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Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

Because prevention is always better than cure!

Two reports in this issue of the *PA Update* stand out for re-affirmation of that age-old wisdom that prevention is indeed better than cure. One of these reports mentions recent communications sent by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change to power related ministries about the continued electrocution deaths of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). The other is a Supreme Court order asking for the demolition of the boundary wall constructed by the Numaligarh Refinery near the Kaziranga National Park as it blatantly obstructs traditional movement corridors of elephants in the region.

While the two specific developments are both welcome, and concerned parties need to be commended for the initiatives, there are important questions that they also raise rather starkly - why and how is it that these situations were created in the first place? Was it not known that the area where the Numaligarh refinery was allowed permission many years ago was an important elephant habitat? Was it not known when wind power plants were sanctioned or the cable lines were being erected in Gujarat and Rajasthan that these were prime habitats of the GIB?

Needless to say, if we had recognized and respected that elephants move in the Numaligarh area, the wall would not have been allowed in the first place and similar would be the conclusion for areas inhabited by the GIB. And these are only two of hundreds of similar such situations of ignorance and/or complete disregard for the situation on the ground that the *PA Update* has been reporting about over the years. Significantly, and this is well known too, many such projects come up in dis-regard for legal provisions that exist to exactly avoid such situations.

Can we ask now, for instance, that the GIB's habitat be returned to its original pristine state minus the windmills, minus the high-tension lines, minus the road networks? Is it possible at all? Does the GIB really stand a chance going into the future? Imagine how irrelevant the questions would have been if we'd gone by the dictum that prevention is better than cure. And let's not forget that asking now for the wall the refinery constructed to be broken down or for the cables to go underground or be provided reflectors is only dealing with the symptoms. These are band-aid solutions that are hugely expensive and cannot, in any way, deal with the fundamental malaise.

Rest assured, measures such as these won't ensure that the long-term future is safe and secure either for the GIB, that nearly became India's national bird or the elephant who, we know, is this country's National Heritage Animal. And imagine now the fate of lesser known species and their habitats that are never able to attract the media coverage, scientific research or activist interest that charismatic species such as the GIB and the elephant are able to garner!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Human-elephant conflict on the rise in Assam



Human-elephant conflict (HEC) in Assam claimed 64 human lives and 53 wild elephants in the first 11 months of 2018.

Over 60 elephants had died in 2017 in Assam as a result of train hits, poisoning and electrocution; 43 of these deaths occurred between September and early December 2017. In fact, within the first 12

days of December 2017, Assam had lost 13 elephants. The conflict is more intense in Udalguri, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Golaghat and Majuli districts, with a majority of the incidents in the last two years happening in and around tea estates and paddy fields. Train-hits are said to be occurring in newer areas.

Wildlife biologist Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar has suggested that the government should immediately introduce a program for grain-to-grain replacement so that animosity can be reduced. Further he suggested that railway tracks passing through elephant areas need to be treated as vulnerable with critical sections. Adequate forest staff along with railway patrol, anti-depredation squads and village defence parties need to be engaged to monitor herd movements in and round such areas.

He has also recommended that the conflict situation be accorded disaster status and funds should be procured accordingly from concerned departments.

Source: 'Human-elephant conflict claims 64 human lives, 53 elephants this year in Assam', *The Shillong Times*, 06/12/18.

Demolish wall on elephant corridor: SC to Numaligarh Refinery

The Supreme Court (SC) recently dismissed an appeal filed by Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. (NRL) and ordered demolition of a 2.2 km boundary wall erected on an elephant migration corridor in eastern Assam's Golaghat district. Environmentalists had objected to the wall the refinery had erected in 2011 for a proposed township in a part of the Deopahar Reserve Forest (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, No. 1 and *PA Update* 27).

The refinery had received flak from wildlife activists when a seven-year-old male elephant died of haemorrhage in May 2015 after trying to force its way through the wall. Videos also captured herds trying to cross the high boundary wall with barbed wire in vain. In August 2016, the National Green Tribunal ordered NRL to demolish the wall within a

month, but only a 289 metre stretch was demolished.

Dismissing the NRL's appeal in the apex court, Justice DY Chandrachud said that there cannot be any township as elephants have the first right on forest.

Source: 'Demolish wall on elephant corridor: Supreme Court tells Assam's Numaligarh Refinery' www.thehindu.com, 19/01/19.

Oil firm forced to shut down operations near Kaziranga NP

An oil exploration firm sponsored by state-owned Oil India Limited (OIL) has been compelled to wind up operations at a site close to the Kaziranga National Park (NP) after massive opposition from local groups and the district administration.

