

Book Review

INCREDIBLE DIBRU-SAIKHOWA NATIONAL PARK

by K.K. DWIVEDI

K. K. Dwivedi through the pictorial coffee table book—'Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa National Park' brings to the fore the astounding

treasure trove and the stunning biodiversity of this lesser known national park situated in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra in the extreme east of Assam.

This national park is a safe haven for many rare and endangered species, and

almost 500 species of birds nestle in its environs. Interestingly, the book is the most authoritative initiative authored by scientists, eco-entrepreneurs, and wildlife photographers, who have portrayed the perils of tourism with conservation imperatives.

The book contains 17 chapters beginning with 'Incredible Dibru Saikhowa' and ending with 'A Geo Tourism Destination'. The first chapter takes the reader on a journey through the surrounding grassland and wetland of the park, with a detailed emphasis on the flora and fauna of the region.

As the national park has been classified as a world heritage site, tourism is the best form of conservation, given the splendors of bounteous nature, abundant wildlife, and scenic vistas prevailing in its environs.

The next seven chapters, from third to ninth, exclusively, focuses on the Big Four, the Monkeys and Ape, Birds and Birding, the Reptilian Saga, the Amphibian Trail, the Fish Tales and the River Dolphin, to the Fairies of the Forest, and other rare insects.

The book also covers at length on reptiles and provides an interesting read about the ornate flying snake, (*Chrysopelea ornata*), the water snake (*Xenochrophis piscator*), rat snake, (*Ptyas Mucosa*), Burmese rock python, Monocled cobra (*Naja Kaouthia*).

The amphibians of Dibru include the Assam forest frog, (*Hylarana Leptoglossa*), Himalayan Tree Frog (*Polypedates of himalayensis*), Ornamented pygmy frog (*Microhyla Ornata*) etc. The next chapter embarks on the Gangetic Dolphin, which, according to tribals has a unique folklore attached to it.

The subsequent chapters concentrate on vegetation and various species of plants that are used by the locals for food, fodder, medicine, timber, fiber, and dyes. The local population use as many as 121 plant species as curatives for 74 different ailments under the indigenous system of medicine.

The park is also known as an orchid hotspot in the country. However, the majestic lush splendor, the regal sunset, and the fleeting glimpse of a tiger would be incomplete without the people who inhabit the park. In fact, there are more than 14 fringe villages in the park, and they are highly depended on the reserve.

But with human habitant increasing, the resources are getting stretched and this is a matter of concern for the authorities. This is because, when the habitat starts fragmenting, it is bound to affect the quality of human existence.

Towards the end, the book has made some recommendations to solve the conflict between man and animal and also wildlife conservation issues. It suggests that economic evaluation of the park's ecological functions will definitely go a long way in enhancing the conservation issues. And one of the many challenges that the book dwells upon is the need to initiate measures that will encourage and develop sustainable tourism in this frontier region. This in turn, will generate not only employment for communities, but also go a long way in enhancing life of the local population.

▣ Reviewed by Mathew Thottungal

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