

## CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

Sloth Bears and many other wild animals were once reported to be very abundant in the district which is evident from the writings of British officers who used the forests as free hunting ground. Most of the large mammals which used to inhabit forests of Mirzapur are locally extinct now or near extinction due to fragmentation of forests and high anthropogenic pressures. Sloth bears due to their unique adaption to survive dry conditions, flexible food habits and relatively smaller home range have been successful to survive in the remaining forests of Mirzapur. However, their population in the district is found to be decreasing at a very high rate in recent years. There was an urgent need to document the remaining sloth bear habitats and corridors in Mirzapur so that required steps for their conservation can be taken before they become extinct from the district, and therefore this study was undertaken. Presence of sloth bears were recorded in most of the forest ranges-Marihan, Sukrit, Chunar, Patehara and Dramadganj. The number of evidences recorded during the survey shows that these forest ranges have fairly good presence of sloth bears. However, most of the forest areas are highly disturbed by anthropogenic activities such as stone mining, deforestation, livestock grazing, forest fires etc. which have led to fragmentation of the forest range and loss of continuity of forests. Other threats include loss of habitat due to land use change (conversion of forest for agriculture, development of townships, thermal power plant etc.), hunting of animals, linear projects (roads, railways, canals) and invasion by exotic species (*Lantana* and *Hyptis*). Nearly all of the sloth bear attacks on human beings have occurred in areas where the forest degradation is higher and the villages which are settled near the forest corridors. The conflicts are result of direct competition for fruits (such as Mahua), water resources (rivers/streams) and space (forests) between sloth bears and local forest dependent people.

The monitoring of forests except few forest beats are very poor because of inadequacy of ground staff and political pressures. Forest ranges like Chunar and Sukrit are heavily affected by mining and logging activities, all of which are done openly in presence of forest staff. Marihan forest range is facing the highest threat of fragmentation of forests and high risk of local extinction due to ex-urban development in this range. Patehara forest range is facing threat from agricultural expansion in the region which has severely affected the forest quality and continuity. Hill-top mining is the major threat to the wildlife in Dramadganj forest range. Hunting of animals like wild boar, and antelopes are also reported from these forest ranges including Schedule I species like sloth bear and leopard.

De-fragmentation of forest, improving landscape continuity & wildlife corridors, improving administrative infrastructure and protection of watersheds/river catchments are some of the immediate measures required to protect these forests and the remaining wildlife. However, in present scenario-without giving legal protection (such as status of

'Protected Area') to critical wildlife habitats, the survival of the wild animals in such disturbed landscape may not be ensured. This should be complemented with other initiatives such as providing alternate sustainable livelihood options to local people as discussed in the report.