

ORDER passed in Original Application No. 716/2024**From :** Consultant Judicial-NGT(P.B.) <judicial-ngt@gov.in>

Thu, Jul 18, 2024 12:10 PM

Subject : ORDER passed in Original Application No. 716/2024

2 attachments

To : Sh. RAJA CHATTERJEE Registrar <registrarngt-kolkata@gov.in>, Judicial Section <ngtjudicial-kolkata@gov.in>**Reply To :** Consultant Judicial-NGT(P.B.) <judicial-ngt@gov.in>**Respected Sir/Madam,**I am directed to forward a copy of the **Petition****& Order dated 02/07/2024 passed in Original Application No. 716/2024 News Item titled "Manipuri ponies under threat despite state conservation policy" appearing in India.mongabay.com dated 07.05.2024 . for your kind perusal & necessary action.**

भवदीय / Regards ☺

परामर्शदाता (न्यायिक) / Consultant (Judicial) ☺

राष्ट्रीय हरित अधिकरण / National Green Tribunal ☺

प्रधान न्यायपीठ / Principal Bench ☺

नई दिल्ली / New Delhi - 110001 ☺

**OA NO 716 of 2024 Suo Motu Manipuri Poni.pdf**
4 MB**Manipuri ponies under threat despite state.pdf**
324 KB

Manipuri ponies under threat despite state conservation policy

Donald Takhell

18 hours ago



- The modern game of Polo originated from Manipuri's traditional game of Sagol Kangjei, which is played with Manipuri ponies. Besides being a vital part of the game, the species is also an important part of the region's culture.
- The Manipuri pony is under threat as its grazing grounds and natural habitats are being encroached by infrastructure development projects. This is pushing the ponies out of their habitat, making them more susceptible to road accidents and deaths due to plastic consumption.
- Though the government launched a conservation policy for the ponies in 2016, experts point out that it has not been efficiently implemented on ground, increasing concern for the last remaining population of the species.

"We gave the world the game of polo" reads a big poster at the Mapal Kangjeibung, the Manipuri term for "outer polo ground". This is the oldest functional polo ground in the world. It is claimed that the modern game of polo originated from the state of Manipur and has its origins in *Sagol Kangjei*, the traditional state sport with seven players in each team. Modern polo has four players in each team. Every year, the state hosts international polo tournaments for both men's and women's teams. Countries come to the tiny state of Manipur to participate not only for the prize money (less than \$12,000) but to compete at the world's oldest polo ground.

In Manipur, polo is mostly played by royals, elite and the military.

The backbone of the game, the Manipuri pony, is one of the country's five recognised equine breeds. It is one of the purest breeds of equines, famed for its intelligence, surefooted moves, stamina and endurance and is referred to as the only living original polo pony. Manipuri ponies are typically 11-13 hands (1.1-1.3 metres) tall at the withers, with a strong back, well-developed quarters, a robust shoulder and powerful limbs.

Its importance is not only limited to the game; the Manipuri pony is intertwined with the culture and rituals of the valley. Ponies are believed to be the reincarnation of Samadon Ayangba, a mythological flying horse whose wings were chopped off as it went off a path of destruction. Ponies are integral to Lai Haraoba, the traditional festival of rituals and dance, celebrated annually in honour of Umang Lais, the forest deities. Young boys and girls in traditional dresses would mount ponies during the Lai Haraoba.

Despite its strong roots in the region, the species is currently endangered and faces a myriad of threats, from loss of habitat for grazing to road accidents.

Delayed implementation

In 2016, the Manipur state government passed the Manipur Pony Conservation and Development Policy, acknowledging the decline in the species population, from 1898 as per the 2003 livestock census to 1101 as per the count published in the 2012 census. However, there has not been efficient implementation on ground, says R.K. Nimai, a retired IAS officer, who was actively involved in the policy drafting process. "No steps have been taken to implement the policy, except a short-term effort to herd them in one or two locations and stall feed them," he commented.

"Only one meeting of the board members has happened till date, after the passing of the policy and 32 acres of low-lying area within Lamphelpat has been earmarked as grazing ground for the ponies," adds Ningthoukhongjam Bedajeet, Technical Chairman of the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association. "This area of grazing ground may at best cater to 100 ponies for a month."



A polo match in progress. It is claimed that the modern game of polo originated from the state of Manipur and has its origins in Sagol Kangjei, the traditional state sport. Photo by Robinson Wahengbam.

Besides natural reasons, road accidents and plastic consumption have been the major causes of pony deaths in the last few years. Nima said, "Due to the increasing stress induced by declining grazing grounds, ponies are often out in the roads and seen scavenging for food from a pile of roadside garbage, which often causes consumption of plastics. This leads to blockages in their intestines and causes death."