The Golaghat district administration revoked the approval for seismic survey given to Hyderabad-based Alphageo India Limited near the NP following the protests. The administration had granted permission after the firm said that the operation would not be carried out in any region that flouts the norms laid down by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Assam Pollution Control Board (APCB).

However, only a day after the operation was launched, a large group of locals and activists from Jeepal Krishak Shramik Sangathan (JKSS) confronted the firm's personnel, who were drilling a hole in the Agaratoli area and carrying out blasts. The police were called and a senior employee of the firm gave an undertaking that the survey would not be restarted. The cancel order from the Golaghat deputy commissioner, which was immediately issued to the superintendent of police and circle officers, said the operation carried out by Alphageo was a violation of the existing norms, since the spot was within the 10 km radius of the eco-sensitive zone of the park. It also said the firm did not meet the concerned officials from the revenue and forest departments before commencing the survey.

JKSS said that Alphageo was unable to produce any certificates to prove it had gone through the mandatory procedures. A memorandum submitted to the deputy commissioner by a group of citizens underscored that as many as four 'clearance certificates' were mandatory for seismic surveying near a NP. These include the environmental impact assessment report, public hearing to be arranged by APCB and permission from the National Tiger Conservation Authority since the park is also a tiger reserve.

OIL, however, claimed that the survey was planned to be carried out strictly as per the instructions and the clearances obtained from the central and state governments. It explained that that survey profiles are finalised after keeping a buffer zone of five km from the periphery of restricted areas. The same norms were also followed in Agaratoli, it claimed.

However, the deputy commissioner was unable to provide the certificates when the locals questioned him.

Source: Rajeev Bhattacharyya. 'Oil Exploring Survey Near Kaziranga Cancelled After Locals Chase Away Firm', www.thewire.in, 08/12/18.

GUJARAT

Banni Maldharis approach NGT over CFR titles

Sixteen gram panchayats of the Banni grasslands in Bhuj district have approached the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over the neglecting of Community Forest Rights (CFR) of the resident Maldhari pastoral community under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). A submission has been made to the NGT as part of an ongoing case over encroachment of the Banni. This petition was filed in May by the Banni Breeder Association (BBA), an organisation of pastoralists in the area.

A BBA member noted that when asked by the NGT, the revenue and forest departments

could not agree about the status of encroachment here. Following this, the Gujarat Revenue Department announced, in September 2018, that a land survey of the grassland will be undertaken under the Gujarat Land Revenue Code, 1879. This would mean the community, which has been trying to get its rights recognised under FRA, would be back to square one. The government started surveying the land in three of the panchayats - Dhordo, Moti Dadhhar and Bhojardo - early October. Interestingly, the three are the only ones to not have applied for rights under FRA.

The 16 panchayats have individually sent submissions to the NGT, drawing its attention to FRA violation and condemning the survey.

In 2015, 47 CFR titles, covering the entire area of the grassland (2,500 sq. km), were granted to 47 villages of the 16 panchayats. While the claims were cleared by the government, the community never got titles that formally recognise their traditional rights over the grassland. When the community called on the chief minister (CM) last year, they were told that a committee comprising the CM and the forest and revenue departments was formed and would soon clear the titles. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No.)

Source: Ishan Kukreti. 'Banni Maldharis approach NGT with reneged community forest rights claims', www.downtoearth.org.in, 06/12/18.

Road in Gir built for the President's visit turns death trap for wildlife

A 32 km stretch of resurfaced road on Mendarda-Talala route in Junagadh district, built ahead of President Ram Nath Kovind's visit to Gir in December has turned into a death trap for wild animals and humans. At least a dozen animals have been killed due to speeding vehicles on the road that has no speed-breakers. The animals killed include two jackal, four spotted deer, two mongoose, one civet and one jungle cat

According to forest officers, the road has three forest check posts as majority of the road passes through the sanctuary area. The road, before being resurfaced, had speed-breakers every half-a-kilometer which restricted the speed of vehicles passing through.

The chief conservator of forest (wildlife circle), DT Vasavda, is reported to have said that the forest department has requested the state roads and building department to expedite the work of building speed breakers on this road.

Source: 'Road sans speed breakers turns killer for wild animals', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/01/19.

State operated lion safari in Devaliya illegally: CZA

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has blamed the Gujarat Government for illegally operating the Devaliya Safari Park (DSP) in Junagadh where a forester was killed and two labourers grievously injured in a lion attack in November.

