

## News From Indian States

### Arunachal Pradesh

#### The Monpas Help Conserve the Pangchen Valley

The forests of Arunachal Pradesh have a wide variety of flora and fauna. Among them are medicinal plants like rhododendrons and many endangered animals such as the Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) and the Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*).

The Monpa tribals live in the Pangchen Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. Protection of forests and wildlife has traditionally been an integral part of the Monpa tribal culture. This was proved when a group of Monpa youth caught an IFS officer and a fellow Monpa guide hunting in their forests. The Monpa guide was starved for a day and fined a hefty sum of Rupees 10,000 by his fellow tribesmen, while the IFS officer was let off with the warning that he would be reported to his superiors if he was ever caught hunting in the local forests again.

Soon after this incident a letter was drafted by the tribals and forwarded to the Tawang Deputy Commissioner (Forest) and defence officials. The letter said, "Fishing, hunting of wild and domestic animals and birds is banned in Pangchen Valley. If a villager is caught hunting, then the fine will be Rs.10,000 per head. If the hunter is an outsider then he will be penalized Rs.20,000 per head."

Deging Dorje, a local Monpa, said that in the past, their tribe had imposed stricter fines and even made culprits run several times in the forest to dissuade them from harming the forest and its wildlife again.

Recognising the value of local participation in conservation, the State Government and the Forest Department have joined hands with WWF India in Arunachal Pradesh to give the co-operation a formal shape.

According to Sejal Worah Director (Programme), WWF-India, "The government and the locals have been very positive in the initiative. The concept of community conservation is not new in North-East India. We are just helping the locals and the

government prepare a formal draft for checks and balances." Villagers too confirm that in recent times poaching in the area has declined significantly.

**Source:** Meenal Dubey, 'The tribesmen are one in protecting their forest from any threat', Mail Today, November 2007

### Apatani Traditions Revisited



The Apatani tribe lives in the Apatani valley in the lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Apatanis are well known for their traditional rice and fish cultivation, their rich agro-biodiversity and the associated traditional knowledge that supports this agro-ecosystem.

The Apatanis have taboos, customs and a belief system that protect the environment as well as their socio-cultural identity and livelihoods. Hunting of animals and using many of the forest products are strictly prohibited during major rituals and ceremonies. A number of flora and fauna species are considered sacred and are protected. Among them are: bamboo, castanopsis and the ficus. They grow and protect reeds like the *Phragmites karka* and chameleon plant (*Houttuynia cordata*) along the river banks. The roots of these reeds check soil erosion. *Phragmites* is only harvested for traditional mat making and indigenous salt preparation, while the chameleon plant is used for its medicinal properties as well as a vegetable. The local traditional knowledge encompasses an understanding of local crop-soil interactions, ethno-pedology, and soil nutrient and water conservation.