



People in Conservation

Community based biodiversity conservation and livelihood security



Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group

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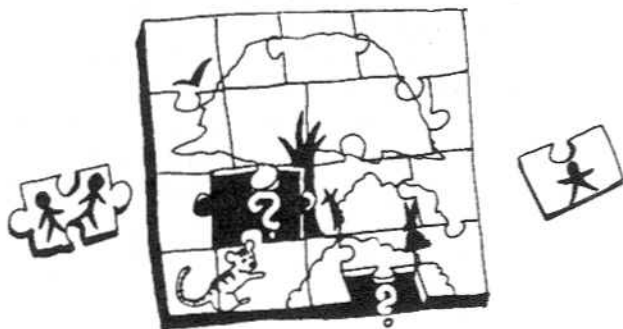
New spaces in the legal framework of conservation and human rights in India are being recognized, challenged, defined, redefined and claimed by various groups. As the year changed over, the long awaited, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition Of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (STOTFDA 2006) was notified. Around the same time all the tiger reserves, a category of protected area were upgraded to critical tiger habitats (CTHs) under the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 as amended in 2006, (WLPAA 2006). The reason for this seemingly hurried up-gradation was reported to be, to avoid the long process involved in relocating local communities out of areas identified as important for the survival of the tiger. This rationale seems clearly misplaced because both Acts mentioned above require an exacting settlement of forest rights process, and a long and participatory process before Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers can be moved out of their homes in the best interest of the tiger and wildlife conservation.

Community reserve, another category of protected area, allowed on individual or community land with the consent of the owner/community is starting to make its quiet presence felt. The responses to this category have been varied, pointing to different ground realities. While the village panchayat of Aloor in Kerala has requested to be notified a community reserve, another well-known and long standing conserving village, Kokkare Bellur in Karnataka, has opposed the attempts of the Forest Department to unilaterally propose the village as a community reserve without the consent of the community.

Acts that have the potential to serve the best interest of conservation and social equity have started unfolding in real time. Whether these actually realize their potential or fail to do so will depend on a number of factors. One of these being the cooperation between all stakeholders genuinely interested in the welfare of the forests, wild life and traditional forest dwellers. The equations are changing fast and those who believe in the positive inter-linkages between conservation and the welfare of forest dwellers, need to give direction to these Acts so that these can truly

serve the best interest of both, conservation and local forest dwelling communities.

Law and Policy



Violating the Inviolable

What does it mean when one says inviolable? According to the Webster Dictionary it means 'not violated or profaned'. Further looking up 'violate' reveals 'break/disregard/harm' - while 'profane' turns out to be 'treat something sacred with abuse, irreverence or contempt.'

Going by the dictionary, inviolable spaces for tigers or critical tiger habitats (CTHs), with reference to the WLPAA 2006 means spaces that will not be abused or harmed, and by no stretch of imagination can it mean remove all human beings, who have lived in an area for generations forging strong relationships with the surrounding landscape. Imagine a parallel in any other relationship, while all relationships should be inviolable – it would be ridiculous to think that to keep the relationship inviolable one or more of the partners necessarily have to be removed from the scene! That would be grave injustice to a partner.

That such injustice has been perpetuated in the past has been recognized by India, and the STOTFDA 2006 was passed to right this historical injustice. The WLPAA 2006 has also recognised the need to undo this injustice as is clear from the various steps of the newly inserted 38V (4) and 38V (5) in the WLPAA 2006.

38V (4)(i) establishes that all critical tiger habitats (CTH) are to be kept inviolable for the purpose of tiger conservation, establishing the link between inviolable

and critical tiger habitat. In the same sentence it says that this is done without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or such other forest dwellers, thus de-linking the determination of inviolable CTHs from the process of interfering with the rights of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers.

38V(4)(ii) states explicitly that in buffer areas coexistence is to be promoted. It is interesting to note however, that there is no explicit indication that it is to be avoided in CTH.(ref: box 1 for relevant sub sections of the Act).

38V(5) shows the various steps needed if traditional forest dwellers need to be relocated or even just have their rights adversely affected in CTH. The only way the following steps can be bypassed is where people agree to voluntary relocation on mutually agreed terms. (Ref: box 2 for relevant sub sections of the Act)

38V(5)(i) states that before any curtailment of rights or relocation can happen – Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers should have their rights recognized. Till this has happened – none of the further steps can be carried out by the State Government agency which in turn may or may not lead to curtailment of rights or relocation.

38V(5)(ii) Amongst other things, states that the concerned agency of the State Government has to establish that the activities of the traditional residents of the forest or their presence are sufficient to cause irreversible damage and threaten the tiger and its habitat. This needs the consent of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers in the area. Thus at this stage any one of the following scenarios may present itself:

- The Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other traditional forest dwellers (OTD) do not give consent.
- The ST and OTD do give consent, but the agency cannot conclusively prove irreversible damage and said threat.
- The ST and OTD have given consent and it has been proved that their activities or very presence will cause irreversible damage to the tiger and its habitat.

Only in the last case, is there a possibility of going to the next step which may or may not lead to relocation or curtailment of rights.



Box 1

38 V (4) Subject to the provisions contained in this Act, the State Government shall, while preparing a Tiger Conservation Plan, ensure the agricultural, livelihood, developmental and other interests of the people living in tiger bearing forests or a tiger reserve.

Explanation – For the purposes of this section, the expression “tiger reserve” includes -
38V(4)(i) core or critical tiger habitat areas of National Parks and Sanctuaries, where it has been established, on the basis of scientific and objective criteria, that such areas are required to be kept as inviolate for the purposes of tiger conservation, without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or such other forest dwellers, and notified as such by the State Government in consultation with an Expert Committee constituted for the purpose;

38V(4)(ii) buffer or peripheral areas consisting of the area peripheral to critical tiger habitat or core area, identified and established in accordance with the provisions contained in *Explanation(i)* above, where a lesser degree of habitat protection is required to ensure the integrity of the critical tiger habitat, with adequate dispersal for tiger species, and which aim at promoting co-existence between wild life and human activity with due recognition of the livelihood, developmental, social and cultural rights of the local people, wherein the limits of such areas are determined on the basis of scientific and objective criteria in consultation with the concerned Gram Sabha and an Expert Committee constituted for the purpose.

