

Regional Tiger, Asian Rhino and Elephant Veterinary Workshop in Chitwan, Nepal

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The National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) in collaboration with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Government of Nepal, and the Agriculture and Forestry University hosted the Regional Tiger, Asian Rhino and Elephant Veterinary Workshop in Chitwan National Park, from February 5–8, 2018.

Chitwan National Park has populations of tigers, one-horned Indian rhinos, and Asian elephants. This was the first wildlife veterinary workshop to focus on three highly endangered species that share habitat. The workshop addressed wildlife health from an ecosystem perspective.

The workshop included oral presentations from the various Asian range countries as well as practical activities. The workshop addressed veterinary topics such as disease surveillance

in wild populations, the role of veterinarians in translocation, rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife, and disease case studies. The workshop hosted 75 participating wildlife veterinarians, including representatives from several Asian wildlife range countries: China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, Vietnam, as well as veterinarians from the United Kingdom and USA.

Wildlife health is an important priority for wildlife conservation in Nepal, and the recent confirmation of *Mycobacterium orygis* in the wild rhino population has increased this importance. NTNC, in collaboration with the government of Nepal, recently established a molecular laboratory, which prioritizes wildlife disease surveillance as an important component of its work. NTNC assists in rhino and tiger rescue and relocation and developed a surveillance program for canine





distemper in domestic dogs and tuberculosis in livestock within the buffer zone of Chitwan National Park. These monitoring programs were discussed during the workshop, which served as a catalyst for networking with the broader regional community of wildlife health experts in Asia. During the workshop, delegates from Nepal presented and discussed with participants a National Wildlife Health Management Strategy that the country is endorsing.

The workshop included visits to the Molecular Laboratory of NTNC, which has been recently constructed. During the lab visit the veterinarians were asked to assess a female elephant with tooth issues. Workshop participants also visited the Elephant Breeding Center which manages 17 elephants, with 6 calves, and enjoyed a drive through Chitwan National Park where local wildlife such as rhino, different deer species, sloth bear, gharial and mugger crocodiles were observed.



This workshop follows up on three earlier regional veterinary workshops to develop the capacity of Asian wildlife veterinarians. These activities are instrumental in developing needed veterinary skills; they helped to identify a critical disease (elephant endotheliotropic herpes virus or EEHV) in additional elephant populations in Asia including in Nepal, for the first time, and improved networking among wildlife veterinarians in Asia.

These regional wildlife veterinary workshops underscore the importance of veterinary science for keystone wildlife conservation in Asian range countries. As a result of these ongoing meetings, there is better communication amongst wildlife veterinarians in Asia, and the sharing of information and experiences has increased. Thanks to the network created by these workshops, wildlife veterinarians working in Asian range countries are now better equipped to support conservation initiatives for endangered species such as the Asian elephant.

