

Multi-Disciplinary Conservation at the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum 2016

8th- 9th November, 2016

Traditionally Conservation Conferences are fairly uniform affairs. The attendees are mostly experts and agencies working in conservation. This year the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum sought to challenge this norm. With the conviction, that in order to increase success of conservation methods, we must expand the group of stakeholders at such conferences. The Forum saw participation of experts from industry, students, educators, government and non profit agencies from over 13 countries.

This multi-disciplinary group came together over two days, November 8th& 9th, 2016 to discuss a broad swathe of issues ranging from focused discussions on the plight of Asian Elephants in the wild and in captivity leading to the announcement of the Asian Elephant Captive Breeding Knowledge Centre at the College of Veterinary Sciences, Assam.

Balipara Foundation's, Robin Eastment set the cat among the pigeons by questioning the traditional concepts of conservation, which are animal centric and questioned their efficacy against the creation of more inclusive conservation models, which offer tangible alternatives to those who dwell within or around forests and protected areas.

Astute moderators like Nicholas Claxton, CEO WoW Media, BittuSahgal, Editor, Sanctuary Asia, Anish Andheria, President, WCT and Raman Srinivasan, TCS took the lead from this and prompted incisive discussions across a wide variety of subjects including the Future of Asian Elephants, Creation of more inclusive conservation models, creation and adherence of policy and laws and security in the age of technology in conservation. The audience members and panellists at the Forum actively engaged each other, both on and off the dais to present their points of view and add flavour to the conversations. This led to spirited discussions presenting different perspectives possibly leading to radical collaborations and new and alternate methods of thinking on major issues.

Moderated by Nicholas Claxton, the panel Asian Elephants – Are we Succeeding provoked thoughts on how National level policy framework is necessary to deal with HEC and how elephant corridors



Image 1. Mr. R. Barthakur announcing the creation of the Asian Elephant Captive Breeding Knowledge Centre at College of Vet. Sciences, Assam



Image 2. Bruce Rich tracing the roots of conservation back to the age of Ashoka &Kautilya

are an essential part of the strategy to conserve elephant and to maintain gene flow across populations and to preserve the natural home range.

The panel The Oxymoron: Conservation Imperatives Vs. Human Aspirations moderated by Bittu Sahgal addressed that no oxymoron needs to maintain balance and maintain sustainability. Aspirations of people can be taken care at the macro level: dams and at micro level: livelihood of communities. Economic gap need to be address by the government and religious foundation of nature needs to be studied. Local specificities and empowering local people is needed to make conservation actions successful. Not one is certain about what all has to be done to obtain balance between nature and human. But it's certain that high price need to be paid for damage to nature

The panel Laws of the Jungle: Policy & Governance moderated by Anish Andheria, President, WCT had an interesting discussion on the importance of Wildlife crime legal cells which are required and essential as courts are ill equipped to handle it. RTI can be an effective tool to ensure laws are implemented. There are different laws existing to protect wildlife and forest. However, the need of the hour is to give more emphasis on implementation of those laws. At the same time it is necessary to empower forest officials and provide underground training to counter insurgency.



Image 3. Speakers from the Panel- Laws of the Jungle: Policy & Governance

Further to that, the panel policing the Protectors: Technology & Security brought in the forefront some really fascinating discussions on how technology exists and if utilised in the correct manner, can be beneficial for fostering Conservation efforts.

These insightful panel discussions were complemented by innovators who presented their traditional challenging ideas for conservation. Bruce Rich helped us trace the roots of conservation through the opposing viewpoints of Ashoka and Kautilya, helping us question whether conservation is only an altruistic pursuit or one which can also be beneficial in the capitalist economy.

Dr. R. Prabhakar, Chief Architect of the India Biodiversity Portal presented his knowledge on the value of data creation and sharing to aid conservation efforts through the India Biodiversity Portal. He challenged the concept of proprietary data and argued for greater transparency and involvement in data sharing. He demonstrated the value of gathering data to evaluate and preserve our biodiversity assets.

The most unique conservation models of recent times were presented by Rajeev Goyal, Co-Founder KTK-BELT and, Lisa Mills, Univ. of Montana and Julie Stein of Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network.

KTK-BELT seeks to turn education on its head by conceptualizing an innovative method of conservation education through the learning grounds in the Koshi Tappu Kanchenjunga region in eastern Nepal. Anchored across 5 campuses in the region, the organization seeks to instil, in the local populations, a sense of pride in the rich biodiversity of their region while learning how to leverage this natural richness into sustainable skills and business models. This model could create a

fundamental shift in the way we teach conservation, value our natural assets and leverage our biodiversity.

Another fascinating concept which promotes the protection of biodiversity by more mainstream industries is Lisa Mills and Julie Stein's concept of the Elephant Friendly™ certification. This certification seeks to incentivise industries to promote business practices and infrastructure which promotes conservation and the well-being of Asian Elephants, by creating a value chain which rewards their efforts through higher returns on investment and opening new markets for business.

These new concepts by KTK-BELT and Elephant Friendly™ challenge the false dichotomy of Human Development vs. Conservation imperatives to demonstrate that both of these can not only co-exist but, in fact, be symbiotic.

The crescendo that was built during the one and a half days of discussions and presentations culminated in the Balipara Foundation Awards and honouring of Late Shri Rabindra Nath Barthakur and his principles, which has inspired many people and laid the foundation of Balipara Foundation in the year 2007.

The Balipara Foundation Awards was instituted to bring into focus conservation case studies and real life Crusaders of the Eastern Himalayan Region. Carrying forward the legacy and seeking inspiration from environmental leaders, the Balipara Foundation Awards this year honoured 12 ecological champions of the Eastern Himalayas tirelessly working to demonstrate and implement the ideals of Naturenomics™, which evangelizes the symbiotic relation between Human Activities and Natural Capital through creation of natural assets.