38V (5) (iii) Amongst other things, says that the concerned agency of the State Government has to come to the conclusion that other reasonable options of coexistence are not available. This too needs the consent of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers in the area. Again at this stage any one of the following scenarios may present itself:

- d. The ST and OFD do not give consent.
- e. The ST and OFD do give consent, but the agency concludes that there are other reasonable options of coexistence available.
- f. The traditional forest dwellers have given consent and it has been proved that other reasonable options of coexistence are not possible.

Again, only in the last case (f) is there any possibility of going to the next step which may or may not lead to relocation.

38V(5)(v) says that the informed consent of the gram sabhas concerned and of the persons affected, to the resettlement program needs to be obtained. Again the possibilities at this stage are:

- g. The affected gram sabha and concerned persons do not give consent.
- h. Both the affected gram sabha and the concerned persons give consent.

Only in the last case (h), is there a possibility of going to the next step which may or may not lead to relocation.

38(5)(vi) says that existing rights will not be interfered with until and unless the facilities and land allocation at the resettlement location are provided. In the event of the authorities not providing the promised relocation package, there is the possibility of:

- i. The package not being acceptable to those affected.
- j. The package being acceptable to those affected

According to the 38V(5) of the WLPAA 2006, the point (j) is where relocation will take place in an already established inviolate CTH.

Thus the need for CTHs to be kept inviolate is established directly in 38V (4), but whether the State needs to relocate people will be determined by 38V (5) (iii) and whether relocation will actually take place or not will be determined by 38(5) (vi).

38 V (5) Save as for voluntary relocation on mutually agreed terms and conditions, provided that such terms and conditions satisfy the requirements laid down in this sub-section, no Scheduled Tribes or other forest dwellers shall be resettled or have their rights adversely affected for the purpose of creating inviolate areas for tiger conservation unless –

(i) the process of recognition and determination of rights and acquisition of land or forest rights of the Scheduled Tribes and such other forest dwelling persons is complete;

(ii) the concerned agencies of the State Government, in exercise of their powers under this Act, establishes with the consent of the Scheduled Tribes and such other forest dwellers in the area, and in consultation with an ecological and social scientist familiar with the area, that the activities of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers or the impact of their presence upon wild animals is sufficient to cause irreversible damage and shall threaten the existence of tigers and their habitat;

(iii) the State Government after obtaining the consent of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers inhabiting the area, and in consultation with an independent ecological and social scientist familiar with the area, has come to a conclusion, that other reasonable options of co-existence are not available;

(iv) resettlement or alternative package has been prepared providing for livelihood for the affected individuals and communities and fulfils the requirements given in the National Relief and Rehabilitation Policy;

(v) the informed consent of the Gram Sabha concerned, and of the persons affected, to the resettlement programme has to be obtained; and

(vi) the facilities and land allocation at the resettlement location are provided under the said programme, otherwise their existing rights shall not be interfered with.

“Over 32,000 square kilometres of land in various tiger reserves have already been notified as out-of-bounds for humans after being notified as ‘critical tiger habitats’, in keeping with the requirements of the amended Wildlife Protection Act; villages lying in these areas will be relocated.” (Ref: “Govt. notifies Forest Rights Act”, Info Change News & Features (www.infochangeindia.org))

“under section 38(V) of the Wild Life Protection Act (Amendment) 2006, the states are required to declare areas within tiger reserves as critical tiger habitats so the villages within the areas could be relocated. This has to be done before the rules framed under The Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 takes effect. With the rules set for taking effect by the end of this month, it was utmost urgent for the state government to declare the areas as critical tiger habitat..... if it would have been done after the rules taking effect, the State would have to go through the very tedious and hostile process for relocation of villages inside the reserves.” (Ref: ‘Ministry notifies Critical Tiger Habitats’, The Indian Express, December 29, 2007)



"It was a good start to the new year for lakhs of tribals living in wilderness in the country with the government finally notifying the much-awaited Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forests Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, almost a year after it was passed by Parliament.....The very same day the PMO issued a list of core notified tiger reserves that would be out of bounds for human beings, bringing a sigh of relief from wildlife conservationists. It stated that as many as 11 tiger range states had been identified as critical big cat habitats. The notification said that an area of around 31,940 sq km of tiger reserves would be completely out of bounds to support a viable population of wild tigers in the country." (Ref: **'Tiger, tiger, vanishing fast', The Tribune, February 23, 2008**)

"While the core areas of tiger reserves are to be kept inviolate - without people - the buffer areas are to be managed as safe cohabitation space for people and the wild cat. An amendment had been made to the Wildlife Protection Act in December 2006 to pursue this but several states are yet to start the process of such a demarcation." (Ref: **'PM wants states to do their bit for tiger conservation', The Times of India February 23, 2008**)

On the ground, however there has been a frenzy of activity on the CTH front which seems to link inviolate CTH with 'no human use'. On the 31st of December 2007, 11 of the 17 states with tiger reserves identified and notified CTHs. The remaining 6 followed suit just a few days later, in effect making the total area notified as CTH (31,940 square kilometers) almost equal to the total area of the tiger reserves themselves.

The up-gradation of all tiger reserves to CTHs just around the time the STOTFDA 2006 came into force and the accompanying reports in leading news papers (see box 3A and 3B) have led to speculation in some circles that inviolate critical tiger habitat is being interpreted as areas of 'no human use' and will necessitate relocation in all cases. However as seen in 38V(4) of the WLPAA 2006, declaring an area as an inviolate CTH is one process while determining whether curtailing of rights or relocation will be necessary is another process altogether and this is outlined in 38V(5) of the same Act. And that under the Act, the declaration of critical tiger habitats neither guarantees the 'smooth relocation of villages' nor can it help bypass the process of relocation – however 'tedious' the entwined issues of social equity and tiger conservation may seem.

Equating inviolate CTH with 'no human use' and seeing relocation as a given in such areas would amount to disregarding 38V (5) of the WLPAA 2006 and a violation of spaces within the Act for a truly participatory process. These spaces need to be claimed logically, and publicly reiterated before repeated claims of inviolate equals 'no human use' get stuck in our collective consciousness.

While one concedes that some areas may ultimately need to be kept free of human use and people may relocate in the interest of the tiger – this should only be done after all the steps have been taken as mandated by 38V (5) in an open and participatory manner.

