

## A SHORT NOTE ON WILD ASS SANCTUARY

### INTRODUCTION :

Little Rann of Kachchh. a Flat, Salt-Cracked vast barren desert is an unusual and fascinating wilderness with it's unique desert wild life. Wild-Ass sanctuary was established to protect the Ghur-Khar . The Indian Wild Ass. (*Equus Hemionus khur*) . Sanctuary covers entire Little Rann of Kachchh and a ring of revenue waste lands and forest lands on it's boarder. Little rann connects the gulf of Kachchh in South-West and separates Kachchh, Kathiawar and Gujarat proper.

Little Rann of Kachchh including island(BETS) etc. with an area of 3570 Sq.km. and Govt. waste lands of boarder villages of Dist: Surendranagar, Rajkot, Kachchh, Bahaskantha and Mehsana with an area of 1270 Sq.kms. were declared as sanctuary vide notification No. GM/KH/WLP/1972/79736-P Dt. 12-1-73 12-1-73 of Agri. forest and Co-operation Deptt. of Gujarat. 113 Sq.km. Area of Banaskantha Dist. was further added vide notification No. GKH/WLP/1976-89899-P Dt. 13-1-78 to make the total area of Sanctuary to 4953 Sq.kms.

Wild Asses were hunted often in the past . Babur- the Mughal Emperor describes one such hunt in May-1507 in his Autobiography. But these Animals escaped massive assault becuse of their unattractive trophies and *tasteless* meat. Habit at destruction mainly during after Independence era is the major factor limiting the population of wild Asses. An account showing Wild-Ass. Population estimates is summerised in the following table.

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Wild Ass estimates from the Year 1940 to 1990

Year 1.	ENUMERATOR 2.	METHOD USED 3.	NO. OF WILD ASSES 4.
1946	Dr. Salim Ali.	Estimate	5000
1956	Wynter Blyth	Estimate	4000
1962	E.P. Gee.	Estimate	870
1967	Forest Deptt. & M.S. Dhrangadhra Dharmakumar Sinhji	Aerial Survey	360
1976	Forest Deptt.	Direct Total Count.	720
1983	Forest Deptt.	Direct Total Count.	1989
1990	Forest Deptt.	Direct Total Count.	2072

E C O L O G Y :

Little Rann was formed through siltation of marine estuary. During monsoon the discharge of river waters together with sea water blowup due to south west monsoon winds, rann becomes a knee-deep mini-sea. Excepting some portion, rann dries up by October-November leaving flat. Salt- impragnated surface to provide " Super highway" for vehicles.

Wild Asses forage upon " Bets" elevated islands in the Rann and on the shores of Rann. Salt- impragnated rann is sterile and devoid of any vegetation. The sparse vegetation of bets consists law- scattered trees like salvadora persica, salvadora oleoides, prosopis spicegera, cordia gharaf, butia monosperma and of course prosopis juliflora- the exotic. There are grassess like zinzvo (*Dicanthium anuatum*) and Dhrokhad (*Cynodon dactylon*) on better soils. Khariya (*Sporobolus Indicus*) Dabhdo (*Erogrostis Spp.*) Kadvano (

(*Aelurops villosus*) Lampdo (*Aristida hystricula*) are found on soil with medium salinity. In soil with heavy salinity we find Thegdo (*Cyperus cappillaris*) Dorli (*Aelurops* Spp.) and ultimately the morads (*sueda* spp and *Heloxylon* spp.) which is a fodder base of wild asses in pinh<sup>c</sup> period. Vegetations of bets & fringe are more or less similar exapting tree vegetation. There are extensive desert boarder plantations of propois *juliflora* on fringe.

Apart from wild asses, there are nilgai, (chinkara blackbuck wild boar, wolf, Jackal, fox, hares and wild cats in and around the rann. After deserting the popular flamingo city. in great Rann , flamingoes are observed breeding in little rann. Endangered species like great Indian Bustard, desert cat and houbara bustards have their dwellinges in some of bets. Sun loving lizzards like spiny-tailed lizzards and other reptiles are good in numbers in sanctuary.

#### Constraints in management of sanctuary

- (1) Approx. one lakh cattle of surrounding 107 villages coupled by an equal numbers of sheeps and goats during monsoon trample the sandy soil causing grazing pressure on the ecosystem of the shore.
- (2) Consequent crop raiding by wild asses due to severe grazing compitition.
- (3) Little Rann produces 25% of the Indian salt i.e. 2.5 Million tons by angaging approx 25000 workers, and approx 1500 trucks in season. It causes pressure on delicate fringe habitat.

- (4) Fuel wood cutting for charcoal burning leaves the sandy soil exposed to wind and salinity.
- (5) Severe grazing competition with cattle causes migration of Wild Asses towards mainland- farther from the sanctuary.
- (6) There is a peril of epidemics as common pasture is shared by cattle, domestic equines and wild asses.
- (7) Poaching of wild asses is almost non-existent now a days . But it is found in antelopes like chinkara and blackbucks in interior areas to some extent.

Wild life Management in sanctuary :-

Protection :

Sanctuary has created an environment of protection in scheduled wild animals by enforcing acts and mobilising the protective armed staff.

- One- Sanctuary Superintendent ( A.C.F.)
- Four- Sanctuary Game Warden ( R.F.O.)
- Ten- Asstt. Game Wardens ( Forester)
- Sixteen - Forest Guards.

Though the present protective measures are effective in protecting the wild ass one prime spp. The deptt. have planned to improve present protection system. More staff with improved communication facilities with more vehicles, motorboats, wire<sup>less</sup> network, walkie - talkie sets, watch towers etc. are under active consideration of the Government. The core area covering most of the betis is under the consideration

of being declared as national park. Settlement proceedings under wild life protection Act-1972 have been geared up as the sanctuary is so far primarily notified under section 18 of the act.

Habitat improvement measures :

Extensive desert boarder plantations by normal divisions on fringe area has certainly reclaimed the poor desert soil and allowed good i under growth of grasses. Pods of prosopis are a good source of protein for wild asses during pinch period prosopis has it's disadvantageous effects too. To over come the prosopis invasion in good fertile grass bearing areas, they are tamed by pruning and selective removal. Pasture land improvement programmes are taken up regularly by raising local grass and planting local fodder trees like piloo and prosopis spici~~geru~~.

Water facilities :

By the end of December the water disappears in sanctuary areas . Water troughs have been provided to almost every hard of wild asses in fringe and bet habitats. Water is regularly supplied in those water troughs in six dry months i.e. from January to June by tankers. There are around fifty water tanks in the sanctuary are managed <sup>by</sup> the the sanctuary Regular maintainance is done by dasilting the water tanks. New water tanks are also constructed every year to capture the maximum rain water.

An improved water system is under active considration as sardar sarovar Narmada Project has ensured to provide water facility.

Research and monitoring :-

Wild life institute of India in co-ordination of G-wyrat Geyarat forest deptt. has taken up research on behaviour, home range, movement pattern and habitat <sup>Use</sup> ~~are~~ of wild ass. They are also working to get a correct assesment of the corp damage by wild ass and habitat damage by salt farming which are two major problems of the sanctuary .

Awareness programme :

Like most of the sancturies and national park, this sanctuary also needs people awareness programme. As a part of the programme, nature education camps are held by the deptt. to impart nature education to the students of surrounding villages. Since 1986, 2205 trainees have gone through the nature education camps. Audio-vismal ~~an~~ and other publiaty material is used to ancourage awareness programme.