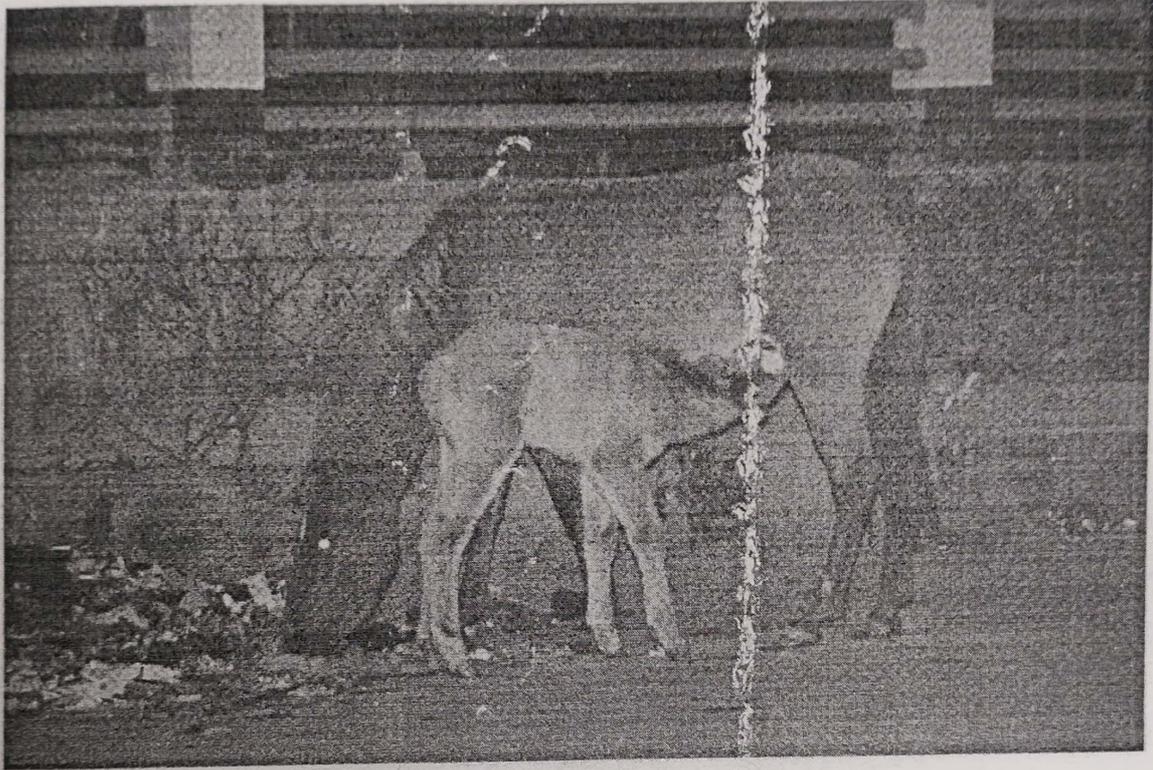
The Press Information Bureau, in a [press release](#) on the 2019 Livestock Census, points to a decline of 45.2% of the total population of horses and ponies in India, compared to the previous census in 2012. As per the 2019 census, the present population of horses and ponies, stands at 3.4 lakhs (340,000). According to the [latest breed report](#) (based on the livestock census, of the 994 Manipuri ponies in India, 918 are in Manipur.

Need habitat preservation over infrastructure

In January 2023, Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated a [122-foot-tall statue of a polo player](#) mounted on a pony at the shrine of Ibudhou Marjing, considered the God of Pony, Polo and War, in Manipur. "This will surely take the legacy forward and inspire more youngsters towards the game," he posted on the social media platform X. However, making a statue instead of implementing a conservation model has drawn criticism.

"The government has mostly been focussing on infrastructural development rather than preservation of grazing grounds and wetlands. The policy only remains on paper and previous interventions, such as the defunct pony farm at Tingkai Khunou, are the best examples of this systematic failure," remarks Bedajeet.

pat. Manipuri ponies prefer the kind of habitat with marshy green wetlands, where they graze around and also play. During rainy seasons, when the wetlands are inundated with water, the ponies would migrate to nearby areas, and are thus prone to facing road accidents.



A pony and foal scavenging from a roadside garbage dump. Photo by Robinson Wahengbam.

The Lamphelpat wetlands, located in the western part of Imphal, was the main and the last resort for the Manipuri pony. Now, however, major areas of the wetlands are encroached upon by government infrastructure. The latest project implemented by the Water Resource Department to dig Lamphelpat into a 12 feet deep waterbody seems to be the final nail in the coffin. This project, spanning over 300 acres, has pushed the ponies out of their natural habitat and has drawn concern from experts and citizens.

“The ongoing dredging work in Lamphelpat is very deadly for ponies. More than 10 ponies have died since the start of the project as ponies get stuck in the mud pool,” said Kh Habe, the former captain of the Manipuri women’s polo team. “This project is killing more ponies than road accidents and plastic consumption.”

Moreover, the ongoing dredging work has drawn apprehensions from nearby establishments including the National Institute of Technology and Shija Hospital, as it could submerge the campus located near the wetlands. The sludge from the excavation work has already made its way to the 32-acre land earmarked for the ponies.



