

INDIA: Meet The Selfless Men Working 24x7 To Save Wild Animals From Assam Floods

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The Assam floods have been devastating, not just for the over 55 lakh people who have been affected, but to a large population of wildlife including the endangered one-horned Indian Rhinos, tigers, elephants, and deer.

Amid all the devastation and damage caused by the deluge, it was heartwarming to see a group of people working round the clock to help the hundreds of wild animals who couldn't fend for themselves against the gushing waters.

The Kaziranga National Park (KNP) which is home to the largest population of the one-horned Rhino was 90 per cent submerged in Assam floods, resulting in dozens of animals including Rhinos drowning while others were displaced, leaving them vulnerable to poachers.

But a group of men from the Center For Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) a joint initiative by the Wildlife Trust of India, an NGO, and the Assam Forest Department have been doing their best to keep the animals safe and take care of those injured or got separated from their groups due to the flood.

"We have around 15 people from the Wildlife Trust of India and other from the Assam Forest Department who are working round the clock here. Whenever there is a need we dispatch a team there depending on the what animal it is and its condition," Dr. Rathin Barman, a wildlife biologist by training, and the Head of CWRC told Indiatimes.

This is the same group, which was seen in the viral video that showed the dramatic rescue of a Rhino cub which got separated from its mother due to the floods.

"Four people from our group were involved in that particular operation, three from the WTI and one from the Forest Department. The Rhino cub is currently at our CWRC and is being taken care of by experts," Dr. Barman said.

The CWRC has been operating in Kaziranga National Park for the past 19 years, care of injured and rescued animals.

"We get the information about injured or stranded animals from the villagers or those in the frontlines. And depending on the situation we will dispatch a team, either by land or boat whichever is required to the spot. Once we reach there

our veterinarians will decide on the future course of action. If it is a minor injury, it will be treated right there and release the animal. If it is a major injury, we will shift the animal to our rescue center and keep it there until it is fully recovered. Right now we have around 10 animals including two Rhino cubs at the center," Dr. Barman explained.

He also said that it was the flash floods that are destroying Kaziranga and not the annual monsoon.

"Kaziranga, being a floodplain needs the annual monsoon and flooding. That is part of the ecology and the animals are used to it. But what is causing the massive flooding there are the flash floods and the construction of dams upstream which is then opened after it becomes full. It forces the animals out of their natural habitat and into the villages and to the highway. This year the situation was particularly bad even outside the national park," Dr. Barman said.

With the floodwaters slowly beginning to recede, the full extent of the damage caused to the wildlife will only emerge in the coming days. Dr. Barman, however, said the death toll this year has been significantly lower than from the previous years.

"Until Friday, we have registered around 60-70 animals this year. That is not a big number comparing to the past few years, where the death toll was much higher. That is because for the past few years we had been working with people from the neighboring villages to educate them to give the animals a right to passage to go to the higher lands. And that has started showing results. Just this year we had a case where a tiger was spotted on a rooftop while the people were still inside. Instead of distracting it and trying to chase it away, the tiger was let alone and by the evening it left on its own, without causing any harm to anyone," Dr. Barman said.

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