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Case Study

The Soligas and the Biligiri Rangaswami Temple Wildlife Sanctuary



The Biligiri Rangaswami (BR) Hills are in the Yelandur Taluka of Chamarajanagar District of Karnataka. In the midst of these hills lies the 540 square kilometre Biligiri Rangaswami Temple Wildlife Sanctuary (BRT WLS). The area has approximately 1000 known varieties of flora, 38 varieties of mammals, 278 varieties of birds, 22 varieties of reptiles, 116 butterfly species and a host of other wildlife.

This area is also the traditional home of the indigenous Soliga people who have lived here for generations. The sanctuary was declared in 1974 and expanded to its current size in 1987, bringing the area under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department.

The Soligas are known for their rich traditional knowledge and cultural life linked to the forest. Researchers have recorded that the Soligas can name 107 species of trees, 11 grasses and creepers, 13 types of fibres, 55 species of birds, 15 species of snakes, 97 species of insects and 41 other animal species. They have developed their own medicinal system known as *Naru-beru oushadi* (root and tuber medicine). Traditional healers effectively treat common ailments, set fractured bones and manage mental health problems. They use more than 300

local herbs for their medicinal and healing properties. There are areas, species and particular trees in the forest that are considered traditionally sacred and nothing is taken from these areas, species and trees. These are just a few of the indicators of the Soligas intricate link with the surrounding forest.

Traditionally semi-nomadic and practitioners of shifting cultivation, the Soligas have after the declaration of the area as a wildlife sanctuary adapted to settled cultivation. However they have retained a lot of their traditional farming practices, which they continue to engage in the small agricultural plots allotted to them by the Forest Department. The plots are vibrant and alive with a multitude of plants, trees, shrubs and herbs. Rain fed farming systems are used to grow a variety of crops like millet (*ragi*), maize (*jola*), niger (*huchuyellu*), field beans (*avarey*) and red gram (*togari*). Higher up in the hills where the weather is cooler and humid a multilayered, mixed relay system of cropping is used. Here crops like maize, mustard, amaranth, bananas and tubers are grown among forest trees. No artificial fertilizers or pesticides are used. The layered system of cropping helps in the retention of nutrients in the soil. Crops are supplemented with food collected from the forests like honey, tubers and wild fruits. The forests and the agricultural plots ensure that the Soligas have a well balanced diet.

Soliga dependence on Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) for household income is high in the BRT WLS, ranging from over 60% in the interior villages to 30% in the fringe villages. Thus, the Soligas depend largely on the forest for most of their needs of wild food, medicine, housing and livelihood.

Once declared a sanctuary, the resources of the area legally belong to the State. In the past, however the Forest Department has allowed the Soligas to collect NTFP. Moreover to help the Soligas sell their collection three Large Area Adivasi Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS) were set up in the area and all NTFP collected by the Soligas was sold at these LAMPS, ensuring a stable income to the Soligas. The Soligas too adapted to the changed arrangement and continued to be proactive in the protection and conservation of the sanctuary. Thus until recently BRT WLS was one of the few protected areas in India that could boast of an amicable relationship between the local community and the Forest Department.

Besides BRT WLS is also one of the few that has the benefit of the long term and sustained support of a civil society organization, Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) and a research oriented organization, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE). VGKK plays a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic lives of the local adivasi population, enhancing their livelihood options, helping them in organization and administration and providing educational and health inputs. ATREE has helped the Soligas with building capacity for sustainable forms of harvesting of NTFP like *amla* and honey. ATREE has also been monitoring the ecological impacts of harvesting and contends that the levels are sustainable with no significant negative impact on the species being harvested. Thus VGKK and ATREE have worked with the Soligas, each other and with the Forest Department and considerably expanded on the earlier 'enterprise based conservation project' that was conducted in the sanctuary.

This scenario changed in 2006. The Wildlife Protection Act (1972) was amended in 2003, whereby extraction of forest resources for 'commercial use' was no longer permitted. The amendment has resulted in serious loss of livelihood to forest dwellers across the country, pushing many to near starvation. The amendment was implemented in the BRT WLS in 2006 and has had a tremendous impact on the Soliga livelihood and sustenance needs and has resulted in the breakdown of relationships between the Soligas and the Forest Department officials.

A national daily, The Times of India (April 26, 2007) reported incidents of large forest fires in BRT WLS. The fires started in mid March 2007 and some of these were reported to have raged for a few days. The newspaper quoted forest officials as having put the blame on the Soliga adivasis living inside the sanctuary, reportedly in retaliation against the ban on NTFP collection. Further on 30th March 2007, there were reports in the local newspaper, Prajavani which stated that, some Soligas were physically beaten and kicked by Forest Department officials.

Prima facie, it seemed improbable, that the Soligas with their traditional links with the forests would resort to such planned destruction of the sanctuary. The matter was investigated by Kalpavriksh, which has been following the developments in the BRT WLS for

decades. After talking to all the key stakeholders in the area – namely the Soligas, VGKK, ATREE and the Forest Department, visiting relevant fire sites and looking up all available relevant records, the investigators came up with some key findings and recommendations.

The findings indicated that it was most unlikely that the forest fires were solely or predominantly the act of any single agency. Investigations pointed to a combination of factors that could have been the cause behind the higher incidence of fires in 2007. Among these were,

- A drier than usual period in the first quarter of the year
- The non removal of *lantana* undergrowth making available large piles of combustible material
- The inadequacy of fire prevention measures taken by the Forest Department that year
- The possibility of a stray fire started by a handful of Soligas due to anger against the NTFP ban imposed
- The possibility of non-tribals from the surrounding areas, retaliating against the Forest Department for actions taken against them
- Accidental fires caused by tourists.

The Soligas had been blamed, arrested and beaten up even though none of the other possibilities had been investigated by the officials. The investigation however pointed out that while there may have been multiple causes for the fire to start, this year unlike in previous years, some Soligas may have been less enthusiastic about dousing the fire or reporting it to the Forest Department because of deterioration in their relationship following the 2003 NTFP ban being implemented from 2006 onwards.

