

## WII in the Field

### Occurrence of hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) near Bhimgoda barrage across Ganga River

- *Bivash Pandav*

The stretch of river Ganga between Bhimgoda barrage near Haridwar and Kunaon barrage near Rishikesh receives a large number of migratory water birds every winter. In order to carry out a count of water birds in this stretch, along with eight students of the IX batch M.Sc. (Wildlife Science) I reached Bhimgoda barrage around 0800 hrs on January 25, 2004. Soon after our arrival the entire area got engulfed in dense fog which restricted our visibility. Even after waiting for half an hour there was no sign of improvement in the weather condition. We abandoned the idea of counting the birds and went for a drive along the Mundal sot in Chilla Forest Range, which got cleared of *gujjars* in summer 2003. As we went around looking for wildlife by noon the fog disappeared and it became bright and sunny. After finishing our packed lunch we headed back and around 1530 hrs we were back at the barrage. While scanning the river for birds, Chandrima, the only girl student of the batch, pointed out a large animal moving in the tall

grass habitat on an island. A careful look revealed that it was a sambar doe. We also saw two small deer foraging near the place where the first Sambar doe was spotted and thought them as Sambar fawns. Subsequently, we saw four more Sambar does in the same island. The doe that we spotted first had by then gone close to the place where four does were standing and had joined the group. However, the two small deer were still in the same place, grazing on the exposed bank of the island facing towards the Chilla side. We concentrated on observing these two animals that were grazing away from the group of five Sambar doe. After watching for couple of minutes all of us were sure that the two animals grazing in the island are certainly not Sambar fawns. Most part of the time when both the animals were moving they were keeping their head low down. After some time, I saw antlers in one of the animals and then I was sure that we were observing two hog deer since last half an



hour. After some time when the two hog deer moved their back towards us we could manage to see the white underside of the tail. All of us were very excited to see hog deer in this area where it has hardly been reported in the recent past.

Hog deer once occurred in the Doon valley in low density. However, destruction of their habitat has resulted in their disappearance from the Doon valley. People still talk about the presence of both swamps as well as hog deer in a small grassland near Chidiapur along the Ganga (25-km downstream of Haridwar on the Najibabad road). Swamp deer as well as hog deer still exist in extremely low densities in the marshy areas along the Ban Ganga River in Haridwar district. During a visit to

## XI Meeting of the Training, Research and Academic Council (TRAC)

The XI meeting of TRAC of the Wildlife Institute of India was held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2004 at "Van Vigyan Bhawan", R.K. Puram, New Delhi. Shri R. Rajamani, IAS (Retd.) chaired the TRAC and overall 21 members attended the meeting including representatives from BNHS, ZSI and Universities of Saurashtra, Guwahati and Patna,. The meeting was also attended by Addl. D.G. (Wildlife), MoEF, New Delhi along with four State Forest Department Officials from Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. The Institute was represented by the Director, Dean and six HoDs. Dr. K. Sankar, Senior Reader also attended the meeting as a special invitee.



The Member-Secretary (Director, WII) welcomed the Chairman and other members of the TRAC and thereafter agenda items were taken up. Along with the agenda of 'Action Taken' on the decision of the previous meeting, one agenda related to Academic (WII's Tentative Work Programme for the year 2004-05), three agenda items pertaining to Research primarily 'Extension of Project(s) and Consideration of Four New Research Proposals' were discussed and of which three new research proposals were approved by the TRAC for the consideration of the Finance Committee of the WII. In addition to that, three supplementary agenda were also put up before TRAC and decisions were taken. The TRAC also decided to hold the XVIII - Annual Research Seminar on 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> September and XII meeting of TRAC on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2004 at WII.

count water birds in Ban Ganga in December 2003, villagers of Idrispur (located 20-km from Laskar in Haridwar district) informed me about the presence of both these species in their area. This area is contiguous with the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary of Muzaffar Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh, where a population of hog deer still exists. However, most of these swampy areas along Ban Ganga River have been encroached by farmers to cultivate sugarcane and I doubt the presence of a viable population of both these species in this area. In the past this entire area along river Ganga as well as along Ban Ganga River would have supported a good population of Swamp as well as hog deer. Today, the habitat is gone and the presence of a good population of both these deer species is a thing of past.

