PUBLISHED PAPERS BASED ON THE RESEARCH WORK
Colonizing the Wild: Early British Policies Towards Wildlife in Assam

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The conservation of wildlife is an important issue in the present world for the maintenance of the bio-diversity, the diversity of biological life upon our planet. The earth is a living ecosystem, a fragile system of interdependence and balance. Our own survival as a species depends upon the preservation of the biodiversity and is tied to the survival and vitality of everything on this planet. Thus, the study of the wildlife in the past will help to understand the importance of the preservation of wildlife. The study of the past will reveal the destruction of wild animals during the past, man-animal conflict, its consequences and ultimately the causes which led to the starting of the process of the preservation of wildlife in the past. This will help to understand the causes that led the destruction of wildlife in Assam during the British period, man-animal conflict and their consequences. Though the term “wildlife” indicates both fauna and flora in their wild state but in this work the term “wildlife” denotes only the wild animals in their wild state. The extension of human population to the natural wild animal habitats led to the displacement of the natural wildlife territory. The population density of wildlife and humans overlapped increasing their interaction thus, resulted in increased physical conflict. By products of human existence offer unnatural opportunity for wildlife in the form of food and shelter, resulting in increased interference and potentially destructive threat for both men and animals that resulted into animals deaths, crop damage, damage to property, destruction of habitat, injuries to people, injuries to wildlife, livestock depredation and loss of human lives etc.

The men-animals conflict is not new, it could be observed since long back. In Ancient India, though hunting was practiced but wild animals were given importance as it has been evident that the deities of the ancient India were mostly in animal form. The pictures of Deities were found in various forms like that of hump less bull, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, tiger, hare etc. This indicates the importance of wild animals in ancient India. Mauryan king Ashoka, gave up royal hunt and started protecting birds and animals after imbracing Buddhism. Though hunting continued during the medieval period but Akbar forbade hunting on certain days. Even Kashmiri Sultan, Zain-Ul-Abidin gave up meat eating and tried to dissuade his nobles from hunting. The Ahom rulers also practiced hunting as their favorite past time. But it the common Assamese practiced both hunting and revered them. Assamese folktales tell how the villagers often stayed away from dense forest for fear of wild animals. But the coming of the British led to the mass destruction of wildlife. Reward giving, appointing paid shikaries, and hunting for sports and trophies led to the record breaking destruction of wildlife during the British rule. Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil viewed that as consequences of the record breaking shikar the population of wild animals decreased and even some of the animals like elephant and rhinoceros disappeared from areas in which they were formally quite numerous. But the process of the destruction of wild animals did not start abruptly. Starting with the killing of wildlife for mere sports and trophies gradually it spun in wildlife trade. But there was not much trade in wildlife in Assam before 1874 except the trade of elephant teeth. Later the destruction of wildlife also helped in the expansion of cultivation after the jungles were clear off, which in turn helped the British government to earn more revenue. In the initial state the British government has no concrete policy towards wildlife. Through this paper an attempt has been made to study the pre-1874 British

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policies towards wildlife, since when the forest department of Assam started functioning. This will help to understand the early British policies towards wildlife in Assam in particular and in India in general. The paper has been divided into two parts. Section I discusses the damaged done by wild animals and section II discusses the British policy towards wildlife.

**Section I**

Huge atrocities to life and property by wild animals can also be noticed in Assam even before the British establishment in the province. The folk tales of Assam also full of the stories of wild animals and occasional conflicts between men and wild animals. Destruction of crops and cattle by wild animals made the human settlement so difficult that many villages were abounded. Some references of the destruction and atrocities by wild animals can be observed in many literatures. John M’Cosh mention in his work “Topography of Assam” that “wild elephants are plentiful, and, move in large herds and are very destructive both to the crops and to human life; entering villages in day light and plundering granaries, and stores of salt, of which latter they are very fond”. S.R Ward mentioned in his work, A Glimpse of Assam, “The worst night disturbers in Assam are the numerous jackals.” He also mentioned “There are night visitors of a stronger and more dangerous kind; your cattle and horses are not safe when a leopard or tiger is prowling about your dwelling which is not an unusual occurrence, as everyone knows who has been many months in Assam.” This indicates that the wild animals led to the damages and destruction of life and property. Every year large number of people was killed by wild beast. 277 and 239 people were killed by wild animals between 1869-70 and 1870-71 respectively. 135 people in Kamroop, 16 in Durrung, 49 in Nowgoan, 9 in Luckimpore, 9 in Khasi & Jynteah hills, 18 in Naga Hills were killed in 1870-71. But the number of causalities by wild beast could have been more as reported by the deputy commissioner of Naga Hills that the number of causalities by wild beasts reported during the year falls far short of the actual number killed by them. Among deaths reported by snake bite 62 people were killed in 1869-70 and 72 in 1870-71.

