the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary WILDLIFE SANCTUARY which justifies its only existence to benefit not only the wildlife but also huge human habitation around it.

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The sanctuary with Dochailla hill range in its belly has a great role to play to defend the vast populated areas to its east, north and south against natural calamities of the type we are envisioning now.

Our environmental question should be viewed from a poor country's angle. We being a non-industrialised country, our responsibility lies more on our way of handling nature and its resources. It is universally agreed in the country that we were much richer in forest resources till mid seventies. And therefore our prime responsibility lies in protecting our forest from the ravage of the vested interest consisting of unscrupulous timber merchants with the backing of destructive section hiding inside the administration holding different posts of importance.

It must be very clearly understood that there is a difference between a natural forest and a created forest. A natural forest is one where plants and trees grow according to suitability of its soil, climate and surrounding environment, whereas a raised forest is more meant for economic benefit leaving the natural aspect as of secondary necessity. Since Wildlife is a natural phenomenon it naturally grows in a natural forest that fulfills its requirements of food, shelter and security.

As similar conditions prevail in Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, various species of wildlife, mammals, reptiles

and birds, settled on their own centuries before and have been living there ever since. But now the human hands have struck and have started threatening their very existence. There is a section who oppose the existence of sanctuary there on the ground that it is no more a suitable ground for wildlife to grow and that not many species really exist there.

According to a survey by Professor Zakir Hussain, so far 178 species of wildlife have been recorded. "About 14 species of amphibians have been recorded from Bangladesh so far, but at least six more species are expected to be found here in Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary."

REPTILES: "The team recorded eight species in a short time. But it is believed that a few more species of Tortoises and Turtles including the land Turtles ... some species Lizards ... and a good number of snakes may be found in the area if serious efforts are made."

BIRDS: "In the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary the team recorded 137 species of birds during the recent field work which is perhaps the first record for the area. They include 20 migratory species ... But we believe more species are to be found there, especially some deep forest and some migratory species. The total number may well exceed 160."

MAMMALS: "About 12 species of mammals have been lost from Bangladesh in this century." "From Chunati it has been possible to record 27 species during field work but the presence of a few more species are expected particularly smaller mammals."

"Looking at the mammalian fauna it is possible to come to the same conclusion as in the case of birds. The very presence of elephants, Slow Loris, Pig tail Macaque (not reported from there before), Leaf Monkey, Pangolin, Wild Dog, Orange bellied Himalayan Squirrel, and Precupine, Jungle Cat, Serow, Barking Deer and Binturong indicate that the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary still supports deep forest and that any attempt to protect these Fauna and Flora will be worthwhile."

While Zakir Hussain reports on wildlife, most reputed taxonomist of Bangladesh Dr M Salar Khan reports in his survey report on Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary published by MARC in Dec. '90 that the vegetation

of the forest in its pristine condition, roughly half a century ago, was classified as a tropical rain forest, rich in genetic resources. Mismanagement, illegal felling and encroachment ... resulted in the degradation of the natural tree cover endangering many of the native species with restricted distribution. Plant records examined at KEW and Edinburgh Herbaria and seen for Heintings list (1925) indicate that Jaldi Range of the Sanctuary was once rich in many tree species forming the top canopy. At present it is desolate and reduced to Brushwood and stunted trees for the majority of the area. Relatively Chunati Range has still some natural forest cover left minus the tall tree species which once dominated the vegetation ... "677 species of plants recorded through field observation. It can not be said to be an exhaustive list ... This list indicates the occurrence of these plants in two Ranges i.e. Chunati and Jaldi and has also some notes on the economic and medicinal utility."

Michael H. Woodford, an Elephant expert deputed by AFO visited Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary in 1988 and toured it along with me and a number of forest officials and zoologists from Chittagong and Jahangirnagar Universities. He appreciated the forest which is of similar to course the African Elephant habitats mostly on bushy plain land forest. This was an arduous journey for him. According to him the sanctuary is not spacious enough to accommodate the elephants numbering about 25 suggested that the herd be caught for domestication. He however missed the point that the question of space was irrelevant in that the herd of elephants could easily move towards east into dense forest of Cig Hill Tracts if their normal corridor is kept open which at the moment has been blocked by settlers, settled by the government in a haphazard way. This corridor can be reopened and made safe and easy for them to move in and out of the sanctuary, which can be achieved through administrative step by the forest department in cooperation with local administration of Bandarban district.

