

## Project Update: April 2006

The field work for this project started in January 2006. The objectives of the study are to generate scientific baselines on the extent of hunting, understand motivation for hunting, techniques used for hunting and document changes in hunting patterns and intensity. At a later stage, the impacts of hunting will be determined. However, prior to embarking on the intensive study, I started with a rapid survey of some of the dominant tribes in some districts. I am still continuing the field survey and in this report, I present some preliminary descriptive information from the initial 3 month of field work.

Two districts, namely Lohit and Anjaw districts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh were covered till March. Lohit district lies between 27°33' and 29°22' N and 95°15 and 97°24' E. The forest types found in Lohit district are mainly tropical semi-evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, sub-tropical pine forest, sub-alpine birch/fir forest. Anjaw is a new district carved out of Lohit district's high altitude areas.

The districts are inhabited by the *Miju Mishmi*, *Digaru Mishmi* and *Meyor*, the former two indigenous tribes are nature worshippers (animistic) while the latter are Buddhist. All these tribes hunt traditionally. The main focus of my survey was the *Miju Mishmi* community, the dominant tribe in these districts. These communities practice shifting cultivation. Rice, millet and maize are the main crops grown.

A total of 31 villages were covered in both the districts (16 villages in Anjaw district and 15 villages in Lohit district) in the initial field work. The village size range from 3 – 35 households.

Interviews were conducted using questionnaires related to species hunted, season of hunting, taboos, reasons, distance traveled, techniques used for hunting were collected. Secondary data on the number of villages, number of households in each village, population size, distance from district headquarters were collected from district office. District/circle officers and teachers were contacted to get an idea of the villages where data on hunting can be gathered. At village level, the village head man or the *gaon burrah* was contacted information about active hunters as well as old and young hunters. Some key informers in villages (young boys, Panchayat members) were a good source of information and provided data on the status of hunting in their village as well as in the neighbouring areas.

During this initial survey, I recorded hunting of 27 mammals, 18 birds and 2 reptiles. Hunting is mainly done on foot and by setting a variety of indigenous traps. Almost every villager owns a gun and guns are also commonly used for hunting. The preferred season of hunting is during winter when the animals come down to lower altitudes. The main hunting season is from November to February.

Skulls of wild animals hunted are displayed in all households as a traditional practice. It is believed that spiritual power lies in the animal skulls and display of hunted wild animals' signifies prosperity and protection from evil spirits. The first room in the house is sacred where only skulls of wild animals are displayed and traditional rituals are carried out here. Skulls of domestic animals like the mithun (*Bos frontalis*, a semi-domesticated cattle that is highly valued by many tribes in Arunachal) and the cow are displayed in other rooms.

Skulls of barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), goral (*Naemorhedus goral*), serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*) takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*) were the most common animals displayed on trophy boards. Himalayan musk deer (*Moschus* sp.) are targeted for musk pods in remote villages in higher elevation of Anjaw district. Pheasants are commonly hunted in remote villages of the district for food. Feather fans of Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*), Sclater's Monal (*Lophophorus sclateri*) and Grey Peacock-pheasant (*Polyplectron bicalcaratum*) are common. A Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*) was trapped alive to be gifted to the village priest in one of the villages during a ritual. Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) hunting is also widespread in this area. Bags made from black bear skin are commonly used by villagers and their skins are used as mats. Skins of goral and barking deer are also often made into mats.

In Lohit district, hornbill species are hunted for food and for trophies. Beaks of four hornbill species, the Great hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), Rufous-necked hornbill (*Aceros nipalensis*), Wreathed hornbill (*Aceros undulates*) and Oriental Pied hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) were seen with hunters.

A skin of the golden cat (*Catopuma temmincki*) was found in a hunter's house. The golden cat was a melanistic form with black skin colour and marbled pattern on the flanks and shoulders. The cat was trapped in a wire trap. A skin of clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) was also recorded in one hunter's house, which the hunter claimed was captured in a trap set for other animals such as barking deer and goral. Hunting of any member of the cat family is taboo and is strictly followed. Cats are not hunted due to religious reasons. If anyone accidentally kills a member of the cat family, an elaborate "religious ceremony" is carried out by sacrificing cattle which is expensive and time-consuming.

Hunting of wild animals is part of the *Miju Mishmi's* culture and down the ages, hunting has been an important activity and a matter of pride. Wild meat is offered as bride price by the *Miju Mishmi* during their weddings. Gifting fresh or dried wild meat is a traditional norm and practice during festivals and weddings. Hunting is carried out mainly for household consumption. Wild meat is sold locally among the villagers. Fresh wild meat costs Rs. 50/- per kg and dried meat is 100/- per kg. Domestic pigs and chicken are reared and are sacrificed during festivals and weddings. When people fall sick, the priest is called to sacrifice domestic fowl and pigs to ward off evil spirits and it is believed that people get well soon if they sacrifice these animals. Apart from

consumption and rituals, some species are targeted for the market. Pods from musk deer and gall bladders of black bear fetch a high price. One *tola* (10 grams) of musk pod is sold for Rs. 5000 (\$113) and one *tola* (10 grams) of Black bear gall bladder is sold for Rs. 1500 (\$34).

I recorded and photographed 11 different kinds of indigenous traps being used for a wide range of species from rodents, small birds to mammals (ungulates, bears).

Hunting is carried out by almost every one in the village though there are 4-5 active hunters who aim for large animals and are known for their hunting skills and tracking abilities. Many hunt as a pastime because they say there is nothing much to do in the village other than agriculture. Interest in hunting has declined in the younger generation. Most young boys do not accompany their fathers on hunting trips either because they go to school or because going on a hunt in the forest involves some risk and hard work.

Awareness about wildlife laws is extremely low. Some believe that hunting would continue because this is part of their traditional practice. Some villagers are willing to give up hunting if they are provided with some job so that they can earn money. There is a lot of scope of creating awareness and exploring alternate livelihood options.

Two more districts (East Kameng and Upper Siang) will be surveyed in April-May 2006 for an initial survey of hunting patterns of *Nishi* and *Adi* communities respectively.