**Ravages committed by wild animals:** The miles and miles of grass and real jungle made the existence of life and property an utter impossibility. Jungles were so heavy that it was almost impossible to track any wild animal. Lieutenant J. Lamb, collector of Zillah, Durrung, on his way to drive away a tiger that had killed some cows viewed that the jungle was so heavy that it was out of question to kill them and if the jungles were not cleared and burnt, the shelter for wild animals increased and it made the existence of life and property more dangerous. Wild elephants were also very destructive. Wild elephants moving in large herds were very destructive both to the crops and to the human life, entering villages in day light and plundering granaries and stores of salt of which later they were very fond. In the winter of 1866-67, one village was abandoned in the Kamroop district as a consequence of the destruction caused by the wild elephants. In Naga Hills also a village was deserted by its inhabitants on account of the depredation by the ferocious tigers. How peerless was the lives and property of the people of Assam can be understood from the fact that many villages were abandoned because of the depredation by the ferocious wild animals. During 1868, 129 persons reportedly lost their lives because of snake bites or from attacks by wild animals. Human habitation in the form of human lives and agricultural crops were greatly subjected to depredations of the wild animals. Tigers were very numerous in the Jynteah hills and 14 people were reported to have been killed in the month of August, 1866. In the neighborhood of Cheera Poonjee and in Cheera Poonjee itself tigers also committed considerable damages to human lives besides a good number of cattle. Only in Gowalpara district 9, 34, 39 people were reported to have been killed in 1867, 1868 and in 1869 respectively. The loss of human life can be easily understand from the fact that 52 people were reported to be killed only in the district of Durrung in two year, 1833 and 1834. From 1858-63 a total of 1120 people were reported to have been killed in various districts of Assam. In 1866 a total of 1413, in 1867 a total of 1363 and 1869 a total of 1577 people were reported to have been killed by wild animals. By snake bite
64,100 and 160 people were reported to have been killed in 1866, 1867 and 1869 respectively.22 The reports were not available of the cattle killed by wild animals for all the districts of Assam except Sylhet where 918, 947 and 940 cattle were reported to have been killed.23 The Superintendent of Cachar district has reported immense loss of life and property in Cachar in the year 1869 because of the vast increase of jungles. Around fourteen & fifteen deaths were reported in a week. Even there is possibility that more than 14-15 people were killed in a week as many such cases were not reported by the villagers of the remote areas of this district.24 Havildar of the Ranees house was also severely wounded by a tiger and several have been found prowling about the vicinity of the bazaar.25

However, these statements are necessarily very incomplete and the figures are unreliable. There is also little doubt that many deaths from wild animals and snakes took place which were not reported to police and the return of wild animals killed does not include the large animals that are unquestionably annually destroyed by sportsman and those persons who did not claim authorized rewards on the other hand sudden deaths from natural causes and probably even cases of homicide and suicide were frequently reported as deaths from snake bite.26 A large number of losses of life from venomous snakes were also observed and offering of rewards for the destruction of snakes didn’t answer the real object in view while it entails an enormous expenditure on government. A few years ago the plan of granting such rewards was tried in the districts of the Burdwan division and though the reward was only 2 annas for each poisonous snake the expenditure in a short time an account of rewards amount to 30,000. The fact that the people were ready enough to kill snakes and that they even brought them from distant jungles for the sake of the reward, satisfied the government that the inhabitants of villages and town would for their own sakes destroy a snake when they met it, and as nothing was to be gained by killing those that infested jungles the reward were discontinued and have not since been resumed.27 No records were kept of the destruction of crops and cattle by the wild animals28 except in Sylhet district.