The more serious aspects that the investigation uncovered were the severe socio-economic deprivation and dispossession of the Soliga adivasis, the violation of their basic constitutional guarantees and fundamental human rights as a result of the NTFP ban, and the significant repercussions of these on conservation itself, as seen from incidents where violations like cutting of *amla* trees which would have been stopped or reported earlier were ignored by the Soligas post 2006.

The recommendations by the investigating team among other things asked for the reviewing of the 2003 amendment of the WLPA 1972, to allow bonafide use of NTFP for both traditional sustenance as well as livelihood requirements with appropriate regulations and restrictions arrived at jointly with the local community.

The investigating team also pointed out that the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 or the STOTFDA 2006 would change the equation between the Soligas and the Forest Department and had the potential to provide very significant socio-economic benefits to the Soligas. The team however cautioned the stakeholders that the Act also could lead to serious ecological damage if the rights recognised by the Act are not balanced by clear responsibilities and authority to ensure conservation. A related recommendation was that the stakeholders need to gain a better understanding of the provisions and implications of the STOTFDA 2006 in relation to BRT WLS and be ready for intervention to enable Soligas get their rights as well as ensure that they have the authority and the responsibility to enhance the conservation of forests and wildlife around them.

Though the situation looked grim, the investigation also pointed to the fact that given the Soliga's traditional conservation ethos, the long term work of a CSO and research organization in the area, the serious efforts in the past of the Forest Department in working out an 'enterprise based conservation project' in the area and the good relationships that have been developed between all these stakeholders for a long time, BRT WLS has the potential to move towards a truly collaborative model of conservation. Such a model involves local communities at all stages of conservation, and not just as disempowered participants in a ready made plan in which the local community has no say.

In summary, while the pre 2006 situation in BRT WLS is indicative of how different agencies can come together to make both conservation and livelihood work. The fires are indicative of how knee jerk and authoritarian amendments and Acts can be counter-productive to the forest dwellers' sustenance and livelihoods and how this backfires on conservation efforts. But the history of co-operation in the

sanctuary is long and the recent damage to forest and relationships can be undone and the BRT WLS can realize its potential to become a truly collaboratively managed protected area. Sometimes it takes a fire to make us look afresh at all that is good and positive in a situation and move forward with renewed commitment. Maybe the forest fire of BRT WLS was one such fire.

Sources:

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Contact: the editorial address

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News From Indian States

Arunachal Pradesh

The Monpas Help Conserve the Pangchen Valley

The forests of Arunachal Pradesh have a wide variety of flora and fauna. Among them are medicinal plants like rhododendrons and many endangered animals such as the Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) and the Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*).

The Monpa tribals live in the Pangchen Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. Protection of forests and wildlife has traditionally been an integral part of the Monpa tribal culture. This was proved when a group of Monpa youth caught an IFS officer and a fellow Monpa guide hunting in their forests. The Monpa guide was starved for a day and fined a hefty sum of Rupees 10,000 by his fellow tribesmen, while the IFS officer was let off with the warning that he would be reported to his superiors if he was ever caught hunting in the local forests again.

Soon after this incident a letter was drafted by the tribals and forwarded to the Tawang Deputy Commissioner (Forest) and defence officials. The letter said, "Fishing, hunting of wild and domestic animals and birds is banned in Pangchen Valley. If a villager is caught hunting, then the fine will be Rs.10,000 per head. If the hunter is an outsider then he will be penalized Rs.20,000 per head."

Deging Dorje, a local Monpa, said that in the past, their tribe had imposed stricter fines and even made culprits run several times in the forest to dissuade them from harming the forest and its wildlife again.

Recognising the value of local participation in conservation, the State Government and the Forest Department have joined hands with WWF India in Arunachal Pradesh to give the co-operation a formal shape.

According to Sejal Worah Director (Programme), WWF-India, "The government and the locals have been very positive in the initiative. The concept of community conservation is not new in North-East India. We are just helping the locals and the

government prepare a formal draft for checks and balances." Villagers too confirm that in recent times poaching in the area has declined significantly.

Source: Meenal Dubey, 'The tribesmen are one in protecting their forest from any threat', Mail Today, November 2007

Apatani Traditions Revisited



The Apatani tribe lives in the Apatani valley in the lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Apatanis are well known for their traditional rice and fish cultivation, their rich agro-biodiversity and the associated traditional knowledge that supports this agro-ecosystem.

The Apatanis have taboos, customs and a belief system that protect the environment as well as their socio-cultural identity and livelihoods. Hunting of animals and using many of the forest products are strictly prohibited during major rituals and ceremonies. A number of flora and fauna species are considered sacred and are protected. Among them are: bamboo, castanopsis and the ficus. They grow and protect reeds like the *Phragmites karka* and chameleon plant (*Houttuynia cordata*) along the river banks. The roots of these reeds check soil erosion. *Phragmites* is only harvested for traditional mat making and indigenous salt preparation, while the chameleon plant is used for its medicinal properties as well as a vegetable. The local traditional knowledge encompasses an understanding of local crop-soil interactions, ethno-pedology, and soil nutrient and water conservation.

The Apatanis also have well defined groups and institutions that support their way of life. For example, the traditional institution called *Bogo* is headed by the *Bogo Ahtoh* who is in charge of the construction and maintenance of the water supply system and ensuring that all families within the group get an equal share of water. The *Bogo Ahtoh* who is selected from within the group can hold the post for one to three years. Similarly the *Enthee Patang* is headed by the *Patang Ahtoh* and is in charge of harvesting and allied responsibilities.

In the recent past, external practices have percolated into the highly traditional self-supporting system. For example, barbed fencing replaced traditional bio-fencing and people stopped planting herbs and useful shrubs which provided the people with medicine while preventing soil erosion. Similarly in 1990, farmers accepted 'High Yielding Variety' (HYV) seeds, inorganic fertilizers and intensive fruit farming. However, over the last fifteen years, farmers have realized that these new methods have caused great loss of agro-biodiversity and have negatively affected their livelihoods. Hence the people are reverting to their traditional seeds and agricultural methods.

Apatanis have recently passed a resolution that agricultural land shall not be converted into any other land use and that all unsustainable extraction of resources (example: sand mining and stone mining along irrigation sources) will be stopped. Also penalties will be imposed where traditional rituals and practices are violated.