The CZA sent a communication to Gujarat's chief wildlife warden seeking to know how a lion safari was being operated in DSP. The CZA investigated the incident following a complaint filed by wildlife activist Ajay Dubey and found that the DSP had neither taken permission for operating the park nor for running the safari. Chief conservator of forest, (wildlife), Junagadh, admitted that the safari is run by the Gujarat Forest Department.

The wildlife activist has sought a first information report against the zoo operator and said that he will also be approaching the National Human Rights Commission seeking action against the state government.

Source: Richa Sharma. 'Lion attack unearths illegal safari park run by Gujarat government', www.newindianexpress.com, 08/12/18.

Lioness found dead near Gir WLS; toll 31

A carcass of a lioness, around five to nine years in age, was found in a field around 10 km from the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, in Amblash village, Talala taluka of Gir-Somnath district, in the month of December 2018. This has taken the death toll of lions in the area to 31 since September 2018.

The causes of the deaths have ranged from natural death due to infighting, pneumonia, canine distemper virus and protozoa infection. As many as 23 lions had died in a short span of three weeks in September alone.

Source: 'Gujarat: Lioness found dead near Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, toll reaches 31 since September', www.dnaindia.com, 07/12/18.

Caught selling nails of lions, leopards



Forest officials arrested two individuals, Danabhai Garaniya and Jilubhai Kamaliya, from Bhavnagar when they were trying to sell four leopard nails as those of lions. Both are residents of Raydi village in Talala taluka of Gir Somnath district. Based on Garaniya's information, forest officers arrested Kanubhai Vala from Pania village of Dhari taluka in Amreli district. The village is about 20 km from Dalkhania where a number of lions died recently due to a viral infection and other reasons. On searching Vala's house, forest officials found 11 more nails. Thus, a total of 15 nails were seized. Vala had given the nails to Garaniya to sell and Kamaliya had only accompanied him. Kamaliya was released after interrogation.

The forensic report confirmed that the eight nails were of Asiatic lion, while seven

others belonged to leopard. The investigation in the case has been handed over to Gir East Forest Division as Pania village falls under this division.

Vala, reportedly, was in contact with forest officials and it is suspected that some forest employees may be involved in the racket.

Source: 'Eight out of 15 seized nails belong to Asiatic lions', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/12/18.

KARNATAKA

Karnataka hikes relief for deaths in wild animal attacks

The Karnataka State Board for Wildlife, in a meeting held recently, has decided to increase the compensation for human fatalities due to conflict with wild animals from the current Rs. five lakh to Rs. Ten lakh. The proposal was made by Sanjay Gubbi, member, on the grounds that the existing compensation rates were inadequate. The meeting was chaired by Chief Minister, HD Kumaraswamy.

Nearly 45 people die in Karnataka every year due to conflict with most of the deaths being reported from Hassan, Ramanagaram, Kodagu, Tumakuru and villages in Mysuru district – either villages bordering the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, or in areas which were once part of the elephants' natural range but have over the decades been dismembered by human settlements and agriculture.

Wildlife activists who welcomed the decision said the wildlife board should also take up the issue of enhancing crop compensation to match market values as it would help soothe frayed nerves of the people who bear the brunt of the conflict.

Source: 'Karnataka hikes relief for deaths due to animal attacks', www.thehindu.com, 10/01/19.

No elevated corridor in Bandipur TR: Centre

The Central government has made it clear that it will not take up the project of constructing elevated corridors in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR). This comes three days after the Karnataka Government opposed the move in the Supreme Court (SC), citing the potential harm to elephants, tigers and other wildlife. The proposal is for the construction of four elevated corridors, each one-km long, on national highway 766 by the National Highway Authority of India as part of the Bharatmala project.

In March 2018, the National Tiger Conservation Authority had already advised the Centre not to go ahead with the project. The minister, making clear the stand of the Centre in the matter, referred to Karnataka's opposition to the move and noted that the Centre has suggested strengthening of the alternative route passing through Thithimathi-Gonikoppa-Kutta.

In August 2018, the activists were first alarmed after a communication between the Ministry of Road and Transport Secretary, YS Malik, and the Karnataka Chief Secretary was leaked. The letter spoke about how Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy and Public Works Department Minister HD Revanna had verbally agreed to the project during a meeting with Union Minister of Road, Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari.

The activists also opposed the proposed reversal of the night traffic ban (9 pm-6 am) on the 25 km stretch of national highway 212 in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve corridor and petitioned Gadkari and Kumaraswamy. The existing traffic ban has been in effect since 2009 when the Karnataka High Court banned traffic flow after dark while hearing a case pertaining to roadkills, where at least 215 animals were being run over between 2004 and 2007.