Section II

British Policies towards wildlife during pre-1874: Though, wild animals were even killed before the British rule by local inhabitants but it was accidental and not intentional. The elite class also used to Hunt wild animals as it was supposed to up-holds once social status— a higher social status required a more ferocious animal to be hunted. But it was occasionally and not a regular process. It was only during the British regime in Assam that various methods were adopted for the destruction of wildlife like awarding of rewards, appointment of regular shikaries etc. W.W.Hunter mentioned in his work “A Statistical account of Assam, vol. I & II” about the rewards given for the destruction of wild animals in various district of the province.29 Captain Roger introduced a gun especially for killing wild animals. Good sums was given as rewards for the destruction of wild animals varying in amount depending on the species of animals to be destroyed and its prevalence or destructiveness in any particular part of the province. A considerable sums were paid monthly by the district commissioners for the destruction of wild beasts and professional huntsmen were engaged in the pursuit are exerting themselves in an unwanted degree and it is hoped with good effects like in Kamroop.30 In Nowgaon, the district commissioner believed that the grant of an increased rate of rewards in his district had the effects of inducing the people to enter more systematically and generally into the work of the extermination of wild animals.31 Special rewards were also occasionally sanctioned by government for the destruction of some particular man eating tiger or a notorious dangerous elephant.32 Great mischives were committed by wild boars in Bishnupur (Guwahati) town and to get away of this problem a reward of Rs. 10 was sanctioned by the government for the destruction of wild boar in Gouhatty (Guwahati) town.33 In Cossyah and Jynateah hills the reward for killing tiger was increased from rupees 5 to rupees 20 and for tiger cubs, leopards from rupees 2-8 to rupees 10 each tiger as a special measure.34 In some cases the grant of rewards for the destruction of wild animals were stopped like in Naga Hills in 1870 but in...
the same year itself the deputy commissioner of the district felt the need of reintroduced the practice of granting the rewards for the destruction of wild animals. The extent of killing wild animals for rewards was high. However, in spite of the provision for reward the absent of regular shikaries can also be noticed, as in Sylhet 15 people were reported to have been killed during 1847 and during the same period there were only nine tigers brought in for the Govt. reward. For six they being full grown the reward for each was Rs.5/-, two not full grown Rs. 4/- each, and for one small one Rs.3/-. Again the scale of rewards varies from time to time and district wise depends on the atrocities by the wild animals. In 1848 scale of rewards for elephants was Rs. 10/-, for rhinoceros, tigers and leopard was 5 annas, for Bear and Buffalos 2.8 annas. In Nowgaon Rs. 5/- was rewarded for the destruction of Rhinoceros. The general amount of Rs. 5/- for a tiger, Rs.2.8 annas for leopard and bear and Rs. 2/- for Hyenas were awarded for the destruction of these animals in 1850 in all the divisions of Bengal including Assam. The special rewards sanctioned in 1850 for the destruction of Elephants, Rhinoceros, Buffalo was 10/- annas, Rs.5/- and Rs.2/- and 8/- annas respectively in Assam division and in Cachar Rs. 7/- was sanctioned for a tiger. The highest amount paid as reward for the destruction of tiger under the Bengal presidency was Rs. 100/- per head.

The following table shows the scale of rewards sanctioned for the destruction of wild animals since 1866.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division &amp; districts</th>
<th>Tiger</th>
<th>Leopard</th>
<th>Bear</th>
<th>Hyena</th>
<th>Elephants</th>
<th>Rhinoceros</th>
<th>Buffalo</th>
<th>Wolf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam division</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong &amp; Kamrup</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The forest of Durrung (Darrang) district also was full of elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, buffaloes, bison, deer of many kinds, bears, pigs etc. Those wild animals used to inhabit the large wastes of reed and grass jungle, and occasionally caused considerable damage to life and property. An amount of Rs 416, 7 annas and 8 paisa was pay out by the government from 1858-63 as reward for the destruction of wild animals. A considerable amount of 15.6 pounds in 1866-67, 18.4 pounds in 1867-68 and 9.5 pounds in 1868-69 was expend in the district of Nowgaon by the government to keep down the tigers and leopard, the main destructive wild animals in the district. The reward for killing a tiger which was only Rs. 5 or 10 shillings to Rs. 25 or 2.10 pounds. Similar rewards were paid for the destruction of wild animals in the Sibsagar district which amounted to 18.4 pounds in 1859 and 4 pounds in 1869. A small amount of 10 shillings was paid as reward for snake killing in the Lakhimpur district. This was something not at all done in the other districts of Assam as no rewards were paid to kill snakes in any of the province under Bengal till1874. Thus, paying of rewards for decreasing wild animals was mostly accepted method for the destruction of wildlife in Assam as it has also been found that almost in all the districts of Assam, rewards were given for killing of wild animals.

The plan of employing paid shikaries was occasionally been tried but without any real success. In some cases marksmen were selected by police, and being furnished with arms and ammunition were encouraged to shoot wild animals and were allowed half the reward in each case, but that too didn’t get success. Captain Roger’s plan of killing wild beasts by means of fixed gun, with strings attached is generally attached to it. But it is doubtful whether it is not as dangerous to cattle and human beings as to the noxious animals it is intended to destroy. Sometime large hunting parties were also organized to destroy particular wild animals to those places where the loss of life and property from wild animals is great. These hunting parties were organized under the guidance of local officers at a small expense to government. This besides helping to kill off wild beasts also gave the people courage and incites them to organize similar hunts on their own.
account and teach them to make a stand against a danger that is now destroying their substance and themselves.

