

# Amlaye Fish Sanctuary

Amlarem Civil Sub-Division, endowed with abundant scenic beauty, is a popular itinerary for tourists visiting the eastern part of Meghalaya. The undulating landscape and wet climatic condition gives the region its distinctive topography. As a result, the region is dotted with numerous natural water bodies. These pristine rivers and lakes form natural repositories teeming with aquatic life which is of great economic importance as they provide an alternative source of livelihood to the people living in these parts.

It is a natural tendency for people to take for granted the very things that are freely available to them. Like any other, the waters here also face the danger of over exploitation. Along with consumption, conservation is of utmost importance to achieve balance in the natural order of things. Perhaps no one understands this concept better than the people of Nongbareh and surrounding villages.

Situated about 21 Kms from Amlarem market, Nongbareh village is home to the Amlaye fish sanctuary. Unknown to most including some local residents of Amlarem, the village practices a unique conservation method. Fishing of any kind is prohibited strictly in the sanctuary. However, the village council reserves the right to grant permission to fish, to those families whose earning member is unable to go to work as a result of an illness or a physical ailment. A majority of the people in these villages earn their livelihood through farming, by working in the fields or as daily wage earners. This thoughtful system in place allows people from the community to tide over their unexpected hardships and provide for their families until such time as they are able to work again. This tradition of ameliorating the suffering and helping another in times of need epitomizes the very concept of community living in this

part of the State.

The sanctuary is located on the Amlaye River and is maintained jointly by the three villages of Nongbareh Rim, Khonglah and Amkoi. The river due to its rocky bottom forms a natural basin for the fishes to thrive in. The sanctuary is populated with fish endemic to the river and no attempt has been made by the residents to introduce or populate the sanctuary with foreign species. Attempts to ascertain the origin of the fish sanctuary remained futile as no one from the village seem to remember the exact timeline of its inception. 'It has been there since I was a little boy' the village Headman of Nongbareh Rim, Ma Kun Pohlong says.

In the year 2002, a foot bridge was constructed at the site with grants from Border Area Development Department giving the sanctuary a much needed support. Subsequently a dyke was constructed by the Soil and Water Conservation Department and a waiting shed cum viewpoint was constructed with financial assistance from the Department of Fisheries.

Apart from the natural fishing spots, Amlarem region is scattered with a number of riverine systems, ponds and lakes which are maintained by different private parties and even individuals. These are opened to the public at suitable times of the year in the form of fishing competitions which attract a lot of recreational 'fishermen'. In contrast to these numerous 'commercial enterprises' the Amlaye fish sanctuary is one of a kind in the manner in which it still proudly preserves the traditional method of sharing in the community and usage of the available resources judiciously, for which the villages and their unique conservation practice deserve appreciation.