Mr Rizvi in his gazetteer mentions that in the forties, during and after the Second World War about 200 elephants of migratory nature used to move around this place using the natural track mentioned above, without causing mentionable damage to crop or confronting human population

who used to be inside the forest daily for collecting fire wood, bamboo, sugrass and so on for their livelihood. In this particular forest with an area of 19,177 sq acres there is no permanent human habitat inside other than its southern boundary. They are mostly casual seasonal visitors comprising mostly unauthorised encroachers who enter it for cultivation. The other section comprise the timber lifters, bamboo and sugrass collectors as well as Betel leaf growers.

The land owners inside the sanctuary are mostly from the adjoining areas who have illegally cleared forest to reclaim land. This is meant to extend their already existing landed properties in their respective villages. Large-scale reclamation of land inside does not serve the need of the poor but the greed of the solvent who frequently use the poor man's cause as shield. True there are some poor cultivators whose small holding inside it are the only means of their livelihood. Well, they may remain as such who can be profitably utilised for the benefit of the sanctuary as participatory part of the population, in its protection and plantation activities.

It goes without saying that Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary could be developed as model project for which all necessary conditions exist, which will inspire the State management to create sanctuaries elsewhere as well in the country where similar conditions prevail.

Socio-economic benefits: After attaining a real appearance of a sanctuary it is sure to be a place of great attraction for all those who happen to pass by or through it. Every year thousands of visitors to Cox's Bazar have to pass through it to reach the beach. Given proper publicity of its existence as a game sanctuary, most of these visitors are expected to break journey for few hours or even a day in a nearby rest house, for a stroll inside it, may be in expectation of getting a snap of drowsing elephants in a streamlet under a shade during sunny hours or deer or scrows in their natural habitats. This will create employment for the people around it as happens in all tourist centres.

The sanctuary offers for them to observe everything wild in their natural habitat unlike a zoo. The offer includes Elephants, Serows, Deer, Pigs, Bear Cats, all varieties of monkeys, wild dogs, Porcupines, wild fowls, pheasants for easy observation. Who will miss the chance if this message reaches his ears? After all most of us cannot visit Africa, India or Nepal for such a view in its natural condition.

Green Light for Endangered Island

THE richly forested Philippine island province of Palawan, considered one of the world's ecological hot spots, may be headed for greener times.

Palawan has for the past five years been a battleground between conservationists fighting to preserve the island's rich and endangered environment and politically powerful loggers.

The uphill fight continues, but local environmental groups say there may be a chance to save Palawan after all.

Jose Alvarez who holds two of the three timber leases in Palawan which cover over 200,000 hectares of forest lands or nearly a third of the provincial total.

As Speaker, Mitra challenged proposed laws to impose a total ban on commercial logging. But as presidential candidate, he has turned around belatedly and now favours a total ban.

Environmentalists realise the shift may just be an electoral ploy. But they believe some long-term trends may

The Philippines' largest province, Palawan is one of the world's ecologically richest areas. Its forests are home to over 3,000 varieties of plants and endangered mammals like the pangolin, reptiles and birds, including the Palawan peacock pheasant, the Philippine cockatoo, talking mynahs and parrots.

Offshore are a network of spectacular reefs containing giant sea turtles, over 400 species of rare corals and an array of tropical fish.

International interest in Palawan's ecological treasure has helped reduce the odds in the fight between ecologists and loggers.

When 14 Haribon members in Palawan were arrested for alleged subversion last year, the outcry from local and international environmental groups resulted in the detainees' quick release.

But experts say that unless the destruction of Palawan's forests and coral reefs is checked, a victory for environmentalism may be pyrrhic. Forests here are still being destroyed at the rate of nearly 20,000 hectares a year. And it will be difficult to stop that even with a new law banning commercial logging.

