

# CAT NEWS

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# Anatolian Leopard on the Brink

Anatolian leopards *Panthera pardus tulliana* may still survive in Turkey, but the total population is probably insufficient to breed, writes Aydin Akin from Cankaya.

Akin says that he has an official letter stating that leopard still exist in Dilek (Priene) National Park, southwest of the town of Aydin in western Turkey, in the area of the Dilek Peninsula mentioned in CAT NEWS 10 (Jan. 1989). But he challenges the report that 8-10 leopards exist in the Hakkari mountains in eastern Turkey. He says that there have been no reports of tigers or leopards in the area since 1971, when a tiger *Panthera tigris virgata* was shot. The last records of leopard were in 1966 in Semdinli and the Ozalpi region.

Reviewing the status of the leopard in Turkey, Akin says that they were quite common in southwestern Anatolia at the beginning of the century and also existed in the Hakkari and Siirt region. They declined sharply. One famous hunter shot 15 leopards. Some of the last ones shot were in the Aege region at Kusadasi in 1956 and Milas in 1964, and at Beypazari, west of Ankara in 1974. Reports since then by villagers and shepherds,

which are common from the Priene National Park and Düzlercami region, were likely to involve lynx, which are very spotted in the area. In a specific case a shot "leopard" was found to be a lynx.

Mr Jeffrey Short has sent a copy of a Turkish newspaper report in January 1989 with a photo of a leopard shot near Beypazari. The translation says people were astonished to see the "horrible panther" for the first time in their life. One of the hunters involved said that the animal had attacked a woman and had nearly torn her arms off when he and his friends reached the scene. They collected their rifles and tracked the leopard for 12 hours before cornering it. The hunter said that at first they were so afraid, never having seen such an animal, that some of the party could not open fire, but they pulled themselves together and killed it with a "rain of bullets".

A biologist, Tansu Gurpinar, was quoted as saying that 10 leopard lived on the West Blacksea Coast Mountains in northern Turkey and the Toros Mountains in the south in the Mediterranean coast region.

## Major Indian Wildlife Reserve Threatened

Armed gangs have invaded the Manas Tiger Reserve, killing more than a dozen forest guards, burning and looting, and letting in poachers of wildlife and timber. They are members of an extremist faction of the Bodo Students' Union and claim that the area belonged to the Bodo people and was taken from them during British rule of India.

Manas, a World Heritage Site bordering Bhutan at the foot of the eastern Himalayas, is considered the richest in India in its varied fauna and flora. It is the home of 19 endangered mammals, among them the pygmy hog, now thought to survive nowhere else.

The gangs entered the reserve in February and have established themselves after driving out forest staff. Over 1,000 logs of valuable trees cut by timber poachers were seized by the authorities in surrounding towns and villages within weeks of the invasion. Slaughter of deer and other wildlife is reported. Rhino poachers are known to have entered the reserve, which holds the third largest surviving population of the great one-horned rhinoceros (about 80), after Kaziranga (1,000) and Nepal's Chitwan (350).

Indian conservationists believe that only the army or armed police can expel the intruders. But the monsoon has now broken, making most of the area inaccessible until November. By then, national elections will be imminent, which may handicap strong action. There are fears that if the invaders are not expelled it may be a precedent for the invasion of other wildlife reserves. Attempts in the past to seize reserves elsewhere have been put down by force.

Manas tiger reserve is one of the most important protected areas in Asia because of its large area (2,837 km<sup>2</sup> plus 443 km<sup>2</sup> of the adjoining Bhutan Manas sanctuary) and its range of threatened species, including 19 mammals listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. They are tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, golden cat, fishing cat, leopard cat, marbled cat, binturong, wild dog, sloth bear, elephant, rhinoceros, wild buf-

falo, capped langur, golden langur, swamp deer, pygmy hog, pangolin and hispid hare. Over 300 species of birds include the endangered Bengal florican, one of the bustard family.

Manas is probably the last sanctuary for the pygmy hog, smallest of the wild boars, which is only one foot high and two feet long, and is dependent on grasslands which have been eradicated elsewhere. It was rediscovered in 1971, at the same time as the hispid hare, after both had been thought extinct for 10 years. It is also of critical importance for the wild buffalo, since the population has not been seriously contaminated by domestic buffaloes, as have the few survivors elsewhere.

Manas is the second largest of the 17 Indian tiger reserves and has the second highest tiger population (123 in the 1984 census). It is an important part of an elephant corridor along the foot of the Himalayas.

The vegetation of Manas includes tropical semi-evergreen, moist and dry deciduous forests and alluvial grasslands. Many species of orchids are known.

The international importance of Manas was recognized by Unesco in 1986 when it accepted the Indian Government's nomination of the reserve as a World Heritage Site. The government stopped a project to build a massive hydro-electric and flood-control project on the Manas River which would have virtually destroyed the Bhutan Manas sanctuary and irreparably damaged the core of the Indian tiger reserve.

An official evaluation of the dangers of the dam project applies today: "In a brief period of a decade or so the Manas ecosystem will be reduced to shambles. This most rare floral and faunal area, with its rich and diverse genetic pool is thus sure to be ruined."

Assam State in northeast India has had a turbulent history in recent years with the State Government backing agitation against the Central Government for not stopping large-scale immigration by Bengalis, Bangladeshis and others to the detriment of the Assamese people, and other groups rebelling against Assamese domination and alleged discrimination.