For the night, commuters currently use a 30 km detour of the Hunsur-Gonikoppa-Kutta-Mananthavady Road. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 6; Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, Nos. 2 & 1; Vol. XVII, No. 6; Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 & 2; Vol. XV, Nos. 5 & 4 and Vol. XIV, No. 6)

Source: 'No elevated corridor in K'taka's Bandipur Tiger Reserve: Centre makes stand clear', www.thenewsminute.com, 08/01/19.

Adivasis displaced from Nagarahole NP on indefinite dharna in Mysuru district

Adivasis of Mysuru district went on an indefinite *dharna* in Kakanakote forest of HD Kote taluk to demand rights under the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). Development through Education (DEED), an NGO, said that a petition highlighting their charter of demands was mailed to the chief minister and the chief secretary.

The protestors have sought immediate rehabilitation of 3,418 tribals who were displaced from Nagarahole after it was declared a national park (NP). According to members of the tribal community, though the committee set up as per the directions of the Karnataka High Court submitted a report calling for rehabilitation of the displaced tribals, the government has failed to act on it. Nearly 6,000 tribals had also submitted applications under the FRA, but the government is said to have rejected them in a majority of the cases.

The tribals have demanded that 12 hamlets be declared as forest villages. The other demands include steps to shore up the quality of education imparted in ashram schools meant for tribal children, Rs. two lakh as seed money for each self-help group run by tribal women, and funds under a separate category for the welfare of the forest-dwelling communities.

Source: 'Adivasis on dharna in H.D. Kote demanding rehabilitation', www.thehindu.com, 11/12/18.

WII to conduct population management studies in Karnataka zoos

The Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens in Mysuru and the Bannerghatta Biological Park in Bengaluru will be among those studied by the

Wildlife Institute of India (WII) as part of a project on population management of species involved in human-animal conflict in the country.

The Rs. 10.65 crore pilot project that will be spread out over three years is being carried out under the Centrally-sponsored scheme, 'Integrated Development Wildlife Habitats'. It aims at assessing the current status of human-animal conflict and reducing its impact. The project has been divided into two phases. Phase one will deal with developing the appropriate tools of population control and developing a protocol for field implementation. Phase two will deal with in-house production of drugs and large-scale implementation at the field level by the forest department.

Four herbivore species — the rhesus macaque, nilgai, wild boar and elephant — have been identified as the focal species for the project. The WII has sought permission for carrying out birth control trial studies on nilgaits and elephants in the zoos. The study is expected to serve as a 'standard model' to be replicated across different geographic regions for mitigating conflict.

Source: Shankar Bennur. 'Karnataka zoos to host project on animal population management', www.thehindu.com, 05/12/18.

Monkey fever outbreak in Sharavathi valley

An outbreak of the Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever, has been reported in the Sharavathi river valley in Sagar taluk. Following the death of monkeys near Hasirumakki in the Sharavathi river backwater region due to KFD, the Department of Forest and Wildlife (FD) has closed its nature camp at Muppeane in the Sharavathi Wildlife Sanctuary located nearby. The decision to close the camp was taken to prevent visitors from coming in contact with ticks that spread the disease from monkeys to humans. An order was also passed on January 1, banning the entry of tourists to the sanctuary and trekking activities till further orders.

The Department of Health and Family Welfare has also issued travel advisories to pilgrims who visit the temple of goddess Chowdeshwari in Sigandur located nearby.

Aralagodu Gram Panchayat in Sagar taluk, the epicentre of this year's outbreak where two persons have died owing to the disease in the past one month, is located at a distance of 15 km from Jog Falls, the famous tourist destination that attracts more than 10 lakh visitors every year. Residents in villages within a five km radius from Aralagodu, where positive cases of KFD have been reported, are being administered vaccine against the disease. In case of flare-up of the viral infection, the entry of tourists to Jog may also be banned.

Field staff of the FD have been asked to bring to the notice of higher authorities cases of unnatural death of monkeys in the valley.

Source: Veerendra PM. 'Monkey fever outbreak likely to mar tourism prospects of Sharavathi valley', www.thehindu.com, 01/01/19.

KERALA

Rs. 574 crore proposal to mitigate human-elephant conflict in Wayanad

Following ground level assessments of human-elephant conflict, the Kerala Forest Department (FD) has put up a Rs. 574 crore proposal for dealing with the situation. The project proposals, submitted by three forest divisions, have been recommended by the district development committee (DDC) and forwarded to the state government for funding under the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Promotion Board (KIIFB). The figure is almost twice the entire budget allocation for the department this fiscal.

