Birding tourism at Kaziranga National Park, India – ecotourism contributing to conservation

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OUTLINES OF THE PRESENTATION

- INTRODUCTION – Eastern Himalayas and Kaziranga National Park
- Avifauna of Kaziranga National Park
- Agoratoli Eco Tourism Initiative
- Birding Tourism through Community Participation
- Focus and Future Plans of Agoratoli Eco Tourism Initiative
- Conclusion

Wildlife Tourism Australia Workshop
02-06 October 2013 Darwin
**The Eastern Himalayas (Indo-Burma Hotspot, Myers et al., 2000):**

- The Sikkim Himalaya
- Eastern Nepal
- Bhutan
- North-east India
- Some parts of China and Myanmar

**High Degree of Endemism**

**Eastern Himalaya**

**Major Forest Types:**
- Tropical Wet Evergreen & Semi-Evergreen
- Tropical Moist Deciduous
- Sub-tropical Broad-leaved Hill
- Temperate, Alpine
- Savanna type of grassland
- Littoral/Swamp forest

*Champion & Seth 1968*
KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK & TIGER RESERVE

Geographic coordinates: 26°35'–26°45'N and 93°05'–93°40'E
Total area: 430 km² (national park)
Climate: subtropical monsoon
Annual rainfall: 1500 and 2500 mm (May–August) > 2300 mm
Average temperature: 5°C to 35°C
Relative humidity: 60% - 90%
Altitude: 410 to 810 meters above sea level

2006
Kaziranga Tiger Project:
Total Area: 807 sq. km.
Core Area: 378 sq. km
Buffer Area: 429 sq. km
UNESCO World Heritage Site (1985)

Conservation history > 80 yrs.

**Big Five !!**

- **Indian Rhinoceros**
  *Rhinoceros unicornis*
- **Asian Elephant**
  *Elephas maximus*
- **Bengal Tiger**
  *Panthera tigris*
- **Asiatic Water Buffalo**
  *Bubalus bubalis*
- **Eastern Swamp Deer**
  *Cervus duvaucelii ranjitsinhi*

KNP is located on the floodplain of the Brahmaputra river – alluvial rich soil - annual flooding – 50-70% of the park area gets submerged under flood waters during monsoon

Map source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaziranga_National_Park
Eastern Swamp Deer
*Cervus duvauceli ranjitsinhi*

Indian Rhinoceros
*Rhinoceros unicornis*

Bengal Tiger
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Asian Elephant
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Photos: kbarua & bbarua – November 2012
UNIQUE ECOSYSTEM – DIVERSE RANGE OF HABITATS/VEGETATION TYPES

(1) Eastern wet alluvial grasslands
(2) Alluvial savanna woodlands
(3) Tropical deciduous forest
(4) Assam alluvial plains semi-evergreen forest
(5) Swamp areas – wetlands – ‘Beels’
(Champion and Seth 1968).

Wetlands & grasslands form a significant part of the park’s area (Total area)
Wetlands - 7%, (191 fresh water lakes and 45 ponds in marshy areas.
Grasslands - > 65% (tall grass 65%; short grass/marshes 5%),
Woodlands - 29%
Sand cover 7%,

(Kushwaha 1997)

Wet savanna grasslands cover nearly 65-70% of the park area.
SCENARIO

- No villages inside the park – human settlements (150 villages) & tea plantations surrounding the park

- Illegal encroachments outside the park – poor subsistence farmers – poverty driven to fish & hunt inside the park

- Poaching – rhino horn is a big problem & challenge to the wildlife department
Avifauna of Kaziranga National Park

KNP location -> intersection of Australasian & Indo-Asian flyways (migratory routes -> ≥500 sp. mark

Birdlife International has identified Kaziranga National Park as an Important Bird Area (IBA) for conservation of avifaunal sp.

- Several bird sp. found only in Northeast India & some localised to the grasslands & woodlands inside the park
- Migratory birds coming to KNP during winter from as far as Siberia

25 globally threatened and 21 near threatened species
Avifauna of Kaziranga

Grey-Headed Fish Eagle
*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*

Slender-billed vulture
*Gyps tenuirostris*

Oriental Pied Hornbill
*Anthracoceros albirostris*

Palla’s Fish Eagle
*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

Eastern Imperial Eagle
*Aquila heliaca*

Crested Serpent Eagle
*Spilornis cheela*

Birds’ photos courtesy: Bhaskar Barua

GLOBALLY THREATENED
Agoratoli Ecotourism Camp

Interactive Tourism and Community Participation in Tourism Activities

Model -< way of life of traditional Assamese community
Birding Tourism through Community Participation

- Birding & wildlife training for local youths
  - Spotting, Identification, knowledge on habitats & protection of birds, English learning
  - Double up as local guides & Jeep safari drivers

- Generate awareness on conservation and love for animals
- Unofficial voluntary wardens of the park

Agoratoli Ecotourism camp – Community participation in responsible tourism & conservation
Agoratoli Ecotourism camp – promoting birding tourism

Birding Photo Exhibition
Held on 23rd January 2013

Initially planned as a 1 day event for international tour operators but turned out to be a week-long event for the local people!!

156 species of birds on display!!
Upcoming Agenda

- Developing the website: assambirds.com
  - Checklist of all recorded species in various places with photographs as well as information regarding various birding itineraries.

- Promote responsible and community-based eco tourism
  - Nurture local culture – art, handicrafts, monuments
  - Visitors get an enriched tourism experience – unstructured spontaneous interaction with locals
  - Visitors build pride and confidence amongst local communities

- Tourism is in harmony with priorities of local communities
  - Involve local people in planning, decision making & implementation of tourism development activities
Ecotourism to Conservation – Kaziranga National Park is a model example

Engaging local communities, providing employment, and collaborating with local government, have modeled the value of effective conservation for the past 25 years.

Agoratoli Ecotourism Initiative

Conduct market research and identify places and activities of touristic interest e.g. local music, dance, cuisine, arts and craft, folk based festivals and events and use them in a sustainable manner for tourism development.
Thank you for your attention

Photos: kbarua — November 2012
References:


Visit: www.agoratoliresort.com