Enforcement of existing laws has been spotty at best. Few are caught for illegally cutting forests and fewer still are convicted. Says Palawan Provincial Board member Nilo Caabay: "In my office, I have a stack of documents one foot high on cases that have not moved for years."

Catching violators has been difficult because some law enforcers — forestry officials, military men and the police — have been in cahoots with the loggers, Caabay says.

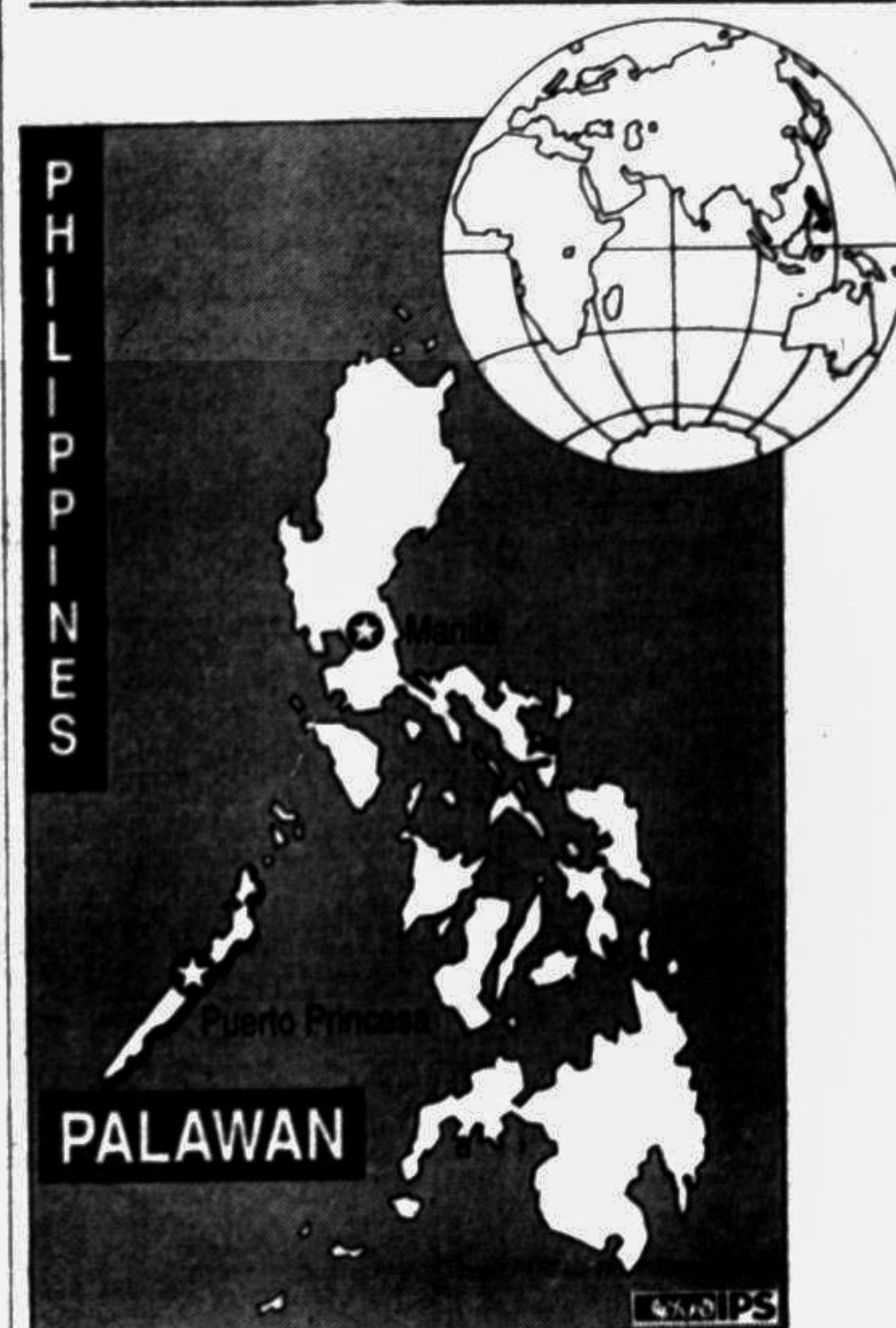
The illegal trade in logs is highly lucrative and involves a two-way traffic between Palawan and the Malaysian free port island of Labuan, which lies off the coast of nearby Borneo.

