

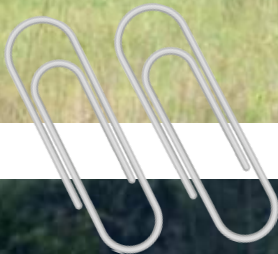


Special attraction on the community protection of turtles at Goila



BHETANOI-BALIPADARA BLACK BUCK HABITAT RESEARCH PAPER BY VASUNDHARA

2005



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Bhetanoi-Balipadara Black Buck Habitat

(WITH A BRIEF NOTE ON THE COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF TURTLES AT GOILA)

2005

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Studies in Protected Areas:

Bhetanoi-Balipadara Black Buck Habitat

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INTRODUCTION:

Black Bucks are very beautiful animals and their population in India is significantly lower than that of the spotted deers, thus putting the former in the list of endangered species. The smaller population is mostly due to loss of habitat and large scale poaching.

These Bucks are scattered all over the country in many Sanctuaries and National Parks, but their largest concentration is found at Visatpura in Gujarat where the people of Bisnoi community have been protecting them as holy creatures since a few centuries. A similar kind of protection to Black Bucks have been provided here in Orissa by the people of Bhetanoi and its neighbouring villages for more than half a century and their successful community protection of this wild life has placed the area next to

Visatpura so far the concentration of the Bucks is concerned.

Bhetanoi is 51 kms. away from Berhampur. Not too far from this place are Buguda and Balipadar. All-weather roads connect all these places.

PHYSIOGRAPHY THE BLACK BUCK HABITAT:

The Bhetanoi-Balipadar Black Buck habitat area extends over a plain* and cultivated landscape with small hillocks scattered here and there. The habitat is partly bounded by a number of hills like Sandhachulia and Gadagada whereas in other parts there is no such natural barrier although the Bucks confine themselves within a certain limit (like particular village areas, canals and the river Badanoi) simply because they do not consider it safe to go beyond that limit.

* Gently sloping in some parts.

Local names and concentration areas

Black Bucks (*Antelope cervicapra*) are locally known as *Bali Harina*, *Krushnasara Mruga* and *Kala Bautia*. The last two names are based on the black colour of these animals although only the males of the species exhibit this colour while the females have a brownish complexion.

About a century ago, these antelopes were found in many parts of the state like the coastal forests of undivided Puri & Ganjam districts and in Kalahandi, etc. However, at present they are hardly seen in such areas. Even in the Konark-Balukhand Sanctuary created for their protection, their presence is doubtful since after the Super cyclone of 1999, they have not been seen by the local people who believe that either they died in the cyclone or migrated to other areas.

The major perennial source of water in the habitat is the Badanoi, but it is confined only to some particular areas. Other water bodies include man-made ponds and irrigation channels.

BIO-DIVERSITY:

The habitat itself is an agricultural land and village site and hence not rich in biodiversity. Besides agricultural crops, some planted as well as naturally grown trees like *Amba*, *Jamun*, *Kendu*, *Babool* and Coconut etc. are found in the area. Herbaceous species are not many and a few medicinal plants like *Koilekha* and *Bena* etc. are found throughout the area. More than three varieties of Grasses are also found like *Mutha*, *Rangadaudia* and *Duba*.

Among the fauna, the Black Bucks are the most important wild life found here. Besides, there also exist some Jackals (*Bilua*), Foxes(*Koki*) , *Pani Odha* (Otter), *Neula* (Mongoose) and snakes. Avian species like *Shua*, *Shari* and sparrows are also seen and aquatic birds like *Gendi*, *Matia Hansa* and *Kuji Hansa* visit the ponds and reservoirs where tortoises, along with fishes, are also found.

FOREST COVER:

Although the habitat is primarily an agricultural land, old people say that small patches of jungles and bushes existed here and there in the past, particularly on hillocks and rocky outcrops. But indiscriminate exploitation over the years for timber and fuel wood as well as extension of cultivation and village sites have almost totally destroyed these small jungle patches. For ex., at Talabagada (literally meaning, the domain of Tala trees), where large number of Palm trees are still found, existed a patch of good jungle in which valuable timber species like Sal and Kashi and other species like Kendu and Mahul were found. It was a private property (revenue land) of few acres with Sal as the dominating species, but the original owner recently sold it out and there are no mature trees found there except some pole crop. It is said that almost 90% of this small jungle is lost. Similarly, in the Sholamile village (near Ramanda), a jungle of timber and fuel wood species existed wherein species like *Nimba*, *Bela*, *Keruan* and *Ranaboli* etc. were found. Besides, there also existed Mango groves at many places.

