

perfect place for basking in the morning sun, and that is what we did for about forty minutes. By 08 30 all of our people had arrived and we decided to proceed little further for tea and breakfast. After climbing a steep slope across the bridge for half an hour we reached on a plateau where two cheerful shepherds welcomed us to their camp. The shepherds informed us that they belonged to Anni *tehsil* of Kullu district and had been visiting upper Parvati valley for summer grazing since past 25 years. A few Nepali workers were also camping nearby under a rock shelter. We were told that they had been collecting medicinal herbs (mainly Dhup, *Jurinea macrocephala*) for some local contractor and every year some 30–40 quintals of medicinal herbs go out of this valley. This area is very close to the recently demarcated boundary of GHNP. It is likely that a major portion of this collection may come from GHNP. We discussed various management issues pertaining to this area including the feasibility of establishing a guard post and regulatory mechanisms within the park.

As we had a long way to go, we quickly finished our breakfast, thanked the shepherds, and resumed our journey. The stretch between the shepherd's camp and Mantalai passes through a wide and flat river valley. We stopped at regular intervals, discussed about the vegetation and bird communities. Some of the flat meadows and marshy areas looked excellent places for water birds. We also frequently scanned the slopes and moraines for mammals without any success. But for the marsh meadows along the valley and some sheltered pockets most of the vegetation had turned brown. Punjab Singh was on fast that day and he had decided to take food only after having a holy dip in the glacial lake at Mantalai. Around 16 00 hrs most of us reached Mantalai. It took us another hour and half to reach the camping site and settle down for the evening. It was decided that as soon as we finish our dinner, we would prepare breakfast as well as pack-lunch for the next day so that we could start early for the long march. Despite having only one small kerosene stove (and no fuel wood), Mr. Rana (Range Officer of Sainj Range, GHNP) gave us timely dinner and packed our meals for the next day before going to bed. This was remarkable. And the next morning (9.9.99) we all woke up fresh, full of enthusiasm for the long awaited Pin Parvati Pass.

Our journey along the Pin river on two subsequent days (on September 10th & 11th) via Tariya (where we halted for the first night), Mud, Tilling, Khar and Sagnam was equally exciting but less tiring. All the migratory sheep and goat herders had already left the area for their winter grazing grounds. The valley was dry and windy but not as windy as adjacent Parahio area of Pin Valley NP where WII (in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution) conducted a study on the ecology of ibex. The valley and the mountain slopes were sparsely vegetated and showed signs of heavy grazing. A herbaceous plant *Aconogonum tortuosum* which had turned red, dominated the relatively stable slopes and added colors to the landscape. Among birds chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), snow cock (*Tetraogallus himalayanus*), yellow billed choughs (*Pyrrocorax graculus*), and black red start (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) were frequent. We didn't come across any person in the valley till we were about 4 km away from Mud village on 11th. The headman of Mud village was kind enough to arrange lunch for us. We were amazed to see the modern amenities including electricity, television, and fashionable furniture in the house of our host at a

place what we thought was a remote area. Close to the village we saw some 15 persons busy digging on a slope. We were told that a motor road was under construction through Rupi –Bhava pass to Wangtu in Kinnaur so that Mud People need not travel all the way via Kunzam pass or Pooh to their market places. While we congratulated the villagers on such developments, we were sad with thoughts that these developments could change the nearly pristine landscape and attitude of the people, who are friendly as of now.

Last part of our journey was a bit luxurious. The head man of Mud village insisted that he would be happy to escort us to the road head near Sagnam. He arranged three Chumurti horses (two of his own and one from some other person, better ones in the village) for Mr. Pandey, Mr. Jishtu and myself. Around 16 00 hrs we reached Mikim village where one of our former Ibex Project field assistants, Mr. Kunzang Dorje, welcomed us. Soon we bade adieu to the head man, Kunzang and others and left the place by three vehicles which were waiting for us at the road head nearby. On way to Kaza that evening, and the next day to Kullu time and again, I mostly thought of the great Himalayan landscape, its equally wonderful people like Punjab Singh, the shepherds, and the headman. If at all I get a chance to repeat this journey some years from now, it is unlikely that the place will remain untamed and the people so noble.

Lion Tailed Macaques have hope in Parambikulam Valley

by Ranjan Sehgal, IFS

A specific census of Lion Tailed Macaques was organised and conducted in Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary from 10.3.2000 to 13.3.2000. Around 40 volunteers from different parts of Kerala and Tamilnadu from various walks of life participated in this census. It was an intensive field operation conducted simultaneously in the tropical evergreen forests of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was divided into census blocks covering all the LTM habitats.

All the volunteers were assembled at Anapaddy, the Sanctuary Headquarter and briefed about the sanctuary and the census operation. Then, they were divided into 25 teams and were deployed in all the census blocks. Supported by the experience of field staff and jungle wisdom of tribal watchers, the teams went about their job with enthusiasm and motivation. At the end of the three sessions of census, the teams were picked up from their respective camps and brought back to the Headquarter. The present census results will prove to be a turning point in the history of Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary's management. Previous census and surveys did not do any justice to the LTM population of Parambikulam as the attention was not a focussed one. The last general census in 1997 by Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) showed a figure of only 3 animals in 2 troops and estimated population was only 30.