Every year a good number of wild animals were killed for rewards and a good sum of amount were expended by the government for its destruction. Between 1858-63, 8682 wild animals were killed for which a sum of Rs. 28443-4-3 was paid by the government and from 1866-69, 9854 wild animals were killed which a sum of 47,925 was paid as rewards. It does not include those animals which were killed for sports and those for which no reward was claimed. That means the number of the wild animals killed during these years could be much more then what has been seen. Thus, even if the reports for the initial years of British rule is not available there is no doubt that a large number of wild animals were destroyed and a good sum of amount was spend on giving rewards for killing wild animals.

Revenue from wild animals before 1874: Wild animals were not a source of generating revenue for the British government before 1874 except elephants and that too was in limited sense. The wild nature of Assam as a whole was not made to contribute towards the revenue, or rather to the wealth of the province excepts the trade of ivory in a limited sense in the Lakhimpur district where elephant catching also contributed a nominal amount. In fact elephants were always been a source of revenue for the government of Assam even in the medieval period. Dr. Wade in his history of Assam mention about ivory boxes, fans of ivory, ivory articles were made and used in Assam. He also mentioned that king Rudra Singh presented mats, fans, and chessmen of ivory to the king of Delhi. Elephant catching expedition under khedeh were conducted since the early years of the company’s rule. In fact, government played his monopoly over elephant catching. There were mainly two kinds of licenses that were formally granted. One was an annual lease of a particular tract of the country. It also gave the permit holder the exclusive right to catch elephants in any manner, he might choose. The amount paid by such license holder as fee varied at times and in 1869 the revenue derived from the issue of such licenses was 601 pounds and 10 shillings (approximately rupees 6,010). The other type of license which was granted to capture elephants in all unreserved forest upon payment of an annual royalty of 2 pounds or Rs. 20/.

In his account that every year a large number of elephants were transported to various countries. He estimated that every year around 700-1,000 elephants were exported from Assam every year and a duty of Rs. 10 was levied at Goalpara on every elephant exported. Jenkins also reported that every year merchants from Bengal made attempts to visit the province with koonkees to catch wild animals and were generally very successful. He found that out of the 600-700 elephants caught in Assam in 1850, around 500 were exported, where as in 1851 around 900 were caught. Newly caught elephants could often be purchased, if under 5 feet in height, for Rs.100/- but the merchants seldom dispose the finer ones in the province as they realized Rs.800 to Rs. 1,00 each for them in Bengal or Hindustan, if they succeeded in keeping them alive for 2 or 3 years. A.J.M.Mills also observed that both ivory and rhinoceros horn were exported from Assam. Trade in Sylhet district in elephant tusk and buffalo horns and hides were observed by Hunter. However, the revenue derived from elephant catching was not considered significant. Though all skins of animals and their claws for which a reward was paid become the property of government and no person should have the option of purchasing the same but no trade in wild beast’s skins was carried on in Assam before 1874. The British government fixed certain amount to be paid for the sale of the Skin of wild animals. It was for tiger, Chita. Panther and leopard was Rs. 10/- each, for bear Rs.2/- and for wolf or hyena Rs. 1/- each. In spite of that absent of trade in wildlife skin could be observed. On the other hand government had to spend considerable amount to keep down wild animals as it can be seen that government has spent more than 67.18 pounds in 1865; 401.16 pounds in 1867; 110.18 pounds in 1870; 228.10 pounds in 1871; 227.10 pounds in 1872; 182.15 pounds in 1873 and 362.10 pounds in 1874. A reward of Rs. 28443, 4 annas, 3 paisa was made from 1858-63. In 1866-67, 1867-68, 1868-69 an amount of Rs. 16713/-, Rs.14148/- and 2 annas,
Rs.17064/- respectively was rewarded. John M‘cosh viewed that the number of wild animals killed was so great that, the amount of rewards absorbs a great portion of the revenue. This was he said only for those animals killed by shikaries and that too only by bows and arrows. Thus, the government had to spend large sum of money on the destruction of wildlife. But it would be wrong to say that it was a burden on government, as only in the year 1869, a sum of Rs.60,101/- was derived by the government from annual lease of the tracts of the country for elephant catching but not more than an amount of Rs.20,000/- was spent on reward giving for the destruction of wild animals each year before 1874. Elephant’s teeth were also exported to other countries like Tibet (Tibet).

