

Heading for a Greater Deluge?

PHOTO FEATURE ON FLOOD (DHAKA CITY)



Rajarbag: How long can the traffic move?

—Star photo by Enamul Haq



Lalbagh: It's now bidding on boats only.

—Star photo by AKM Mohsin



Basabo main road: Boats replacing rickshaws.

—Star photo by Enamul Haq



Postogola: Waiting for boats!

—Star photo by Amran Hossain



Sayedabad: Water project turned into a lake!

—Star photo by Amran Hossain

The One That Got Away

Omayma Khan writes from Jamalabad, Pakistan

A leopard may not be able to change his spots, but farming communities can change their attitudes so that rare and valuable species may be helped to recover from the brink of extinction.

WHEN Ulfat Karim recently discovered an unwanted guest on his land in this small village in Pakistan's Northern Areas, his immediate reaction was to protect his livestock by catching the intruder. But then he discovered that it was a snow leopard.

Renowned for both its rarity and its ferocity, the snow leopard is found in 12 countries, stretching from the Central Asian Republics to Mongolia. It prefers rocky mountains, arid and semi-arid shrubland, and grassland or steppe — though sometimes it is found in open coniferous forest. Like the lion and the tiger, the snow leopard is at the top of the food chain, so if it flourishes so does the surrounding ecosystem.

But the animal is on the Red Data List of endangered species and Helen Freeman, founder and president of the International Snow Leopard Trust (ISLT), explains why.

"The snow leopard is a notable example of how not all species are created equal," she says. "Some are more prone to extinction than others. The

snow leopard is few in number, large-bodied, with a low population growth, and its habitat is becoming increasingly fragmented — all characteristics that promote the early disappearance of a species."

But perhaps the most important factor in the survival of a species is its relationship with man. Although the world now values this elusive creature, it is still a nuisance for those communities in its vicinity. A hungry snow leopard does not distinguish between wild and domestic animals. Sheep and goats, as well as cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, and even dogs have been killed to satisfy its appetite.

Reconciling the needs of the communities with those of the snow leopard is proving difficult. Since livestock represents wealth, it is not surprising that farmers have killed snow leopards to prevent losses. But more enlightened attitudes are emerging, and Ulfat Karim chose to protect rather than to kill the predator.

"Two of my sheep were dead, and I found the snow leopard

wrestling with a third," he said. "They say the snow leopard becomes inebriated at the sight and smell of blood, and unaware of what is happening around it. I hit it on the head and wrapped my shirt round it until my brother came. We tied it up and kept it until a makeshift cage was built."

For four days Ulfat Karim's family fed the cat 10-12 kilograms of meat — including the animals he had killed and others that died later. "I realised that I couldn't bring my sheep back to life, but I could limit any further damage," he said.

Karim is a member of the Khunjerab Villages Organisation (KVO), set up to protect animal species in the buffer zone round the Khunjerab National Park. The KVO reports any illegal hunting and also aims to convince others of the benefits of protecting wildlife. When other members heard of the snow leopard, they came to ensure that it was safe.

WWF-Pakistan was also contacted and a small team was sent to observe the leopard in captivity. Four days after its

capture, arrangements were made for the animal's release and the whole village congregated at the back of Ulfat's house. When the animal was given its freedom, 15 kilometres from where it had been caught, villagers chased it as far into the buffer zone as possible, hoping they would prevent its return to prey on their livestock.

Basit Khan, WWF-Pakistan's Coordinator for the Northern Areas, points out that there was no direct benefit to the villagers from their action, but he believes the incident should set an example to others as a sensible conservation measure.

For this to happen, however, cannot be the only incentive. Qurban Jan, Secretary general of the KVO, says compensation must be made available to farmers who suffer losses, otherwise the next animal to wander on to their property will not be treated with the same tolerance.

The writer is Communications Manager, Northern Areas, WWF-Pakistan.

How Important are the Forests?

by Helmut Nagelschmitz

GERMANY is among the European Union's most thickly wooded countries, with some 10.7 million hectares of woodland and forest — almost one-third of its total area. There are wide variations, from three per cent of the land under timber in the Dithmarschen district of Schleswig-Holstein to 61 per cent in the Regen district of Bavaria. Germany's timber reserves — at 270 cubic metres per hectare — are among Europe's biggest.

According to Jochen Borchert, Federal Minister for Food, Agriculture and Forestry, this results from the rebuilding of this country's forests in the wake of destructive tree-felling in the 19th century and the rape of Germany's woodlands after the First and Second World Wars.

Efforts to conserve the world's tropical forests play a major part in international co-operation in the forestry and timber sector. These forests are being destroyed at an alarming pace, with some 13 million hectares vanishing from the map every year. Experts in Latin America and Asia warn that this means the irredeemable loss to the whole world of a vital natural legacy.

Incineration to clear land for food production accounts for about 90 per cent of tropical

forest destruction. Effective co-ordination of a wide range of international efforts to contain this development is much-needed. These are being channelled, for example, via German development aid as well as through the framework of multilateral ventures such as a pilot programme to save tropical rain forests in Brazil or the Washington agreement on the protection of endangered species.

Air contamination by industry, power stations, transport systems and domestic households share major blame for the destruction of forests; the main contaminants are sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen dioxide (NO_x) and ammonia (NH₃). These have a double effect on organisms, for one thing directly on surface flora systems and indirectly through the infiltration into the soil of sulphates, nitrates and ammonia.

It is known that air pollutants can cause significant changes in forestry ecosystems which are not immediately obvious. Nutrient deficiencies, acid saturation of forest floors and nitrate and heavy metal contamination of water reservoirs, changes in tree-root systems and disruption and depletion of the species spectrum are particularly worrying manifes-

tations.

The Federal Government in Bonn has responded to research findings and created a legal basis for reductions in harmful emissions. Important legislative instruments include the Federal Emission Act, ordinances on the operation of large- and small-scale combustion plant and technical regulations limiting air pollution. As a result, major offenders have greatly reduced their emission of air contaminants.

While, numerically, the timber industry plays a relatively modest role in the German economy, it and the paper industry together achieved a turnover of 163 billion DM in 1996. Timber processing (furniture, construction elements, packaging materials) accounted for almost half of this.

Like the forestry industry, timber processing occupies a special place in the rural employment sector, comprising mainly small and medium-size businesses located mainly in country regions. A small number of suppliers dominate the market only in a few capital-intensive spheres such as the timber-working or papermaking industries. Other member-states of the EU are their main trade outlets.

Despite a steady, high-level increase in its stocks of commercially useable timber — 57 million cubic metres per year — and although only 70 per cent of this is actually utilised, Germany is unable to cover its own requirements in timber and wood products. So, for many developing countries, Germany is a good customer.

Annual timber production of between 30 and 40 million cubic metres brings in between 2.5 and 3.5 billion DM, but its true significance goes far beyond these statistics. It covers a good two-thirds of Germany's annual timber consumption, thus forming a raw materials basis for the German timber industry which, along with paper manufacturing, provides employment for around 480,000 people. Furthermore, the woods and forests themselves give full-time employment to 70,000 and part-time jobs to many more.

The value of woodlands and forests in terms of their role in protecting the environment and safeguarding our climate cannot be expressed in figures any more than can their influence on human health and leisure. Their environmental function is far-reaching and international, as everyone is now aware thanks to the continuing controversy surrounding the destruction of rain forests.

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