Now, plantations of Eucalyptus and Cashew have been raised at a few places like Gadagada and Pangidi-Kanasahi.

The habitat itself is bounded by some Reserve Forests like Sandhachulia (near Pandiaphathar) and Solandi (near Ramanda) which themselves are denuded to a large extent under anthropogenic pressure.

AREA AND LEGAL STATUS OF THE HABITAT:

The habitat was originally confined to an area in the neighbourhood of 22 villages more than 80 years ago. There was no recorded forest land in this original area since being used for cultivation and habitation purposes, it was recorded as a revenue land.

In a notification [memo number F(W)2/89, 22755/FFAH] dated 19th September, 1989 the Govt of Orissa declared this area of 15867.96 acres (64.2 sq. km.) as a Game Reserve. It covered 21 villages with an area of 4250 hectares* (42.4 sq. km.).

However, the current habitat area seems much larger than the above one. As Sri P. Venkata Rao Dora, a retired Forest Ranger of Pandiapatthar village estimated, the original area has almost doubled over the years because the Bucks are no more confined in the neighbourhood of those 22 villages, but are also seen near villages like Belipur, Ramanda, Betarasing, Gandadhar and Karising of the Buguda Forest Range as well as in some plain & cultivated lands of the Kodala Range. The original concentration was near Bhetanoi-Pandiapatthar area, but later with increasing population of their won, some of them have migrated to other areas like Sapuamala (which is more than 10 kms. from Bhetanoi).It seems than the Forest Department is yet to assess the exact area of this extended habitat.

The factors causing an extension in the habitat may be the following:

- Increase in population and consequent need for more extensive grazing grounds.
- Construction of the Baghua irrigation canal (which proceeds from the Buguda side in the neighbourhood of villages like Ramanda) which seems to have caused a disbursement of the herds of Black Buck towards the Kodala side (areas under Kodala Forest Range).
- Threats from poachers.

STATUS AS A PROTECTED AREA:

Before 1936, when Ganjam district was under the Madras Presidency and the separate province of Orissa was not created, the Madras Govt notified in a gazette the Black Bucks of Bhetanoi-Balipadar as protected species prohibiting the hunting of these animals. However, the habitat was never declared as a restricted/protected area.

In 1989, the Govt of Orissa declared it as a Game Reserve “in which, no hunting shall be permitted except under and in accordance with a licence issued under the said section[†] by the Chief Wildlife Warden or the authorised officer”. However, the Act was amended in 1991 after which Section 36 which provided for a legal status like Game Reserve was omitted thus making the declaration null and void although from the records of Forest Department it can be seen that for all official purposes the old status (Game Reserve) was mentioned for many years even after this amendment.

Wildlife researchers have expressed concern over the fact that the area no more stands protected (after the amendment) thus threatening the Black Bucks and as such, they have advised to declare this habitat as a Closed Area[‡] under the existing legal provisions. The

* Source: Information Sheet of Ghumsur South Division, p.6 (undated).

[†] Section 36 of Wild Life Act, 1972

[‡] Means area closed to hunting [see Section 37 of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972].

authorities have accordingly started the necessary process to implement this recommendation. However, provisions for Closed Area do not interfere with the natural as well as revenue rights of the local people.

JURISDICTION:

Although the habitat is a revenue land, the Bucks being wild life and an endangered species (enlisted in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act), the DFO, Ghumsur South Forest Division, who is also the Wildlife Warden for the Division, has jurisdiction over this area. The concerned Forest Ranges are Aska, Buguda and Kodala.

HISTORY AND SUCCESS OF THE COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF BLACK BUCKS:

Legend has it that more than a century ago there was a flood in Bhetanoi area in which few Black Bucks came floating from some other area and took shelter in this new area. The villagers took care to provide safety to these animals not only because they found them very beautiful, but also with some religious attitude. They thought that killing or causing harm to these Bucks would bring misfortune to them and that, the existence of the Bucks in their area was an auspicious sign. Thus, they saw to it that the Bucks remained safe and unharmed.

Documentary evidence shows that the villagers took great care of the Black Bucks as early as 1918 since in an advertisement published on their behalf in a local newspaper 'Prajamitra' dated 15th November, 1918, they humbly urged everybody not to kill these animals saying that these Bucks were dearer to them like their sons. The advertisement was published after the villagers noticed some cases of Buck hunting by the Englishmen against whom taking any action was difficult for them the country then being under the British rule.