South Wayanad Forest Division has submitted project proposals worth Rs 189 crore including those for the setting up of 103 km of rail fencing, 43 km of solar fencing, a two km retaining wall and maintenance of existing elephant proof trenches (EPTs) of a length of 15 km. The conflict mitigation measures proposed

by the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) and North Wayanad Forest Division would entail an expense of Rs 212 crore and Rs 173 crore respectively.

Conservationists have however questioned the logic of the measures saying it is high time the department focused on sustainable methods for conflict mitigation rather than indiscriminately creating physical barriers along forest fringes, which would only exacerbate the conflict. They have asked for the focus to be on protecting corridors and to also expedite the voluntary relocation of families from core area of the forests.

Source: 'Forest department moots jumbo plan to solve man-wildlife conflict', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/01/19.

FD deploys party lights to scare off elephants in South Wayanad

The forest department (FD) has installed 14 multicolour, 360-degree rotating LED light units in forest fringes to scare off elephants from habitations in Chethalayam under the South Wayanad Forest Division. The initiative has proven to be an efficient deterrent so far as the areas have not reported any stray elephant incidents for the past one and a half months despite it being the paddy harvest season. Measures like elephant-proof trenches, granite walls and solar fences have failed to check the problem in the area leading to new solutions being tried. A local farmer said that the lights had been found effective against wild boars too.

The LED lights were cost effective as well, with a unit of a bulb and a battery costing around Rs. 4,000.

Source: 'After trenches and walls fail, 'disco lights' keep jumbos away', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/12/18.

MAHARASHTRA

FD asks railways to construct new underpasses on Brahmapuri-Chandrapur section

Maharashtra Forest Department's (FD) Chandrapur Forest Circle has pitched for construction of new underpasses and cleaning of choked ones to save wild animals from train hits in the Brahmapuri-Chandrapur section. Following the death of three tiger cubs in Junona in November by the speeding Chanda Fort-Gondia passenger train (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 6), the chief conservator of forests (CCF), SV Ramarao, had ordered a survey on mitigation steps to be suggested to the South East Central Railway (SECR), Nagpur, and accordingly has recommended a five-pronged strategy.

The CCF, in a communication to divisional railway manager (DRM), Nagpur, has pointed out that during the last eight years, 24 wild animals including four tigers, two sloth bears, two leopards, four hyenas, four bison, six wild boars, one nilgai and one deer, have died on the tracks here, all on the Ballarshah-Junona-Sindewahi-Talodi-Nagbhid-Brahmapuri section. The death toll may be even higher if the section near Navegaon National Park is taken into consideration. He said further that 60 km of the railway line passes through dense forest patches which is inhabited by wild animals including tigers.

The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), Chandrapur and Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) officials have been writing to SECR since 2012 in the matter but no efforts have been taken up yet by the railways to mitigate the conflict. Ramarao has now suggested new underpasses in the most vulnerable forested ranges of Mamla, Junona, Sindewahi, Chichpalli, Talodhi, Balapur, and Nagbhid in Brahmapuri and Chandrapur divisions.

The FD has also identified at least 19 railway poles where trains should run with a caution of 40 kmph. These patches fall in Junona, Mamla, Babupeth, Lohara, Mindala,

and Brahmapuri. The CCF also noted that during maintenance and construction works along the tracks, the railway contractors have made some small pits in the area near tracks. These water-filled pits attract animals that then get killed by speeding trains. Another issue that has been pointed out is related to the existing underpasses, which are not used by the animals as they are blocked. Of three such blocked underpasses, two are in Sindewahi and one near Babupeth.

The CCF has also suggested that the SECR should ensure that the tracks are clean in the forest patches. Food thrown from the trains also attracts animals resulting in casualties.

Source: 'Forest department asks SECR to construct new underpasses', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 28/12/19.

Committee to suggest mitigation measures for road projects through Tadoba Andhari TR

Following directives issued by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) the Maharashtra Government has constituted a nine-member committee to suggest mitigation measures for road projects cutting tiger corridors around Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). The NGT Principal Bench, Delhi, had conducted proceedings in December and directed all relevant agencies to report in one month on the matter.

The state committee will be headed by principal chief conservator of forest (head of forest force) while the chief wildlife warden, state nodal officer, representatives of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), public works department (PWD), National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be members. The chief conservator of forest (planning & management) will be the member-secretary.

The next date of the NGT hearing in the matter is March 26.

