

NOMINATION TO THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Name: KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK

Identification No: 337

Date received by WH Secretariat: 18.4.84

Contracting State Party having submitted the nomination of the property in accordance with the Convention: INDIA

Summary prepared by IUCN (March 1985) based on the original nomination submitted by India. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION: State of Assam in the northeast of India on the south bank of the Brahmaputra River. Burma monsoon forest biogeographical province.

2. JURIDICAL DATA:

The area has been a national park of 42,996 ha since 1974 and is administered by the State Government of Assam Forest Department under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. The area was first established as a Reserve Forest in 1908, a Game Sanctuary in 1916, and a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1950.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

Kaziranga's setting is on the low-lying (40-80m) flood plains of the Brahmaputra River system, characterised by 'jheels' - flat, swampy ground with broad shallow pools fringed with reeds. The river Bhangra flows through the park in an east-west direction. The soils are chiefly of alluvials derived from the river system. The climate is moderate, with a mean annual rainfall of 2500mm falling mainly during the rainy season (May-October). Temperatures range from 10°C-35°C.

The vegetation is mainly of 3 types: (1) wet alluvial grasslands (2) Tropical semi-evergreen forests and (3) Tropical wet evergreen forests. The grasslands occupy nearly two thirds of the park area.

This park is internationally recognized for the large size of the remnant Indian rhino Rhinoceros unicornis population which was 1195 in 1984, some 3/4 of the total world population (the numbers in 1900 had declined to only 12). Other mammals include tiger, elephant, leopard, sloth bear, wild buffalo, gaur, sambar, swamp deer, muntjac, hog deer, wild pig, capped langur, gibbon, and otter. There is a pelican rookery (grey pelican) near Kaziranga village, and the park's wetlands are used by many thousands of migratory birds. The gangetic dolphin is also found in some of the closed oxbow lakes.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION:

The park has a long history of protection reflected in the dramatic recovery of the rhino population. A management plan for the park exists and basic equipment and manpower is provided by the State Government. Kaziranga is a popular tourist destination and a rest house is available.

The park is bordered on three sides by human settlement and tea plantations and is only afforded a buffer on the north boundary by the Brahmaputra River. Rhino poaching is a continuous problem with 37 illegally killed in 1983.

A buffer zone to the south in the Mikir Hills and Karbi Plateau has been proposed to allow some protection during the monsoon season when wildlife move outside the park during floods.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

The Kaziranga National Park, as presented by the Government of India, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

a) Cultural property -- not applicable

b) Natural property

(iv) Habitats of rare and endangered species. The park is the world's primary area for protection of the Indian rhino.

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1. DOCUMENTATION:

- (i) Nomination form
- (ii) IUCN Data Sheets
- (iii) Consultations: John MacKinnon, William Oliver, Peter Jackson, Claude Martin, India Government Officials
- (iv) Literature Consulted: India Today, 31 March 1984; WWF-India Newsletter 52, 1985

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Within the Burma Monsoon Forest Biogeographical Province there are 18 other established protected areas in India and Bangladesh. Kaziranga is the only one of these with national park status and many are too small to provide long term viable conservation. One exception is the Namdapha Wildlife Sanctuary (190,782 ha), a proposed Biosphere Reserve site in the neighbouring State of Arunachal Pradesh. This reserve has only a small portion of its area with similar features and has no Indian rhinos. In West Bengal, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary offers similar attractions including some rhinos (14) but it is only one-quarter the size and has less legal protection than Kaziranga.

Compared to the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, Kaziranga is quite different, being removed from the hill forests of Bhutan and located on the southern flood plain of the Brahmaputra River. It is also distinctive from Royal Chitwan National Park in this regard, although Royal Chitwan has the second-highest population of Indian rhino.

3. INTEGRITY

Because its perimeter on three sides is adjacent to human settlement, protection of Kaziranga from illegal incursions of poachers and herdsmen has been a difficult task. The introduction of rinderpest and domestic buffalo have had negative effects on buffalo, including hybridization of the remaining wild stock.

Poaching of rhino has been a serious problem (particularly during the recent period of civil unrest) but the overall population levels are steady or rising.

Another factor in the management of Kaziranga is the seasonal inundation of floodwaters which causes many animals to migrate outside the park where they are susceptible to hunting and reprisal for crop damage.

The presence of the busy national highway No. 37 along the southern border of Kaziranga has brought increased settlement which disturb traditional wildlife migration routes. A proposal for a railway line along this corridor is also being considered by the Government.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The provision of a corridor and buffer zone to the south of the park would greatly add to the overall integrity of Kaziranga.

5. EVALUATION

Although Kaziranga has a range of natural values and provides habitat for a number of threatened species and migratory birds, these are secondary to its major importance as the world's major stronghold of the Indian rhino. For this main reason, it meets criteria (iv) of the Convention. The Brahmaputra River's fluctuations result in spectacular examples of riverine and fluvial processes and the site thus also qualifies under criteria (ii). Concerns over the integrity of the park are, at present, minor but the situation should be monitored as the park represents one of the last unmodified natural areas of this region of India.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Kaziranga National Park should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Committee may wish to recommend that the Assam State Government be encouraged to provide the legal basis for a buffer zone to the south to protect the wet season habitat and to undertake impact studies in connection with the proposed railway along the southern boundary of the park.