From the above-mentioned advertisement, it is also known that some of the Bucks were nurtured by the villagers after which they were left free in the cultivated fields. Some people even put bells in the neck of some of these Bucks, an act showing intimacy in the relationship.

The Bucks recognised this intimate relationship by taking the presence of the protecting villagers easily. They are not frightened by seeing these villagers unless there is some outsider (recognised by his costume and activities which the Bucks are not familiar with). Some of them even enter the villages occasionally.

These Bucks use the cultivated lands as their habitat and prefer to remain closer to the protecting villages. They share the common grazing grounds with the village cattle and instead of entering the bordering forest areas to continue their life in the wild habitat, they rather prefer to avoid these forests and remain confined to the village sites and cultivated fields.

The success of this community protection is evident from the statistics of Black Buck census. Whereas in 1918 their number was around 100 (as per the estimates of the protecting villagers), the census done in 1998 revealed their number to be 551*.

Results of the Black Buck census operations [†]				
Year of census	Male	Female	Young	Total
1994	82	348	41	471
1998	94	376	81	551

PROTECTION STRATEGY OF THE VILLAGERS:

The advertisement of 1918 was published by M. Chandramani Dora of Bhetanoi village which took lead in the protection of Black Bucks. The other 21 villages on whose behalf it was published, were Pandiathar, Bhejiput, Badakholi, Dhanija, Danachandanapedi, Phamalpur, Gahangu, Bishnuchakra, Ramagada, Dengapadar, Kalambo, Pangidi, Jholori, Santrapur, Sankholi, Ballipadar, Kadapada, Daugan, Sadashivpur shasana, Pankulabadi, and Babanpur, all situated between Aska and Rasulkonda. This suggests that there was a kind of unity and agreement among the 22 villages so far this protection was concerned.

However, it seems that the protection effort was never formalised in the form of any committee or patrolling system, etc.. The common understanding that informally united these villages was based on a religious belief that causing any harm to the Bucks would bring misfortune to the family. **Thus, the Bucks have been protected not for the sake of bio-diversity, but on the basis of some religious perception.** That is why when an outsider hunted a Buck decades ago, the dead animal was taken in a procession by the villagers of Pandiathar and was buried by the side of the memorials (which are situated near the village temple) raised in

Black buck protection: for what sake?

The protecting villagers believe that these antelopes are devotees of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna and thus it is a sin to kill them. The religious attitude is so prominent that even stone images of Black Bucks have been installed in some temples of the area.

The ecological aspect of this protection attitude has only been a secondary one. Some people say that the more the Bucks eat their crops, the greater is the yield. To justify this, they indicate some kind of silvicultural impact on the plants by saying “ if they eat a branch (of the plant), the plant will produce four or five new shoots and thus the yield will be greater”. But they themselves are unable to ascertain this claim when it comes to the ground reality. Otherwise, why some people would have left their fields uncultivated?

* Currently supposed to have increased upto 700 although the villagers estimate 1000.

[†] Source: Information Sheet of Ghumsur South Division, p.6 (undated).

the memory of some of the influential people of the village.

Material measures (like fencing) taken by the villagers for the protection of Bucks are almost absent. What they do is described in the following:

- Recognise their cultivated fields as the habitat of the Bucks and as such, do not try to permanently rebuff these animals although the Bucks eat their crops.
- Take care of the injured Bucks.
- Take action against the poachers (and even co-villagers who cause harm to any Buck).

The poachers are either fined or beaten up. The action is taken by the village in whose neighbourhood poaching took place or by the villagers who caught the poacher. The amount received against fine is deposited in the village common fund (*Kotha*). There is no amount fixed for fining and it depends on the seriousness of the offence committed as well as on the fining villagers. Accordingly, a poacher was fined Rs.100/- by the villagers of Ramanda more than two decades back whereas another poacher was fined Rs.700/- by the villagers of Bhetanoi about 10 years ago.

The informal understanding of providing protection to the Bucks automatically spread to villages other than the 22 listed above and as such, when only two/three Bucks first appeared near the Ramanda village about 25 years ago, the villagers decided to provide protection to them. Thus, when a hunter came to kill the Bucks, the inhabitants of Ramanda cautioned him not to cause any harm to these animals and advised him to go to the nearby forest to search some other animal for him gaming, which he partially followed and killed one Buck after which he was fined. However, such cases (of fining poachers) are extremely irregular, not only because poaching rarely takes place in many areas, but also because it has not been always possible for the villagers to identify the poachers.