Among more recent developments, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari had laid the foundation stone for several road development and repair works in November 2018. This covers for 576 km roads worth Rs 5,356 crore in Chandrapur district alone. Of these, roughly 100 km will cut through tiger corridors. The most vulnerable two-lane road projects affecting wildlife and tigers include patches between Nagbhid-Brahmapuri-Armori, Malewada-Chimur, Chimur-Warora, Mul-Chandrapur, Bamni-Navegaon and Gadchiroli-Mul, totaling 244 km and costing Rs 1,618 crore. The PWD has also received approval for road widening between Chimur-Kanpa and Hinganghat-Nandori-Kora-Khadsangi-Neri-Pendhri-Sindewahi-Mul totaling 135 km and costing Rs 810 crore. Several of these patches are connected to Tadoba.

Source: 'After NGT rap, state forms panel to suggest wildlife mitigation plan', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/01/19.

Committee to study impact of infrastructure projects through SGNP and Tungareshwar WLS

Clearances for several infrastructure projects, including the proposed Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train line, that will pass through the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS) have been put on hold till an expert panel studies their impact on the wildlife habitat.

The Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife (MSBW) has set up a committee under additional chief secretary Praveen Pardeshi, to study the impact of development projects passing through the two protected areas and suggest ways to mitigate them. The committee will study what funds will be required to put in place mitigation measures and how to fix responsibility on the agencies involved.

Among the key projects passing through the SGNP and TWS are the Rs. 1.08 lakh crore Mumbai- Ahmedabad bullet train, the 126 km Virar-Alibaug multi-modal corridor, the

Railways' dedicated freight corridor, a natural gas pipeline and the Goregaon- Mulund tunnel. The bullet train project alone requires 115.5 ha of forest area including 55 ha in Thane district and 62 ha in Palghar. Besides, more than 1.5 lakh mangrove trees will have to be cut.

The MSBW has, however, cleared the proposal to build a tunnel under the SGNP connecting Goregaon Film City to Bhandup. The project proponent, in this case the Brihan-Mumbai Municipal Corporation, has been asked to give an undertaking that the hydrology of the SGNP will not be affected as the Tulsi lake is not far away from the proposed site.

Further, the MSBW has, against the backdrop of the killing of the alleged man-eating tigress Avni in Yavatmal (Editorial, *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 6), also announced it would frame a policy to tackle growing incidents of human-animal conflicts in the state. Besides this, the government has also decided to seek permission from the National Tiger Conservation Authority to keep six tiger reserves in Maharashtra open for tourism during the monsoon. The MSBW also discussed training and the use of elephants to monitor tigers in these reserves.

A sanctuary spread over 265 sq. km in Kanhargao on the Maharashtra - Telangana border was also approved.

Source: Surendra P Gangan and Badri Chatterjee. 'Infrastructure projects passing through wildlife sanctuaries in Maharashtra on hold, government to study impact', www.hindustantimes.com, 06/12/18.

Builders and land mafia responsible for fire adjoining SGNP: environment minister

The Maharashtra State environment minister, Ramdas Kadam, has alleged that builders and the land mafia were responsible for the fire that broke out on a private plot adjacent to Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Aarey Colony in Goregaon in the first week of December.

Kadam, who has already demanded an inquiry into the fire incident, said that locals

told him trees that stood on the plot had been chopped just before the fire broke out. There is also an issue with land records of the said plot and its measurement has not been undertaken by revenue officials. Kadam has instructed the police, local municipality and pollution control board to probe the incident and take action if violations are found.

Almost 150 acres of forest were affected in the incident.

Source: 'Minister: Bldrs, land mafia to blame for Goregaon fire',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
07/12/18.

Fire brigade enquiry finds evidence of trespass but fails to pinpoint cause of fire near SGNP



A fire brigade investigation of fire near the Goregaon border of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in the month of December has failed to establish its cause. The fire brigade report recommended investigation by the police for suspicious activity as certain areas were found unaffected despite the major blaze. The report said that there were unburned portions of a hillock, however, some half-burnt tyres, plastic articles and bottles were found in the central region of the hill. This, according to the report, was evidence of trespass.

The fire that erupted on the outskirts of the park then spread rapidly through the open space of Aarey area, moving towards the nearby residential buildings. It took 14 hours to bring the blaze under control.

Fire officials said that no one came forward as an eyewitness though other witnesses' statements helped them conclude that the fire occurred on the hill near a nullah on the

north-east and travelled rapidly towards the south-west.

The area amidst the Dindoshi hills where the fire erupted belongs to Raheja builders.

Source: 'Mumbai: Hill fire inquiry finds evidence of trespass',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
13/12/18.

Online facilities for citizens to report mangroves destruction

Citizens will now be able to report the destruction of mangroves in Maharashtra via a toll-free number, a new website, and an email address set up on the direction of the Bombay High Court. They can call 1926, log on to www.konkanmangroves.com, or send an email to konkanmangroves@gmail.com.