Rare hardwood species, including an extremely rare form of ebony, are tugged by boat to Labuan. The ships bring back a wide range of consumer goods like powdered milk, clothes, shoes, televisions, radios, refrigerators, washing machines and motorcycles.

"I'd bet many of the motorcycles playing the streets of Puerto Princessa were made in Malaysia," says Gen. Epineto Logico, who commands all military forces on the island.

But even if the loggers were stopped, the government would have to find ways of saving the forests from desperately poor farmers who migrate to Palawan from nearby island and end up doing slash-and-burn farming in the uplands.

The results of their work are visible to passengers of commercial aircraft flying into this city — thick columns of dark smoke rise from the ravaged hillsides of this endangered island.



"Environmentalism has won greater acceptance among the people here," says Joselito Alisuga, a lawyer who heads the provincial chapter of Haribon, one of the country's pioneer environmental groups that started the 'Save Palawan Campaign' in 1988.

"Even the most notorious pro-logging politicians in the province are singing a different tune these days," he said.

The most prominent example of this may be House Speaker Ramon Mitra who comes from Palawan and is one of the leading contenders in the crowded race for the presidency in general elections this May.

Mitra has long been identified with logging interests here, particularly business ty-

Village Support Ensures Giant Panda's Future

TWIN pandas are providing a much needed boost to the captive breeding centre in China's Wolong nature reserve. Born in September last year, they are remarkable in part for surviving their first months of infancy. Since it was set up in 1981, the station had produced just one panda, which died soon after birth.

But Stuart Chapman, a United Nations-sponsored volunteer who is training Wolong

The wild population of the Giant Panda has dropped dramatically over the last 200 years. The current level is under 1000-all in China.

Says Chapman: "It is so easy to protect the Panda. If you can untie a knot made by a piece of wire (set as a snare), you can protect the Panda. If you can patrol in the hills, you can protect the Panda."

Just ensuring the 50 guards do patrol has proved a major part of Chapman's work. One

Martin Williams writes from Honk Kong

By setting himself a routine of two or three outings with guards each week, Chapman helped boost the number of guard patrols in Wolong to a record level last year.

A record number of negative 'incidents' were also reported — Chapman alone found over 70 wire snares, and his teams caught seven people for felling protected trees.

The number of negative incidents may reflect an increase in illegal activities within Wolong. More likely, it is a result of more patrolling. And increased reporting.

Though the guards were supposed to fill out report forms for each patrol.

Wolong nature reserve in China is a captive breeding centre for pandas. Deforestation and poaching has cut the panda population. A new government conservation management plan for the giant panda aided by the World Wide Fund includes a proposal to move the villagers out of Wolong. But local support to protect Wolong and other panda reserves is essential.

Chapman believes they show little enthusiasm for this, because a report of a negative incident could mean a black mark for the guard held responsible for activities in his patrol area.

Now, at Chapman's instigation, the reserve is introducing an incentive scheme: guards will be rewarded for exposing illegal activities or, better still, catching the perpetrators.

The illegal activities include tree-felling, collecting medicinal — but protected — plants, and poaching. With monthly incomes of people living in the reserve of around 80 yuan, and plants and animals often fetching good prices in markets — a kilo of velvet deer antlers might sell for 2500 yuan.

Says Chapman: "Wolong is like a wildlife supermarket.

And, like any shop, you need a good security system or you will lose all your stock."

Pandas can also fetch high prices: investigators from TRAFFIC, an international wildlife trade monitoring network, last year found that Panda skins were available in south-east China from \$10,000 each (most were bound for Taiwan).

One dealer claimed to have two cubs, with a price tag of \$1,12,000 each, climbing to \$3,45,000 for the pair during 48 hours of negotiations, as the dealer's 'friends' wanted a cut in the deal, in return for not informing the police.

Indeed, poaching has been

treeless land the animals are loathe to cross.