Towards a formalised effort

In 1999(?) it was reported that a Black Buck protection committee had been formed in the Ramanda area with two members from each family. The committee had 15 executive members and the DFO was its president. It was supposed to meet every month.

On the other hand, the Bhanja Yuba Sangha, a youth association of Buguda area, reportedly worked for increasing the awareness of this protection effort.

However, when we enquired about the current status of these activities, every thing appeared to be in a defunct state.

STEPS TAKEN BY THE FOREST DEPARTMENT
FOR THE PROTECTION OF BUCKS:

Besides declaring the area as a Game Reserve and the Bucks as a protected species, the Department constructed a watch tower and few game tanks in the habitat and provided

food (like Mahul) to these animals for some time* (which was discontinued later). It is also said that the Department tried for a fodder grass plantation which could not succeed, but this is yet to be confirmed.

In his letter(dated 10th March, 2003) to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Bhubaneswar the DFO has highly praised the community protection effort of the villagers of Bhetanoi and other protecting villages and it is learnt that he has recommended for rewarding them.

The authorities have asked the Govt for implementing a special scheme so as to strengthen the protection measures on their part since the current measures are extremely inadequate. Had the villagers not protected the Bucks, the rare species would have probably become extinct by now.

SACRIFICES MADE BY THE VILLAGERS FOR BUCK PROTECTION:

The protecting villagers suffer considerable loss in their harvest from agricultural fields since the Bucks eat their crops. The loss is greater in summer when grass growth is reduced to its minimum and in absence of any other alternative, these animals consume crops like *Mandia*, *Muga* and *Biri*, etc.. Even vegetable crops are not spared[†].

The loss in agricultural harvest varies with individuals and even with villages. For ex., in Bhetanoi village the average amount of agricultural land left uncultivated in fear of the Bucks is approx. 25% of the total cultivable land whereas Kamaraj Mohanty, a landholder of this village, has left about 60% of his cultivable land uncultivated due to this reason. Even from the rest of his land, the harvest is approx. 25% lower than the actual potential. It must however be remembered that Kamaraj could afford this because he is a service-holder also and depends on his salary as his primary source of income; but those who badly depend on the crops grow crops in maximum possible area despite a fear of the attack by the Bucks.

Similarly, in Ramanda village, villagers are primarily agriculturists and used to grow, besides paddy, a number of other crops like Groundnut and *Muga*. However, after repeated loss suffered due to their crops being eaten by the Bucks, they have almost stopped growing Groundnut and *Muga* (Green gram).The result is that whereas previously they were self-sufficient in *Muga* and vegetable oil production (from Groundnut) for domestic consumption, now they have to purchase both these items from the market. And they can afford this (despite considerable financial loss) because many of their family members work in Surat(Gujurat) and this is how the financial burden is reduced.

* For ex., Rs.10000/- was reportedly spent for this purpose sometime during 1990s (1994-95 ?) vide letter(No.3486/4F) of the DFO, dated 9-6-1997.

[†] However, the Bucks are not fond of Brinjal.

Scared of the Bucks?

“We provided protection to these Bucks when they were very few in number. But now we repent for that,” said a resident of Ramanda referring to the increased agricultural loss accrued to the growing population of Black Bucks. Had the animal not been regarded as sacred, the villagers would not have tolerated them to such an extent.

The alternative is to grow cash crops like Sugar cane, but there is dearth of water for such type of cultivation. Keeping their grievances in view, the authorities and politicians assured them many things at various times most of which have remained only in vein. For ex., a CM assured them that fencing would be provided to keep the crops out of the reach of Bucks, but nothing of that sort happened. The Baghua irrigation canal is still incomplete.

THREATS TO THE BLACK BUCK POPULATION:

The Buck population would have been much higher had their poaching been stopped completely. Because, there have been around 100 Bucks killed by the poachers during the past one or two decades, as estimated by P. Venkata Rao Dora. There is a good all weather road from Aska towards Polosora and Buguda a part of which runs across the Buck habitat and that too, without any village in its immediate proximity. Needless to say, the poachers take advantage of this road because killing a Buck there is almost out of risk. It is also alleged that some villages/individuals are in nexus with the poachers.

