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**ADVISORY ON WILD LIFE DEPREDATION IN TEA ESTATES OF NORTH BENGAL**

Generally the Tea Estates of the North Bengal experiences the wrath of Wildlife depredation mainly due to straying of Bisons during the dry periods, Leopards in Tea Estate's plucking areas and Elephants depredate almost throughout the year but more extensively during and around the monsoons. This phenomenon is there on record since inception of tea cultivation in Duars.

Monsoon is also the time for leopard breeding and it coincides with the best tea plucking season of a Tea Estate. During the monsoons the Tea Estate and neighbouring Forest drains and camouflaged low lying grasslands and Guatemala grass plantations in general provide an ideal place for leopard breeding. Generally female leopard with her cubs or a pregnant female leopard when encountered by humans in fear of being attacked / self defence retaliates and injures the humans nearby their approach. Similarly the elephants quite often raid the Tea Estate areas for crops like maize, paddy etc being raised by labourers in the fringes with the forests or for the brew being made illicitly in some labour lines. In the process damages are caused to the huts and sometimes human casualties also occur. Also, during the dry months some Bisons stray into the Tea Estates and create panic and at times injury to the labourers.

Here are few advisories for tackling the Wild life depredation and related problems.

1. Before start of plucking of tea bushes of a section by the labourers the area in advance must be disturbed by beating of drums, shouts or a nominal bursting of few crackers so that it disturbs the animal if present nearby and gradually it retreats to a safer zone
2. The labourers should be advised to avoid going in open for nature calls.
3. The labourers should be desisted from laying any traps within Tea Garden or vicinity of Forest to control intrusion of any wild animal as it injures animal and also invites retaliation by the animal. This is also a punishable offence under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
4. Hunting of any Wild Life is a serious punishable offence under The Wild life (Protection) Act, 1972. The labourers in general may be educated about this.
5. On sighting of a Gaur in the garden area in general the labourers should be advised to stay at a safe distance and management should immediately inform the nearest forest office. Also, any other Wild animal sighted or creating trouble should be promptly informed to the nearest Forest office.

6. Compensation for injury or death by Wild Life is paid when a person is attacked outside the forest area. No compensation is paid for any incident within a forest area. Compensation for hut/houses damages of TE labourers would be paid as per rules in vogue through TE management.
7. Labourers should be advised not to go to forest for collection of firewood etc. Any visit to Reserve Forest is liable for attack by a wild animal and trespassing is also an offence. The Tea Estates should ensure supply of fuel wood or its alternates. Similarly since cattle's rearing in TE is legally prohibited the initiatives for discouraging the labourers to do so must be taken. Both these activities are disturbing and degrading the Wild Life habitats which is resulting in profuse depredation in Tea Estates.
8. Raising of crops like maize, banana, fodder grass etc in vacant tea areas and in vicinity of Forests which is legally prohibited should be discouraged as they invite elephants. Also this is not allowed in Tea Estates as per lease conditions.
9. Local unauthorized brewing in some labour lines invite elephants visit. This should be discouraged and reported to police/SDO/BDO.
10. Labour lines along forest fringes may be fenced up with energized fencing. Technical knowhow would be provided by Forest Department but financing has to be done by the TE concerned from welfare fund or from Commercial Felling of TE trees.
11. Eco-clubs may be formally formed in the TE. The concerned TE Manager may kindly take initiative so that actions for awareness and creation of voluntary squads against Wild Life depredation could be undertaken.
12. The names of miscreants utilizing TE spaces for illicit timber dumping and those suspected to be involved in poaching etc may be made available to Forest Department confidentially. Otherwise as per legal provisions, illicit timber or wild animal parts etc., if found within a TE, the TE Authorities are liable for the same.
13. Forest Department with mobile units would be visiting the Tea gardens time to time to help the management with regard to movement and control of depredation by Wild Life. Necessary cooperation may be extended to them.
14. Tea Gardens should raise their own fuel wood plantations. Necessary help with regard to raising of plants, nursery and planting design would be provided from this end. For this assistance for a tie up with Waste Land Development Corporation, West Bengal could also be facilitated from this end.
15. Biannual meeting with all concerned must be held by CCF/CF as per their jurisdiction and copy of the minutes of such meeting must be sent to this office also.

Let all concerned be informed.

  
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife  
& Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal.