

of a tiger dispersing and settling far from its natal area on the Russian border provides support for the current plan to establish a North-east China/Russian Tiger Landscape.

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Conserving large mammals in partnership with private landowners in Assam, north-east India

Conservationists are looking increasingly at lands outside protected areas to serve as secondary habitat or dispersal conduits for threatened species. In India, where protected areas are generally small, private landholdings can enhance the viability of wildlife populations. Research carried out by the Wildlife Conservation Society, India Program (WCS India) in north-east India has suggested that for conflict-prone species such as the Asian elephant, private land does not serve as primary habitat but could facilitate connectivity. Building upon this finding, WCS India has initiated a connectivity project—predominantly in tea plantations, paddy fields and areas of human habitation—between Kaziranga National Park and the hills of Karbi Anglong, Assam. The landscape is a unique floodplain ecosystem wherein animals move seasonally between inundated floodplains of Kaziranga and the higher reaches of Karbi Anglong.

In recognition of the potential conservation value of tea plantations, WCS India and Balipara Tract and Frontier Foundation have been working with six plantations, two of which are managed by Amalgamated Plantations Private Ltd, to foster their role as wildlife movement routes. Amalgamated Plantations Private Ltd Foundation, keen to form a model for conservation in tea plantations through adoption of wildlife-friendly management practices, supports the collaborative project initiated by WCS India and Balipara Tract and Frontier Foundation. Amalgamated Plantations Private Ltd Foundation has also tentatively set aside land in plantations between Kaziranga and Karbi Anglong for wildlife habitat and movement.

WCS India is conducting research to assess the conservation value of these lands for mammals. Initial surveys, during January–April 2015, with support from the Department of Science and Technology (Government of India), WCS New York and the Amalgamated Plantations Private Ltd Foundation, indicate that multiple species, including

barking deer, leopards and elephants, use tea plantations. Meetings have been held with managers of all six plantations, and further investigations are underway to identify management practices that could sustain or enhance wildlife movement through tea plantations. Through these efforts, organizations involved in this programme aim to integrate scientific findings into decision-making in a manner that serves both wildlife conservation and human livelihood needs.

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Media workshops to improve reporting of human–wildlife interactions

Interactions between people and wildlife are a common occurrence in many parts of India and much of South Asia. Large mammals that frequent human-inhabited areas are typically depicted in the media as fearsome and dangerous, increasing fear of wild animals and potentially instigating negative attitudes towards wildlife. Heightened antagonism towards wildlife also pressurizes park managers to take action when wildlife shares space with people. One common intervention is translocation of so-called problem leopards, which, as research conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society, India Program (WCS India) has shown, can actually increase conflict with people near release sites.

In April 2015 WCS India held collaborative workshops to increase the sensitivity of media personnel in reporting human–wildlife interactions. This was part of a series of seven workshops conducted across multiple high-conflict states in India over the last 2 years, supported by the Rufford Foundation and WCS New York. Participants numbered more than 200, and included park managers involved in mitigating conflict, local conservation NGOs, and journalists from the English and local-language media. The workshops focused on the positive impacts that media reporting can have on the nature of human–wildlife interactions through shaping public perception of wildlife and influencing the way we deal with wild animals that occur in human-use lands. Workshop content included research findings on conflict-prone mammals from WCS India and other organizations (including the Nature Conservation Foundation and Centre for Conservation and Research); novel mitigation methods detailed by conservation practitioners; and a media perspective on human–wildlife conflict and how the media can reduce sensationalism and make people more aware of the complex nature of this issue.

Subsequent to the workshops, reporters stated their interest in enhancing the quality and depth of news reports on human–wildlife interactions. Initial results indicate that the workshops have been successful in improving the sensitivity of news reports on wildlife residing in and around human habitation. People in India have traditionally accepted the presence of wildlife in their vicinity; retaining this acceptance is crucial for the long-term viability of many threatened species. The media can shape public perceptions of wildlife, and interactions between scientists, conservationists, park managers and journalists are crucial for accurate and responsible reporting on conflict.

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Exploring the challenges and opportunities for biodiversity offsets

The uptake of biodiversity offsets as a mechanism for mitigating the residual impacts of development on species and ecosystems has increased rapidly in recent years, with offset frameworks and/or policies emerging most recently in countries including Liberia, Mozambique and Mongolia. Extensive guidance is available on best practice in biodiversity offsetting and this is supported by an increasing body of scientific research. However, it is widely acknowledged that biodiversity offsetting faces a host of challenges if it is to deliver positive outcomes for biodiversity conservation.

With support from the Arcus Foundation, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) led a review of the current state of biodiversity offsets, to support the effective implementation of offsetting policy. FFI and collaborators assessed established national and sub-national offsetting schemes in the United States (led by Rebecca Kormos, a Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley) and Australia, as well as the more recent development of offset policy and practice in South Africa. The review examined case studies in these three countries and elsewhere to better understand barriers

and enabling factors for the effective implementation of offsetting policy and the positive and negative outcomes for biodiversity, identifying lessons learned and key considerations for informing emerging offset policy and implementation.

To share this learning and further explore the many dimensions of applying biodiversity offsetting policies in diverse contexts, FFI hosted a 3-day Biodiversity Offsets Learning Event in July 2015, in Cambridge, UK. The event brought together 55 FFI staff, partners and government representatives from Australia, Belize, Brazil, Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Philippines, Singapore, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, and the UK, and aimed to build capacity, establish peer support networks, and share experience and learning on the development of biodiversity offsets and the challenges associated with their implementation. The event also saw the launch of FFI's biodiversity offset animation (<https://vimeo.com/136186136>) and was supported by graphic facilitation expert Danny Burgess, who produced some excellent live scribing of the key issues discussed. On the final day, FFI staff and partners were joined by 30 representatives from mining and energy sectors, environmental consultancies, financial lenders, NGOs and research institutions to consider the learning to date, and next steps.

A range of issues arising from the implementation of offsets at national, sub-national and site levels were identified and explored, including those relating to policy and politics, enforcement and compliance monitoring, institutional capacity and resourcing, financing, timelines, coordination and stakeholder engagement, socioeconomic considerations, methods and metrics. Although the barriers to the effective implementation of biodiversity offsetting policy are many and challenges abound, there are some indications that biodiversity offsets can, in certain cases and as a last resort after the full application of the mitigation hierarchy, contribute towards biodiversity conservation objectives.

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