Source: Mihin Dollo

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The Pakke Tiger Reserve Initiative

The heads of sixteen villages bordering the Pakke Tiger Reserve in East Kameng District in Arunachal Pradesh, have formed a committee called the *Ghora Aabhe*, to protect the reserve where hunting animals illegally has been a common practice. Tana Tapi, a Divisional Forest Officer has helped the villagers in the formation of the committee.

The committee recently passed a resolution listing penalties for wildlife violations. Following this resolution, about 32 guns were seized from poachers. Many of the poachers have now promised to work for the protection of the reserve. The committee will also work to strengthen intelligence networks and enforcement activities.

The village elders, *Gaon Burahs* play a crucial role in persuading villagers to stop hunting and use natural resources in a sustainable manner. Currently the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) supports the *Gaon Burahs* carrying out conservation work by paying them an honourarium.

The Pakke Tiger Reserve is contiguous with the Nameri Tiger Reserve of Assam and is an important habitat of big cats as well as rare and endangered wildlife species such as the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Asiatic Blackbear (*Ursus thibetanus*), and Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*). In this area hunting for food is a widely prevalent practice, and the current steps taken by the local village heads in conjunction with other agencies will go a long way in conserving the wildlife and the forests.

Source: "Villagers join hands to protect Pakhui Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh", The Hindustan Times

Contact: Divisional Forest Officer, Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary Division, P.O. Seijusa, District West Kameng 790 103, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Assam

Deepor Beel

Deepor Beel (10,000 acres) in Assam provides breeding and feeding grounds for millions of birds and is a major "staging ground" on migratory flyways. 219 species of birds including more than 70 migratory species have been recorded here. The wetland provides critical habitat to 17 globally threatened bird species including the critically endangered Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Baers Pochard (*Aythya baeri*), Lesser Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos javanicus*), Pallas's Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), Slender-billed Vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*), Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) and Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*). Birdlife International has declared Deepor Beel an Important Bird Area (IBA), with high priority for conservation. The area is also recognized as one of the most significant wetland systems in the world under the Ramsar International Convention on Wetlands. The wetland also supports a highly concentrated and diverse indigenous freshwater fish population (approximately 50 species belonging to 19 families). The wetland is a major fish breeding and nursery ground, supplying fish-stocks to other nearby wetlands and rivers.

Fourteen indigenous villages comprising of 1,200 families around Deepor Beel depend directly and indirectly on the wetland's natural resources for their livelihood. Freshwater fish is a vital source of protein as well as that of income for these communities. Their health directly depends on the health of the wetland ecosystem.

The rainfall in Assam is one of the highest in the world. Recent studies have proved that without the vast Deepor Beel wetland ecosystem to absorb and store the storm waters, the capital city Assam, Guwahati would be flooded every monsoon season.

In utter disregard of Deepor's ecological value, its Ramsar and IBA status and the livelihood of local communities, the city of Guwahati regularly dumps its garbage into Deepor's waters. Government authorities look the other way as illegal settlements and industries crop up around the wetland, exacerbating the waste and pollution problems.

Further uncontrolled settlement and industrial development could alter water flow patterns and fill the wetlands with sediment.

What is encouraging is that some of the indigenous people who rely on Deepor's vast resources and the scientific community have joined forces to stop the wanton destruction of Deepor Beel.

The theme of World Wetlands Day (February 2nd) 2008, is "Healthy Wetlands; Healthy People." The indigenous communities of Deepor Beel along with the scientific community are asking the world to help them protect their health and the health of the Deepor wetlands. The solution they propose is a comprehensive management system with strong community participation.

Bhupen Das, a representative of the Deepor Beel Fishermen's Cooperative Society, gives voice to the sentiments of the people when he says, "Our forefathers protected this wetland and we are committed to do the same as we depend on the wetland for our livelihood."

Source: "Move to conserve Deepor Beel with help of locals", The Assam Tribune, January 2008

Contacts:

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Karnataka

Kokkare Bellur



For centuries the Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelicanus philippensis*), Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and man have coexisted in the village of Kokkare Bellur in the Mandya District of Karnataka. For over two decades now a village association called *Hejjarla Balaga* or the Pelican Clan has proactively worked to save and increase the birds' habitats and rehabilitate injured birds. Besides these two species, the presence of another 140 bird species has also been recorded in this tiny village. The villagers welcome nature lovers and serious bird watchers and the local youth and children enthusiastically help visitors identify the different species and show them around the rehabilitation centre.

Though the conservation efforts have been local, there have been attempts by the Forest Department to turn the bird loving village into a tourist hotspot with fancy hotels and concrete watch towers. The villagers are of the opinion that such intense tourism will lead to a great influx of tourists which will be harmful to the birds as well as the social fabric of this peaceful and picturesque village.

Recently there was a move by the Forest Department to unilaterally propose the area as a community reserve, a kind of protected area that can be declared on individual or community land with the consent of the local community. The villagers have written letters to the DC, PCCF and the Governor to register their protest against this unilateral move by the Forest Department.

Source: Amit Upadhye, "Villagers oppose conservation reserve", Sunday Times of India, Times City

Contact : Manu, Hejjarle Ballaga, Kokkare Bellur, Maddur Taluka, Mandya District, 571433 Karnataka, India; Mobile: 09886383793; Email: pelicanmanu@gmail.com

The Slender Loris Finds a Home

The Slender Loris (*Loris tardigradus*), a tiny primate, is found in large numbers in Nagavalli village situated 86 kilometres from Bangalore in Karnataka. In 1996 some school children noticed two of the primates with long pencil thin arms and legs, no tail and saucer like eyes, in a bamboo clump in their school compound and informed their teacher Gundappa B.V. of the same.

Later, the primates were spotted in many areas within the village and in surrounding areas. The villagers are careful not to disturb the shy animal and have even started proactively protecting it. For instance they have requested the electricity department to insulate electric wires running across the village so that the primates do not get electrocuted.

Conservationists are now planning to put pressure on the Forest Department to declare the village a community reserve.