And the area of remaining forest is shrinking as the villagers cut more trees.

A conservation management plan for the giant panda, prepared by the World Wide Fund for Nature and China's Ministry of Forestry, includes a proposal for moving the villagers out of Wolong.

Now, according to the main author of the original plan, John Mackinnon, WWF is



standing back, saying: "You have plan. It is for you to make the decision to implement and fund the work."

This near inactivity on the part of WWF arises largely from disappointment over its involvement in Panda conservation during the early Eighties.

The WWF president has said: "We agreed to put a lot of money into China, which, in retrospect, we should never have done."

Chapman counters: "China has made immense sacrifices in trying to protect the Panda; and example is the huge loss of potential timber revenue in setting aside large areas of forest as reserves. It should be rewarded, not criticised."

His hard work and positive attitude have earned him respect from the Chinese. The China Environment News published an article on him. His efforts are also starting to bear fruit within the reserve.

Providing the grassroots support is forthcoming, Chapman looks set to play an important role in ensuring the survival of Wolong's remaining pandas, and the forests into which the breeding centre's twins may be released when they reach adulthood. — Gemini News

Martin Williams helped establish a bird reserve at Beidaihe, East China.

Elephants Go on Jumbo Booze Binge

by A J Singh

INDIAN elephants walking along one of their traditional routes recently stumbled on a military camp's liquor supply and helped themselves to it.

The camp had been set up across the herd's path, with the bar located right in its way. The elephants walked in, grabbed liquor bottles with their trunks and emptied them down their throats before continuing on their way.

It seems they acquired a taste for the stuff, because they reappeared a few days later and repeated the performance.

In previous years, the elephants would probably have been shot by the thirsty soldiers, but widespread poaching has given elephants a protected status. Instead, the soldiers put up electrified fences and built small fires around the camp to deter the interlopers.

But the elephants outsmarted them, using logs to bring down the fences and spouting water from their trunks to put out the fires. The soldiers looked on helplessly, knowing it would be another dry night in the camp bar. /PANOS

Farmers Question Uganda's Strict Policies on Trees

by David Musoke

UGANDA is trying to restore its depleted forests, but farmers are skeptical about the government's methods.

All landowners have been ordered to plant one-third of their land with trees, to replace forests that were cleared to make way for cash crops.

"Policymakers are assuming that all farmers have enough land to grow their own food and at the same time have spare land for tree-planting," says Solomon Katenda, a farmer in Gayaz village, central Uganda.

Farmers will lose land if they do not comply with the new rule, says Kintu Musoke, minister of state for presidential affairs.

"Should the landowner refuse to plant the trees, then the public will do so and those trees will be publicly owned," he says.

Uganda's forests suffered during two decades of civil war and political turmoil. Farmers cut down trees to plant crops, reducing 100,000 square kilometres of forest to only 20,000 square kilometres.

Some areas are becoming warmer as a result of the disappearing forest cover, and the once-rich soil is losing its fertility. Many farmers are turning to swamps and wetlands for food production, disturbing the areas' ecological balance.

A ban was imposed last year on timber exports, as well as on the felling of trees in a number of forests. Farmers are also now forbidden to plant crops on land close to the edge of rivers and lakes.

While farmers regard the government's six-year reforestation plan as being well-intentioned, they argue that environmental problems are not spread uniformly across Uganda, and that any one solution imposed on the whole country could create more problems than it would solve. /PANOS

China: where the pandas are



reserve guards, cautions that the twins should not deflect attention from efforts to preserve the Giant Panda in the wild.

While there is kudos attached to breeding pandas in captivity, Chapman says support for grassroots efforts to protect Wolong — and the other 13 panda reserves — is essential. Particularly important is support for the guards who are the reserve's "eyes and ears."

problem is the rugged terrain: Wolong encompasses a large valley cutting into the eastern Himalayas.

Fields cover much of the lower valley, and the forests which hold pandas cling to steep hillsides: "You can't go anywhere without being out of breath in two minutes," says Chapman. In winter, severe cold is a deterrent to patrolling, while in summer the forests harbour leeches and ticks.