Besides poachers, wild animals like wild dogs sometimes come from the adjoining RFs and hunt the Bucks. Particularly, the young ones are easy prey for them.

However, poaching is the major threat. The Buck meat is said to be delicious and the horns & hides are hurriedly sold (in fear of a seizure) reportedly at significantly lower rates. There are also reports of selling of the little Bucks by some villagers to the interested persons who want to nourish them as their pet. However, experience of the local people suggests that it is very difficult to keep these animals in captivity, particularly if it is an adult male. During the mating season, the adult ones would hardly tolerate any attempt to confine them in chains.

The story of Buddhi

Buddhi is a semi-domesticated female buck of Pandiathar. She was brought from the field when young and her caretaker took her to his working place outside Pandiathar, but in fear of attack by the stray dogs, she was returned back to Pandiathar where she wanders here & there at her own will and no body keeps her in captivity.

Although she goes to the fields for grazing, the village is her home and she even accepts, besides rice, junk foods like *Pakoda*. Somebody of the village caused an injury to her leg probably because she ate up his crops, but the villagers, who failed to identify this man, called up a veterinary doctor and Buddhi is now normal.

No forest protection activity has been reported from the protecting villages of our concern. It is true that the area (Buck habitat) is almost devoid of forest growth, but at the same time it is also true that there was some forest growth scattered here and there which could have been protected.

At Ramanda, we came to know from the villagers that they couldn't collect timber or firewood from the nearest forest (which borders the Buck habitat) since the adjoining village protected it and the forest-protecting villagers did not allow them for any such kind of collection from the same forest.

A request to the villagers of Dasanapalli

Dasanapalli is a village situated near the Gadagada hill forest which has been denuded. At the entry point to this village, there is a small concrete structure on which a message has been written on behalf of the Range Officer, Aska. The message is translated below:

“Brothers and sisters of Dasanapalli, the great attitude with which you have involved yourselves in the protection of Black Bucks; can you pay a similar kind of attention to the Gadagada forest? Because, without doing so you would be depriving your children from enjoying the forest.”

Range Officer
Aska

Acknowledgement

- DFO, Ghumsur South
- Sri Chandramohan Bosi and Sri Kamaraj Mohanty, Office of the DFO, Ghumsur South, Bhanjanagar
- Sri Prabhakar Naik, Range Officer, Buguda
- Villagers of Ramanda, Bhetanoi and Pandiathar
- Sri Hari Jena and Sri Mala Nayak, Solamile

Our special thanks are due to Sri P. Venkata Rao Dora and Sri A. Venkata Rao Dora of Pandiathar.

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Addendum

Golia: A Shelter for the Fresh Water Turtles

Much attention has been given to the conservation and safety of marine turtles like the Olive-Ridleys, but little has been done for some of their fresh-water counterparts in Orissa who are in negligible numbers than the former, thus being practically an endangered species in the state.

Traditional Indian zoology distinguishes two major species of Tortoises, viz., the *Kurma* (large ones or the turtles) and the *Kachchapa* (*Kainchcha* or tortoise). Among these, the tortoises are found in many fresh water reservoirs and ponds of the state whereas the marine turtles are found in large numbers in the Bay of Bengal. However, the fresh water turtles are very limited in their number and distribution.

The tortoises are amphibians and some of them are quite comfortable on land. On the other hand, turtles are aquatic reptiles. There are 26 species of these creatures found in India of which *Aspideretes gangeticus* is a giant fresh water turtle found in rivers like Mahanadi and places like Satkoshia and Maneswar(Sambalpur), etc. It is this species which is seen at Golia and is known as the Indian Soft-shell Turtle.

Legend has it that labourers who carried large pieces of stone to be used in the construction of the famous Jagannath temple at Puri, later turned into turtles* and lived this reptilian life in the *Indradyumna Pokhari*† of Puri.

A few centuries ago, Dandapiti Venkata Rao Dora of Golia village (Buguda Block, Ganjam district) visited Puri. Dora, who was a very strong man, suddenly found the King's elephant behaving like a rogue and no body was able to control the elephant. Dora intervened and managed to avoid a great danger by getting hold of the tail of the animal‡. When the King wanted to reward him, he just wished to take away with him a few turtles from the Indradyumna tank. After his return to Golia, he left the turtles in the Nila§ Pokhari, a pond attached to the village temple of Lord Langaleswar. This is how Golia became the second place in Orissa after Puri to have these fresh water turtles.