Source: Amit Upadhye, "This Village has an unusual friend", Sunday Times of India, Times City
Contact: Ahmed Ameen, Wildlife Aware Nature Club, Nisarga Layout, Tumkur, 572173 Karnataka; Email: tumkurameen@gmail.com

Grameen Mahila Okkuta



Mangamma is a farmer and a native seed conservator. She has a 20 acre farm. On 10 acres she grows paddy, ragi, maize, sesame, cowpea, avare, togari and other crops. She intercroops ragi with avare and other pulses on 3 acres. On the rest of her small holding she grows 20 varieties of vegetables including tomato, brinjal, chilli, onion, gourd, ladyfinger and many leafy vegetables. This traditional method of mixed cropping and farming ensures the maintenance of high biodiversity on the field as well as food and livelihood for her family.

Mangamma is also a board member of a group called the *Grameen Mahila Okkuta* (Rural Women's Federation) in Mulbagal Taluka in Kolar District in Karnataka. She represents a band of vibrant women leaders who have played a key role in the empowerment and transformation of 145 villages in Kolar District. These women are conservators of traditional seeds and holders and revivers of the traditional knowledge around these seeds.

One of the places where the federation exchanges seeds and ideas with others is at the frequently held *Janapada Jattras* (folklore fair) in Kolar City. Mangamma and her friends set up stalls at such fairs. Their objective is clear. They are here to pass on the lessons of self-sufficiency through conservation of indigenous seeds on local fields. Besides this, these fairs also give them an opportunity to market their products.

Many who visit the *Grameen Mahila Okkuta* stall feel nostalgic as they see seeds and grains, which were thought to be lost. There are those who want to take some of these long forgotten seeds home to grow on their fields. The federation is happy to share the seeds – all that one has to promise in return is that when the crops from these seeds are harvested one will give back double the amount of the grains to the seed bank. Thus more members join the increasing team of local seed conservators.

Today people from far and wide recognize the *Grameen Mahila Okkuta* as a reliable source of good quality indigenous seeds and 350 farmers access these seed banks every year. What is most amazing is that this turn around has happened in the last eight years. Earlier the people of this area were reeling under the dual attack of drought and debt, both a direct fall out of having embraced the monoculture of HYV plants that were sold aggressively in the seventies with the promise of assured prosperity to the people. But the crops brought along with them chemical fertilizers, pesticides and high water requirements. Soon the underground water level fell from 30 feet to below 800 feet. Tanks and ponds which are the mainstay of water in this district lost their water holding capacity due to silting. Easy availability of chemical fertilizers had reduced the farmers' interest in dredging the fertile tank silt. The land abused with chemicals and bereft of water could no longer support those it had supported for generations and people left their fields and migrated to the cities as labourers.

Happily today, in eight years the situation has been reversed and a movement has started in Kolar District to save local seeds and local agricultural practices which not only ensures the food security of the area, the livelihoods of these people but the enrichment of the agro-biodiversity of the area as well. And women like Mangamma who are equipped with traditional seeds and associated knowledge are at the heart of this movement.

Source: Anitha Pailoor, "Native varieties take back the show", LEISA India, June 2007, Vol. 9 No. 2

Contact: Anitha Pailoor, Krishnalaya, 1st Main, 4th Cross, Narayanpura, Dharwad, 580008 Karnataka, India; Phone: 0836-2748277; Email: anithapailoor@gmail.com

Kerala

The Kole Wetlands and Aloor Village

The Kole Wetlands spread over an area of 13,632 hectares in Thrissur and Malappuram Districts of Kerala. The name *Kole* refers to a unique cultivation method in Malayalee. Kole is regarded as the rice bowl of Central Kerala and meets about 40% of the regions rice requirement. It generates 12,00,000 man days of work and a yearly income of more than Rs. 17 crores.

Ornithologists have recorded 241 species of birds in this area among these are globally threatened species such as the Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*), Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) and Greater-spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*).



Today the wetlands and its avian and human residents are threatened by changing land use patterns. Paddy fields are being converted into high cash yielding plantations and in to construction sites that are destroying the wetlands. Besides this, rampant poaching has also taken its toll on the avian population. The 85,000 strong population of birds in this area a decade ago has been reduced to a mere 35,000.

The wetland has been recognized as an 'Important Bird Areas' by Birdlife International and in 2002 the area was also declared protected under the RAMSAR

Convention. However this recognition though important does not afford legal protection to the site.

Hope for conservationists, has come from Aloor, one of the Kule villages in Thrissur District. The move in Aloor village has come from the community to save the endangered Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*). For decades, this village, has been one of the breeding grounds for the many avian species that flock the Kule wetlands. Six pairs of Darters however, were seen here for the first time in 1999. The number of breeding pairs in Aloor swiftly rose to 30 in 2005 and has been rapidly increasing since then.

Local bird lovers and the village panchayat have consistently made efforts to highlight the ecological importance of the birds and the wetlands around. The efforts have paid off. In 2003, when the Kerala State Electricity Board came up with plans to cut down bird habitat trees in the nesting season, the villagers got together and secured a stay order from the Kerala High Court. The IHRD Polytechnic in the village has planted 100 habitat trees around their campus in the past two years. Currently there are 62 Darter nests in the polytechnic campus alone. Latest in the many conservation efforts of the village is the resolution of the panchayat requesting the State Government to declare 100 acres of the village area which forms part of the Kule Wetlands as a community reserve. This has been proposed in the hope that this will ensure that 100 acres of the wetland will have all the privileges of a wildlife sanctuary. This will stop the rampant land use change and prevent the builders' lobby from taking over the wetlands as well as retain governance of the area to a large extent in the hands of the local community.

Sources:

Venus Vinod Upadhyaya "Warning bells in Kule", The Hindu, October 2007

Venus Vinod Upadhyaya, "Feathered Friends", The Hindu, July 2007

Contact: P.O. Nameer, Associate Professor (Wildlife) & Head, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Kerala Agricultural University, KAU (PO), 680 656 Thrissur, Kerala, India; Phone: 487-2370 050 & 2371 018 extn: -221, Fax: 91-487-2371 040; Email: nameer.ommer@gmail.com

Orissa

Water for Every Peafowl

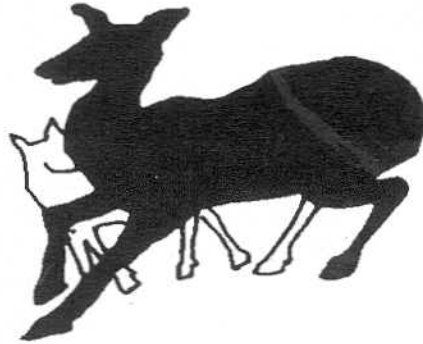
The locals of the Pakidi Hills in the Ganjam District of Orissa believe that Peafowls (*Pavo cristatus*) are harbingers of good fortune and have taken a number of steps to protect them from harm. Locals from six villages (Sobhachandanpur, Kerikerijhole, Ambuabadi, Bharatpalli, Chatradhepa and Shelliguda) situated close to the protected forest zone near Aska, have formed a protection committee and are working towards creating mass awareness about the peafowl. Moreover, throughout the year and especially during summer every house in these villages puts out earthen water troughs in the courtyard, so that no peafowl remains thirsty. The birds move around confidently in and out of courtyards, quenching their thirst secure in the knowledge that they will not be harmed in any way by the local community.