Conclusion: The men-animal interactions was not new to the British regime in Assam, but never before wild animals were destroyed in such large numbers. Archival reports regarding the destruction of wild animals in Assam are available from 1858-63 and from 1866-68 in pre-1874 Assam. If depend on these records it reveals that the number of wild animals killed in these years were much more than the number of human being killed by the wild animals. From 1858-63, 217 person were killed while 8682 wild animals were killed during the same period. Again, from 1866-68, 4353 human beings were killed by wild animals on the other hand 9845 wild animals were destroyed during the same period. Now, the question arises was the killing of wild animals in such large number needed? Safety of life was not the concern of the British as it is found that the villagers of Durrang (Darrang) were not allowed to clear off the jungles and they had to pay revenue out of their own pocket to clear off the jungles and if the jungles were not cleared off the shelter of wild animals were increased. The villagers also could not burn the jungles as it might burn their houses. And moreover the number of people annually destroyed was much lesser then the wild animals killed. Sport was one reason why wild animals were killed and secondly, it was for the sake of trade in wild animals as it is found that the British government has fixed certain amount for the sale of the wild animal’s skin as mentioned earlier. There are also evidences of trade of ivory, horn and hides of wild animals. Though, no trade was carried on in wild beast’s skin but it would also be wrong to conclude that there was no trade in wildlife before 1874. It can be said that the in initial stage the British were not successful in their attempt to trade in wildlife in Assam.

Thus, it can be concluded that there was no concrete policy of the British government regarding wildlife in Assam till 1874 and not much revenue was generated from wildlife on the other hand the government has to spend large sum of amount on the destruction of wild animals. Though, there was not much trade in wildlife but the revenue from elephant catching was enough to meet the expenditure of the destruction of wild animals and the clearance of jungle later helped the British government to expand the cultivable land and to earn more and more revenue.

Reference:

3. Ibid.p.18.
10. ASA, Judicial and Revenue Administrative Report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, General department, 1836.
11. Ibid.
12. ASA, judicial and revenue administrative report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, general department, 1836.
15. ASA, judicial and revenue administrative report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, general department, 1836.
17. Ibid, letter from col. H. Hopkinson, agent to the govr. Genl., North-East Frontier and commissioner of Assam to the secretary to the government of Bengal dated 22nd sept. 1866.
23. NAI, Home, public-. Sept, 1871, 43-72.
25. Ibid, p.29. letter to L.Lowis commissioner of Dacca Division from the superintendent of Cachar, on 13th sept.1836.Tiger was found entering the compound of the house of J.G.Burns, Superintendent of cachar in 1853.
27. NAI, home, public-A, sept. 1871, nos. 43-72.
28. NAI, Home, Public, A, Sept.1871, file no. 43-72, letter from the junior secretary, to the govt. of Bengal to the secretary to the government of India.
30. ASA, judicial and revenue administrative report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, general department, 1836.
31. ASA, judicial and revenue administrative report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, general department, 1836.
32. NAI, Home, Public, A, Sept.1871, file no. 43-72, letter from the junior secretary, to the govt. of Bengal to the secretary to the government of India.
34. NAI, home, public-A, 5th Feb 1870, 31-48.
35. ASA, judicial and revenue administrative report of 1835, file no. 298, Bengal, Assam secretariat, general department, 1836.
37. ASA, 1848, Bengal Government papers, file no.340, scale of rewards for the destruction of wild animals.
38. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
42. NAI, Home, Public, A, sept-1871 file no. 43-72.
44. NAI, home, public, A, February, 1870, 31-48.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p.232.
48. Ibid., pp 300-301.
49. WBSA, judicial dept., Sept. 1873, 47 -53 proc, A experiment was tried in Burdwan division of Bengal, which is one of the worst from snake bite in the whole province and it had been found that snake killing became a regular trade. The snakes being brought in from jungles where they did harm nobody. The cost under this system had in 1863 became enormous having risen in the small district of Bancooral alone to over Rs. 20,000 per annum. This led to the withdrawal of reward for snake killing in Bengal.
50. NAI, Home, public-A, sept.1871, nos. 43-72.
51. NAI, Home, public-A, sept.1871, nos. 43-72.
52. Ibid.
53. NAI, Home public-A,September, 1871, Nos.43-72.
55. NAI home, public-A, sept.1871 file no, 43-72.
59. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
67. NAI, home, public-A, 1870, August, nos. 71-73.
68. Ibid. the value of one pound was equal to about ten rupees at that time.
74. ASA, Assam commissioner papers, file no. 446, correspondence regarding Goorkhate Mehals from 10th march, 1858 to Jan, 1865. Letter from lieutenant J. lamb, collector of Zillah, Durrung to Coll. J.Jekins, commissioner of revenue Assam, Dated camp lahur barree, 20th January, 1859.