A committee formed by the state government has been tasked with the implementation of this mechanism. A subcommittee formed at the district level will receive a copy of the complaint. Once the complaint is received, nodal officers from three departments (revenue, police and forest) will look into the complaint and respond within 48 hours.

Provisions have been made on the website for people to upload geo-coordinates of the site and pictures supporting the complaint. The complainant will be kept anonymous.



Source: Mitaksh Jain. 'Citizens can report destruction of state mangroves on new site', www.mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com,
22/11/18.

ODISHA

Odisha may hike relief for death in wildlife attack

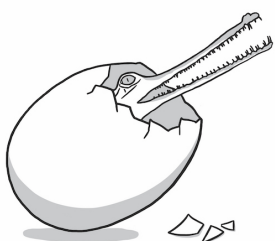
The Odisha Forest and Environment Department (FD) has proposed to the state government to increase the compensation for human deaths caused in conflict with animals from Rs four lakh to Rs five lakh. Between 2011-12 and 2018-19, as many as 680 people died in wild animal attacks in the state. 535 of these deaths were caused by elephants. 6,417 houses were also damaged by elephant herds during the same period.

The FD is also in the process of procuring four special vehicles equipped with a crane to rescue elephants in distress. These vehicles would also have a few veterinarians on board to attend to the animals. The vehicles, each costing about Rs 25 lakh, would also be used to chase tuskers away from human habitations. The FD has sought the help of its West Bengal counterpart in the procurement of these vehicles.

Source: 'Odisha may hike relief for death in wildlife attack', www.thehindu.com, 02/01/19.

PUNJAB

26 gharials out of total 47 spotted after reintroduction program in Punjab



26 of the 47 gharials that were released into the waters of Harike WLS in March 2018 (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 1) were recently spotted by a team of forest officials and a researcher of the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature – India.

The hatchlings had been brought from a hatchery in Madhya Pradesh and there are plans

to release 50 more gharial hatchlings in the near future.

Forest officials said that they were also making simultaneous attempts to sensitise locals about the status of these endangered creatures to ensure their long-term survival (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 3).

Source: '26 gharials out of total 47 spotted after reintroduction program in Punjab', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/01/19.

RAJASTHAN

NTCA seeks report on missing tigers from Ranthambhore TR

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has asked for a factual update from the Rajasthan Government following a complaint by wildlife activist Ajay Dubey, seeking an inquiry into the 'missing' tigers from Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (TR).

Dubey had written to the NTCA noting that five tiger tigers had gone missing from the TR in 2018 and that he feared they had been poached. He also alleged that the state government wanted to stop monitoring of tigers that are not traceable or had moved to other forest areas.

Source: 'NTCA seeks report on missing tigers from Ranthambhore reserve', www.newindianexpress.com, 14/01/2019.

High Court dismisses petition challenging translocation of tiger to MHTR

The Rajasthan High Court recently dismissed a petition challenging the translocation of the male tiger T-91 to the Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve (TR) (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, Nos. 2 & 1). This paves the way now for other translocations that the forest department (FD) has planned.

A petition filed by wildlife activist Ajay Dubey had alleged violation of wildlife norms in the translocation and had asked for the tiger

to be relocated to its original habitat. The court had sought response from the office of the principal chief conservator of forests, Rajasthan, which responded saying that no norms were violated in carrying out the translocation. It was argued in court that the chief wildlife warden is the competent authority to take decision to shift the tiger as per section 11 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

The court observed that the NTCA is a capable body, which can decide on the relocation of the tigers. The court also observed that the male tiger is roaming the sanctuary alone and in stress. The court noted further that permission had already been granted by the NTCA and in such circumstances the court's intervention was not warranted.

According to the original plan put together by the state government two female and one male tiger were to be moved to the Mukundra Hills TR and officials had received in-principle approval for the relocation on October 9, 2017. There was an initial delay due to failure of fulfilling certain conditions but a male tiger was finally moved in 2018.

Source: 'Now, female tigers can be relocated to Mukundra Tiger Hills Reserve', www.dna.com, 11/12/18.

TAMIL NADU

Tribal museum at Sathyamangalam TR



A museum representing the culture and lifestyle of the tribes of Tamil Nadu is being set up at the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR) at a cost of Rs. seven crore. The

state government has sanctioned the funds as part of the Tamil Nadu Innovation Initiatives, under the State Innovation Fund for 2018-19. The museum will come up on 20 ha at Karachikorai village that is located 13 km from

Bannari on the road to Thengumarahada along the water spread area of the Bhavani Sagar Reservoir.