Forest Department sources admit that the population of pea-fowl in the area has gone up due to the efforts of the local committee and that habitat improvement and conservation measures may lead to further improvement in their numbers.



Source: "Turning peacock protection into a mass movement", India First Bureau, Bhubaneswar
Contact: Y.Giri Rao, Senior Programme Officer, Vasundhara, 15, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751016 Orissa, India; Phone: 0674-2542011, Mobile:094371 10915; Email: ygiri.rao@gmail.com

Blackbuck Protection in Bhetanoi-Balipadar

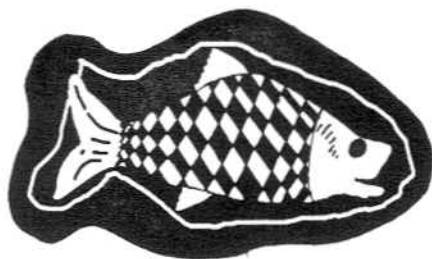


Seventy villages in the Bhetanoi-Balipadar region of Ganjam District in Orissa actively protect Blackbucks (*Antelope cervicapra*) even though this is a drought prone area and there is a considerable amount of crop depredation due to the Blackbucks. This practice has been around since 1918. However in the last 50 years, protection measures have been strengthened. As a result currently there are about 500 Blackbucks in the area. 60% of the village land has been left fallow due to water scarcity and crop damage by Blackbucks. Yet the villagers who believe that these antelopes are devotees of Lord Rama and Krishna stop anyone from hunting them. They have requested the government, that they be given irrigation facilities, to offset the drought situation and depredation of crops in the area.

Source: Y. Giri Rao

Contact: Y.Giri Rao, Senior Programme Officer, Vasundhara, 15, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751016 Orissa, India; Phone: 0674-2542011, Mobile:094371 10915; Email: ygiri.rao@gmail.com

Mahashir Protection



Humma village situated on the banks of the river Mahanadi, in Orissa is well known for its ancient Shiva temple as well as for the reverence that the local community has for the 'kado' or 'Mahashir' fish (*Tor mahanadicus*) as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The species is endemic, endangered and of great commercial value. About one and a half kilometres of the river around the temple is protected by the villagers. The fisher folk do not catch the Mahashir in this stretch. The temple committee along with the entire village takes decisions on the conservation efforts in the area. The protection efforts by the local community play an important role in replenishing the wild stock of Mahashir. The Mahashir in turn keep the stretch of river clean by feeding on the phytoplankton that flourish in the river bed. This area also has a healthy population of Jungle Cats (*Felis chaus*), Jackals (*Canis aureus*), other animals and various water birds.

Source: Y. Giri Rao

Contact: Y. Giri Rao, Senior Programme Officer, Vasundhara, 15, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751016 Orissa, India; Phone: 0674-2542011, Mobile: 094371 10915; Email: ygiri.rao@gmail.com

Asian Openbill Storks in Rugudipalli

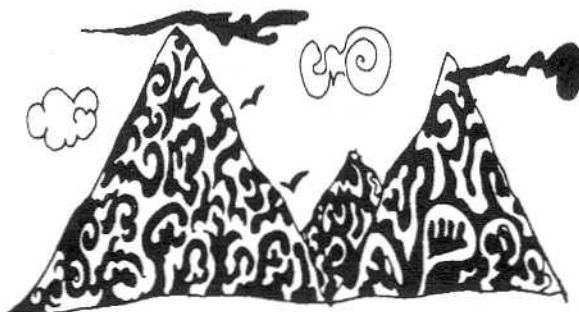
Rugudipalli is a village in the Bolangir District of Orissa. Since the 1980s, the Asian Openbill Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), locally known as *Gendelia* come to this village in June every year, and stay on for seven months nesting and breeding. The villagers have formed a committee to protect the birds. If anyone is found causing injury to these birds or is caught trying to do so, a fine of Rs.1,051 is imposed on the person by the committee. The Asian Openbill

stork feeds mainly on mollusks and fresh water snails, thus ridding the nearby agricultural fields of pests.

Source: Y. Giri Rao

Contact: Y. Giri Rao, Senior Programme Officer, Vasundhara, 15, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751016 Orissa, India; Phone: 0674-2542011, Mobile: 094371 10915; Email: ygiri.rao@gmail.com

The Dongria Kondhs and Their Niyam Rajah



The Niyamgiri Hills in Orissa are home to primitive tribes like the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondh, Majhi Kondh and Jharania Kondh who live in about 200 villages and worship the hills as Niyam Rajah (*Lord of Law And Order*). The Kondhs have a rich and symbiotic relationship with the Niyamgiri hills. For generations they have conserved the area with their strong tribal wisdom and faith while the hills and forests have supported their daily sustenance and livelihood.

Little wonder then, that the hills continue to be home to a number of vulnerable wildlife fauna species including Leopards (*Panthera pardus*), Sloth Bears (*Melursus ursinus*), Pangolins (*Manis crassicaudata*), Palm Civets (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), Giant Squirrels (*Ratufa indica*) and Sambars (*Cervus unicolor*). It is also a part of an elephant migration corridor and home to the Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*). The Niyamgiri Hills are also home to more than 300 plant species of which 50 are known to be medicinal plants. The hills are the birth place of hundreds of streams (most of which are perennial) that feed at least two large rivers namely the Vamsadhara and the Nagavalli. These rivers flow through Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and are the

sources of drinking and irrigation water to millions of people in both these states.