At present, there are supposed to be around 300 such turtles in this pond that has an area of more than 3 acres. The villagers consider these reptiles sacred and established an intimate relationship with them. They never agreed to its killing for meat because of their religious belief(which says that the Divine had a Kurma Avatar** in the evolutionary history of creation, implying to the transitional phase between aquatic life and life on land) and traditional values and that is how the Nila Pokhari of Goila remained as a safe

* This story might be just implying to the fact that the labourers had one thing in parallel with the turtles, i.e., they carried stones with such a capacity as if their back was tough and hard like that of the turtles.

† Pokhari means pond.

‡ Thus, he is popularly known as Hatiram Dora (*Hati* means elephant). His successors still reside in the village.

§ Nila means blue. The water of this pond looks bluish.

** incarnation

haven for these creatures for more than hundred years since their arrival in the village. A few years ago, the Forest Department took certain steps consolidating the protection efforts on its part by acquiring the pond (which was on a revenue land) and erecting barricades around it. In exchange of this pond, it constructed another one at Koinondi(at the outskirts of the village) and gave it to the villagers.

Things went on smoothly and the Nila Pokhari contained a good number of turtles many of which were large enough to bite persons entering the pond and disturbing them. Some of the villagers still have marks on their body caused due to turtle bite.

About ten years ago, the pond was renovated and de-siltified. At that time the villagers confined the turtles in a safe corner and provided them food. After the renovation work was over, the turtles were free to use the pond again as their habitat; but despite the precautions taken on the part of the villagers, the turtle population is said to have suffered badly the impact of this renovation work.

The next and most important set back came towards the end of 1990s when a group of villagers (of Golia) decided to use it for their own interest. These people said that they would be opening a school for the girls and to ensure a source of income for the school, they would be using the pond for pisciculture. Needless to say, the real intention was to use this as their won source of income although fishing in this pond was not permitted by the Forest Department. It is said that the annual income from this illegal project was around Rs.50000/- and this money was utilised only by the concerned persons who earned it in the name of the school. However, the turtles became victim of this illegal fishing because they were being thrown out carelessly when fishes were taken away from the nets. As such, on the morning of 22nd March, 2002 more than 28 turtles were found dead by the villagers. Disappointed greatly, the villagers informed the Forest Department about the incident. Although, the Department was not prompt enough to take any concrete step immediately, it threatened to take action against the persons involved in illegal fishing after which the concerned individuals discontinued fishing in the pond (and the proposed school-project was also withdrawn).

However, the agony of the turtles is still not over. Golia is a big village having a large number of cattle & buffalo populations. Unlike the bullock, the buffaloes need more care so far their bathing is concerned because they require to be bathed twice daily. The buffalo population is supposed to be more than 1500 and the village having only a limited resource of ponds for their bathing, some people use the Nila Pokhari for this purpose. It is said that approx. 200 buffaloes depend on this pond. This has created a great menace over the years by regularly disturbing the turtles and also,

*Population statistics of Goila
(as per 1991 census)*

General: 3253
Scheduled caste: 598
Scheduled tribe: 58
OBC: Nil
Total: 3909

Cattle population: 4229

by polluting the water of the pond. Thus, while the water of Nila Pokhari is not used for drinking purpose, the turtle population seems to have been affected*.

In fact, some of the villagers estimate that the abundance of turtles in this pond has been reduced by more than 75% over the years. It may be noted here that the fencing provided by the Forest Department is not in a condition, thanks to the villagers themselves and also to the quality of the work done by the Department, to provide adequate protection to the turtles.

The Department reportedly tried to take away some of the turtles to a more safer place like Nandan Kanan, but the villagers damaged the baskets brought by the Department for this purpose saying that transferring any turtle from the Nila Pokhari would be unethical. Their argument is that the turtles were originally brought to the village as a *Dana* (free & permanent religious grant) and since any Dana property can not just be transferred, hence the turtles can not be taken away from there. They claim that some people had tried to take one or two turtles to some other ponds outside Goila, but the turtles came back to the Nila Pokhari. The common belief is that if anybody illegally (or rather unethically) transfers or accepts such a Dana property, there will be no successor of him.

Golia presents an interesting case study of the success & failure of the community protection of wild life. It is clear that neither the villagers nor the Forest Department have been successful in the recent years to protect a heritage site created by some past generations and it is high time that some effective measure is taken in the interest of the turtles.

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- Sri Prabhakar Nayak, Range Officer, Buguda

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* the buffalos might have damaged turtle eggs.