Ponies in their natural habitat in Lamphelpat during the monsoon. Dredging work at Lamphelpat is a threat to the ponies. Photo by Robinson Wahengbam.

At present, there are plans to shift the semi-feral ponies in this region to the campus of the Manipur Pony Breeding Farm and elsewhere, alienating them further from their natural habitat and also making them more susceptible to road accidents and scavenging.

“Local grass such as *tingoi* and *hoop* are the main fodder but now there are effectively no more areas to find them for grazing after Lamphelpat was made out of bounds,” adds Habe. At the breeding farm, hay-straw has been arranged as fodder, but the ponies are not really fond of it. “Hoping for the government’s intervention is the same as beating a dead horse,” laments Habe.

Banner image: Tending saddled polo ponies in between game breaks. Photo by Robinson Wahengbam.

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[Mongabay-India](#)

[Back to top](#)

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Item No. 06

Court No. 1

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI**

Original Application No. 716/2024

News Item titled "Manipuri ponies under threat despite state conservation policy" appearing in India.mongabay.com dated 07.05.2024

Date of hearing: 02.07.2024

**CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE PRAKASH SHRIVASTAVA, CHAIRPERSON
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ARUN KUMAR TYAGI, JUDICIAL MEMBER
HON'BLE DR. A. SENTHIL VEL, EXPERT MEMBER**

ORDER

1. This Original Application is registered *suo-motu* on the basis of the news item titled "Manipuri ponies under threat despite state conservation policy" appearing in India.mongabay.com dated 07.05.2024.
2. The matter relates to the threat to Manipur's ponies as its grazing grounds and natural habitats are being encroached by infrastructure development projects. This is pushing the ponies out of their habitat, making them more susceptible to road accidents and deaths due to plastic consumption. As per the article, though the government launched a conservation policy for the ponies in 2016, it has not been efficiently implemented on ground, increasing concern for the last remaining population of the species.
3. The news item further states that in 2016, the Manipur state government passed the Manipur Pony Conservation and Development Policy, acknowledging the decline in the species population, from 1898 as per the 2003 livestock census to 1101 as per the count published in the 2012 census. However, there has not been efficient implementation on

ground. Only one meeting of the board members has happened till date, after the passing of the policy and 32 acres of low-lying area within Lamphelpat has been earmarked as grazing ground for the ponies. This area of grazing ground may at best cater to 100 ponies for a month. Besides natural reasons, road accidents and plastic consumption have been the major causes of pony deaths in the last few years. Due to the increasing stress induced by declining grazing grounds, ponies are often out in the roads and seen scavenging for food from a pile of roadside garbage, which often causes consumption of plastics. This leads to blockages in their intestines and causes death.

4. The news item alleges that the Manipur ponies prefer the kind of habitat with marshy green wetlands. However, the government is not focusing on the preservation of grazing fields and wetlands. The wetlands in Imphal used to be the primary habitat place for the Manipur ponies. However, the situation has changed due to development of infrastructure in the region. The Water Resource Department has finalized a latest project to dig Lamphelpat into a 12 feet deep waterbody, which seems to be the final nail in the coffin. The project spans over 300 acres and thus forces the Manipur ponies to step out of their habitat. The article notes that since the initiation of this project, over 10 ponies have died as they got stuck in the mud pool. The article also highlights that local grass such as *tingoi* and *hoop* are the main fodder for ponies, however, they are found no more after the projects in Lamphelpat.

5. The above news item indicates violation of the provisions of the Environment Protection Act, 1986, Policy on Conservation of Manipuri Pony, 2016, and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

6. The news item raises substantial issue relating to compliance of the environmental norms and implementation of the provisions of scheduled enactment.

7. Power of the Tribunal to take up the matter *suo-motu* has been recognized by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the matter of "*Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai vs. Ankita Sinha & Ors.*" reported in 2021 SCC Online SC 897.

8. Hence, we implead the following as respondents in this matter:

(i) Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change,
Integrated Regional Office (Manipur) Law-U-Sib,
Lumbatngen, Near MTC Workshop, Shillong – 793 021

(ii) Loktak Development Authority, Manipur, Through its
Chairperson

The Secured Office Complex 2nd Floor, North Block AT-Line
Near 2nd MR Gate Imphal (W) Manipur – 79500.

(iii) Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Services, Through its
Principle Secretary

Manipur Secretariat, Imphal West-795001 Manipur, India.

(iv) Deputy Commissioner, Revenue Department, Imphal West,
DC Office, Lamphel – 795004

9. Let notice be issued to the above Respondents for filing their response before the Eastern Zonal Bench of the Tribunal.

10. Since the matter relates to the Eastern Zonal Bench, Kolkata, therefore, OA is transferred to the Eastern Zonal Bench for appropriate further action. Let the original record of this OA be transferred to the Eastern Zonal Bench, Kolkata.

11. List before Eastern Zonal Bench at Kolkata on 02.09.2024.

Prakash Shrivastava, CP

Arun Kumar Tyagi, JM

Dr. A. Senthil Vel, EM

July 02, 2024
O.A. No. 716/2024
HB