There has been a consistent attempt by Vedanta Alumina Limited (VAL), a multinational with an international track record of violation of environmental and human right laws, to mine these hills for their rich bauxite reserve. Mining in the Niyamgiri hills will cause irreparable loss to the already dwindling wildlife of India, spell doom to the rich and pristine biodiversity of the area, dry up the streams and deny drinking and irrigation water to millions of people in the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. It will also cause irreparable damage to the lives of these Primitive Tribal groups (PTGs) and result in the annihilation of their unique way of life, the resources they conserve and their associated traditional knowledge. The Kondhs have through many protests made it clear that they do not want the Niyamgiri mined or their way of life changed.

A court case filed by Shri Biswajit Mohanty of Wildlife Society of Orissa, Academy of Mountain Environics and Shri Prafulla Samantara (representing the interest of the local community) in the Supreme Court (SC) resulted in a verdict dated 23rd November 2007 where a decision was taken not to allow VAL to mine bauxite from Niyamgiri. However, in a surprising twist of events the very same verdict invited Sterlite Industries of India Limited (SIIL), which is clearly a close associate of VAL and has an equally bad track record to apply for mining rights in the area. Seizing upon this unusual opportunity presented to it by the Supreme Court, the board of directors of Sterlite Industries passed a resolution three days later agreeing to "substitute" for Vedanta Aluminium in the Niyamgiri Hills bauxite mining project. The application filed by Sterlite Industries to take over the mining came up for hearing on 15th February, 2008 and the SC has directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to give its expert comments on it in two weeks. Thus the sacred hills may yet be mined and the fate of Niyamgiri, its amazing biodiversity and the very existence of the local indigenous primitive tribes hang in a precarious balance.

This time will the Supreme Court hear the voice of the primitive tribes? Or will the voices be stifled again? The question before the court was never "who should be allowed to mine the Niyamgiri" but "whether the Niyamgiri should be mined at all?"

Sources:

Madhu Sarin, "Decoding the Niyamgiri verdict", Down To Earth, January 2008

Contact: Madhu Sarin, 48, Sector 4, Chandigarh 160001; Email: msarin@satyam.net.in

Kanchi Kohli, "Orissa's Niyamgiri tribals await apex court verdict", India Together, November 2007

Contact : Kanchi Kohli, 134, Tower 10, Supreme Enclave, Mayur Vihar Phase I, Delhi-110091; Phone: (011)22753714; Email: kanchikohli@gmail.com

<http://www.freewebs.com/epgorissa/>

Contact : Nachiketa, Email: epgorissa@gmail.com

International News

The Pokomo Community of Kenya



Gwano and Ndera, are two locations in Kenya that are the ancestral homes of the local Pokomo community who have lived here for generations. The area is also home to the Red Colobus and the Crested Mangabey species of monkeys. In the mid 1970s the Local County Council of the area passed a resolution to hand over Gwano and Ndera to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to set up a game reserve for the protection of the rare species of primates found in this area. This was done without the consent of the local community. When informed of the decision, the community protested but the

government went ahead and established the reserve and ordered the local people to leave their ancestral homes.

For sometime after this the local residents carried on with their lives as usual in the area without any interference from the authorities. In 1991, the game rangers arrived with their guns and started harassing people and evicting them on the argument that the locals were trespassing in a game reserve. A number of locals were arrested and charged for trespass.

In 1993, the community went to court to reclaim their rightful place in their ancestral home and to protest the handing over of their homes without their consent in the name of wildlife protection. The villagers said, 'if there are people who can protect the rare Red Colobus and Crested Mangabey monkeys, it's we and not the KWS'. However KWS had just received a grant of Sh 500 million from the World Bank through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to develop the reserve and increased the level of harassment, threats and evictions in the area.

On February 19th, 2007, The High Court gave its ruling. According to this ruling the Tana River Primate National Reserve is no more. KWS and its agents are barred from evicting any resident from the two locations. The residents are entitled to cultivate their farms without being harassed or obstructed by the KWS and its agents. KWS has also been restrained from interfering with the wildlife at the two locations as the ruling states that the local people know best how to conserve the endangered monkey species. The order puts to rest a dispute of more than 34 years between KWS and the County Council on one hand and the local residents on the other hand over who has rights to conserve the rare monkey species.

Source: Ngumbao Kithi, "Kenya: villagers free to live with monkeys again", The Nation, Nairobi, June 2007

Forests Alive!

Author: Sujatha Padmanabhan

Kalpavriksh has brought out "Forests Alive!" an environment education handbook on a CD. This is the result of a collaborative programme with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE) and the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyan Kendra (VGKK) in Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka.

The CD contains valuable information pertaining to the sanctuary and the wildlife within it. It also includes information relating to the lives of the Soliga tribal community members who live within the sanctuary.

Generously illustrated with drawings and maps, the CD contains descriptions of over 175 activities. Educational aids like posters, flash cards and game cards specific to the BR Hills have also been developed. The entire package can be used as part of an Environment Education Programme for students from Classes 1 to 10. It can be adapted for non-formal learning programmes as well. The book will also be of interest to teachers, environment educators, the Forest Department, wildlife tourists, NGOs and other concerned individuals. While the content is set in the BR Hills, it can serve as a useful tool for other areas, as much of what it contains can either be used directly or modified.

For more information and/or to place orders, please contact kvbooks@vsnl.net

Deep Economy

Author: Bill McKibben

Publisher: Times Books

Deep Economy is a series of essays that culminate into one cohesive idea. The idea being that the objective of economic growth is to improve the quality of human life and that if this objective is not fulfilled by the current model of economic growth, the model should be re-evaluated and replaced with ones that meet the stated objective under current circumstances.

McKibben does not champion any particular model of economic growth as being more competent than others rather he thinks that the idea is to find practical site specific models that suit different sites.

The author also argues that it is no longer practical to associate 'More' with 'Better'. When industrialisation started, producing more was linked to making available a better quality of life; today however we have gone beyond the point where more means better. He talks of 'hyper individualised' people, who need a sense of community and other parameters like less pollution and calmer lives to better their quality of life and not more money and extrapolates that models of economic growth and production methods that fulfil these and other current needs need to be pursued instead of models that just help us to produce more.

This is a highly readable and interesting book which looks deep into the primary objectives that should guide our choice of economic models.

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