Sighting of these two hog deer in Bhimgoda barrage has led us to believe that a very small population of this species still continues to exist very close to Chilla. Adequate protection and enhanced connectivity in the islands located in river Ganga may help in building up this small population of hog deer that still continue to thrive in the Bhimgoda barrage. Chances of this small hog deer population spreading into the Mundal area appear to be remote. However, the way the Mundal grassland is recovering after the relocation of *gujjars*, release of few hog deer caught from the wild (may be from Corbett NP) is worth considering. Hog deer was definitely there in Rajaji NP in the past. It will certainly be a great achievement if we can bring this deer back into the area. The park authorities have already demonstrated their tremendous commitment to save the area by relocating the *gujjars* from the Chilla range. I am sure that with their sincere efforts, one-day hog deer will roam in

the Mundal *chaur*. With the hope of seeing hog deer in the Mundal *chaur* in near future all of us returned back to Dehradun in the evening.

### On the proliferation of species through degeneration of taxonomic thought

- *Karthikeyan Vasudevan  
and M.S. Chaitra*

The concept of species is one of the most debated issues in Biological sciences. This primal debate has been intense only among a small group of philosophers from the beginning in Aristotle's days. A small group called 'taxonomists' kept contributing to the world of knowledge that we have today on "species" or more fashionably put today as "biological diversity". Ironically, this group has always remained small even when we have seen rapid strides in our inventory of biological diversity. The title of this narration reveals the intent, we wish to highlight the sudden proliferation of species without a sound backing of the very concept of "species". We will discuss this based on some recent publication related to the amphibian diversity in Sri Lanka-Western Ghats global biodiversity hotspot.

There are several concepts and definitions available to describe a species. In recent days, the core areas of the species debate has focussed on species either as a group or a rank, or species as an Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU), or the utilitarian value of a species, or species just as the terminal of tree or as a management unit. Mostly these debates are largely restricted to taxonomists and evolutionary biologists. The users of the concept, conservation biologists have rarely participated in these debates. As more sophistication in techniques and analyses became available, the debate has shifted towards

highlighting conservation importance. A recent report of identifying more than 140 new species of amphibians from Sri Lanka made the island nation an amphibian hotspot, thereby attracting large conservation grants. Wide use of Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC) will have more impact on some taxa and some regions more than others, and comparisons of species lists will be now seriously undermined. Additionally, serious operational difficulties must be overcome before phylogeny can be used as an estimate of biological diversity or evolutionary history since accurate estimation of phylogeny has its own problems and pitfalls. In the light of recent findings, we would like to discuss on taxonomy and conservation of amphibians of South Asia. We do recognize the fact that the scope of this discussion is wide since many taxa of flora and fauna in the region have experienced this "boom in species". As informed biologists or field managers it is important to analyze and understand the implications of such findings. Our research team has recently communicated an analysis to the journal *Current Science* that is in press. Therefore, we draw our arguments from this publication to voice our concerns to a larger audience, beyond taxonomists or herpetologists or conservation biologists.

In the past three years, three major papers have been published in high impact journals like *Science*, *Nature* and *PNAS* addressing the taxonomy and phylogeny and biodiversity conservation issues. This clearly indicates a growing global concern towards resolving systematics and biogeography, highlighting the importance of endemic taxa in conservation. The taxonomy of amphibian fauna of the oriental region is extremely interesting to taxonomists

### X Finance Committee Meeting

X meeting of the Finance Committee was held on March 25, 2004 at Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi. Shri N.K. Joshi, Director General of Forests & Special Secretary, MoEF, Govt. of India chaired the meeting. In this meeting, issues regarding execution of departmental civil works, campus development works, annual accounts & understated assets, library account and audit of annual accounts for the year 2002-03 and some other issues were discussed. The committee examined the budget proposals placed before it. The information provided in the agenda notes was noted by the Committee. The Committee approved the budget estimate for ongoing and new research projects for the year 2004-05. The Director, WII was authorized to allocate the funds depending upon the research priorities of the Institute.