The Balipara Foundation Lifetime Service Award, the one for the individual of legendary proportions was presented to Dr. Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, a leading authority on Nepal's biodiversity and taxonomic classification. The foremost botanist and a hero of environmental conservation of endemic plant species in Nepal, Dr. Shrestha joins the esteemed ranks of Mr. B. M. Khaitan (India), Dasho Palijor Benji (Bhutan) and Anne Wright (Eastern Himalayas) completing a Full Circle of champions of the Eastern Himalayan region.

The evening was capped off by a unique *jugalbandi* between renowned technologist, Mr. S. Ramadorai, master flautist, Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia and acclaimed vocalist Mrs. Mala Ramadorai.

This harmonious collaboration embodied the foundation of the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum 2016

that "Real innovation happens at the edges of disciplines" leading to the resolutions and outcomes as follows:



Image 4. The Ecological Champions of the Eastern Himalayas 2016

1. **Conservation:** We need to re-define conservation to make it more tangible for all stakeholders.

Actions:

- a. Curate and document case studies of conservation of natural assets (Land, Water, Carbon)
- b. Work with eco-champions, communities, governments, NGOs and for profit agencies to develop sustainable, scalable community based conservation models moving conservation into mainstream business models
- c. Develop consistent systems and metrics to measure the social, economic and ecological impact of conservation projects
- d. Build platforms and partnerships to focus efforts on conserve of complete habitats and ecosystems

2. **Technology:** Technology will increasingly play a pivotal role in conservation

Actions:

- a. Use technology to empower those who guard nature capital
- b. Sensitize communities and enforcement officials to the use of technology both to use as a tool for conservation and, to combat poaching and trafficking
- c. Create laws to regulate the management and deployment of technology

3. **Media:** Traditional and new media can provide a powerful voice for making conservation tangible to wider audiences

Actions:

- a. Create powerful narratives to make conservation more tangible and mainstream
- b. Build partnerships to promote positive news stories and to highlight attacks on natural assets

4. **Asian Elephant Secretariat:**

Actions:

- a. Define the objective and purpose of this platform and set measurable goals to be achieved by the Elephant Secretariat Community
- b. Create Nodal Offices and appoint officers in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, North Bengal, Sikkim, Myanmar, S. China, Eastern Nepal, Thailand, USA and UK.

5. **Elephant Science:** Leverage science and research to deepen the impact of conservation efforts

Actions:

- a. Establish a Captive Breeding Knowledge Research Centre at the College of Veterinary Sciences, Assam for scientific research on Asian Elephants in Captivity

6. **Education:** Creating interactive education modules to engage generation next in learning about their natural inheritance

Actions

- a. Naturenomics™ School to partner with global universities and organizations to create certified education modules for studying practical conservation techniques
- b. Create interactive apps, games, etc. to engage “generation next” in exploring conservation and the build knowledge about natural assets

7. **Elephant Country:** Create a multi-disciplinary approach to promote conservation of Asian Elephant habitats and migration corridor by creating sustainable economic and social incentives

Actions:

- a. Elephant Insurance schemes to be created for villages in the Balipara and Udalguri regions of Assam as test markets and to be replicated across all Asian Elephant Countries
- b. Experiment with community conservation models to promote sustainable conservation by creating incentives for communities to protect their natural capital
- c. Create awareness and fundraising opportunities through Products and explore partnerships with certification agencies such as Elephant Friendly™

8. **Digital Platforms:** Explore the creation of digital platforms to facilitate and streamline conservation efforts, and promote collaboration

Actions:

- a. Expand the functionality of the Asian Elephant Secretariat to include project management and collaboration tools for agencies to collaborate on efforts to rejuvenate Asian Elephant habitats
- b. Explore creation of digital platforms for raising awareness and creating opportunities for biodiversity education such as MOOCs, knowledge bases, etc.

9. **Experiments:** We need to recognize the importance of science and prototyping to further the impact of conservation

Actions:

- a. Create a Herbarium of Eastern Himalayan flora to study and exhibit the biodiversity of the region

10. **Fundraising:** We need to explore new avenues for creating sustainable capital sources for long-term conservation efforts

Actions:

- a. Explore creation of alternative funding opportunities for conservation such as an Elephant Fund and a Green Bond and Social Impact Funds for continued conservation efforts in the Eastern Himalayas.

HIGHLIGHTS 2016

Participants & Attendees

- Over **600 invitees and guests** participated over the two days
- Participants from **13 countries** and **22 Indian States**
- Participants included scientists, botanists, nature conservators, wild life enthusiasts, ecologists, Administrators, Government and Forest Department officials

Media Visibility

- Two press conferences - pre-event conference on September 27th 2016 and one during the event

Print Media Coverage

- The event was **reported 51 times** pre, during and post the event, in leading English, Hindi and Assamese from Assam and the North East

Electronic Media

- **5 DTH channels** from the North East **covered the event and reported prime time news** Nov 8th and 9th 2016.
- Interviews with various experts **telecast on News Live**
- History Channel shared Balipara Foundation videos via their social media channels with **>39,000 views**

Newspaper Advertising

- **4 advertisement's released** in leading publications

Event collaterals

- Event Invites & Agenda
- Award Winners brochure
- On site visibility – standees, wings on stage, banners at the venues

Other visibility

- Hoardings across Assam and North East Indian States

In The Future:

The Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum 2017 will be held on November 2nd & 3rd, 2017 in Guwahati, Assam, India seeking to elevate this multi-disciplinary dialogue on conservation to new heights.