Called the Tribal Eco Cultural Village, the museum will have model houses of different tribes, their dress, musical instruments, stones and the wooden products they use. A Sanga Ilakkiyam studio, an outdoor interpretation centre, an indoor auditorium, an open atrium, a tribal shady, a tribal food court, and medicinal plants garden in front of each model house are being planned. A market for products made by the tribals to support their livelihood and create employment opportunities to the craftsman is also on the anvil.

Source: SP Saravanan. 'Reserve forest to house tribal museum', www.thehindu.com, 09/12/18.

TELANGANA

Tiger electrocuted inside Kawal TR

An ongoing investigation has revealed that the tiger whose skin was seized by forest officials in early January was killed by electrocution in November inside the core area of Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR). Kawal is now left with one tiger in its 893.23 sq km core area and two in its 1,125.89 sq km buffer area. The tiger was killed with the help of a live current wire placed inside a stream in Pulgampandri village near Pembi inside the core.

The matter came to light when TRAFFIC India got in touch with one of the poachers when they were looking to sell the tiger's skin and informed the forest department about it. Following this, forest officials intercepted a vehicle transporting the tiger skin and arrested five persons - two of them are from Hyderabad and one each from Pembi, Indervelly and Warangal. The five arrested persons are suspected to be habitual poachers. Search is on for another accused poacher.

Since 2012 when Kawal was declared a TR, around 15 tigers have been caught on camera here and in adjoining forests. However, most of them have gone "missing". Even the

tiger whose skin was seized, was captured on camera last time in November 2017 after which it went missing.

Source: 'Tiger was electrocuted by poachers in core area of Kawal Wildlife Reserve', www.newindianexpress.com, 07/01/19.

UTTARAKHAND

Research body approved for conservation of flora in Uttarakhand

The Uttarakhand Government has granted approval to the forest department (FD) to form a research body to conserve the flora of Uttarakhand. An autonomous body named, Centre for Research, Development and Conservation of Himalayan Forestry Resources will work for development and collection of quality seeds of forest species, preparation of quality clones and on livelihood issues. The proposal for formation of the research society was first sent to the FD in September 2017 after which the proposal was sent to the state government.

The body will run on funds from different companies under the corporate social responsibility initiative. The research body headquartered in Haldwani will advise the FD in determination of the policies for conservation of rare, endangered and threatened species found in the Himalayan region. The body will also form a database of the forestry resources and undertake the assessment and impact of climate change in the Himalayan region.

Source: 'Uttarakhand forest department gets first research centre to conserve Himalayan flora', www.hindustantimes.com, 03/12/18.

UTTAR PRADESH

Dudhwa TR joins hands with SSB to curb wildlife crimes

The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (TR) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) have joined hands to provide

security to the forests of Dudhwa. A consensus was reached among all security agencies and the reserve staff to strengthen patrolling in and around Dudhwa to help check forest and wildlife crimes.

The DTR field director along with the deputy director held a meeting recently in this regard with the SSB, central and local intelligence officers, customs and excise officials, the special tiger protection force (STPF) and Dudhwa field staff to discuss the issues involving safety of Dudhwa's forests. It was agreed at the meeting that joint long route patrolling comprising SSB, STPF and DTR field staff would be held at regular intervals.

Apart from this, stress was laid on intelligence and information sharing among various security agencies.

Source: 'SSB, other agencies to jointly patrol Dudhwa tiger reserve', www.india.com, 25/11/18.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

460 leopard deaths in India in 2018; highest annual number in last five years

Data collated by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) shows that calendar year 2018 saw the deaths of 460 leopards across the country. This is the highest in the last five years, the other numbers being 431 in 2017, 440 in 2016, 399 in 2015 and 331 in 2014. The highest number of deaths in 2018 were reported from Uttarakhand where the number was 93. This is followed by 90 in Maharashtra.

Data submitted in the Lok Sabha recently by the government showed 260 leopards were poached between 2015 and 2018 (up to October).

The 2016 census had put the total number of leopards in the country at between 12000 and 14000.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'In 2018, 90 leopards died in Maharashtra', www.hindustantimes.com, 17/12/18.

384 tigers killed by poachers in 10 years in India

A total of 384 tigers were poached in India in the 10-year period ending November 2018. The same period also saw the arrest of 961 persons allegedly for poaching tigers. The information was given by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) in response to a right to information query.

The WCCB said, however, that no information was available regarding convictions of the accused in these cases.



Source: '384 tigers killed in India in last 10 years, reveals RTI',
www.punemirror.indiatimes.com,
08/12/18.

Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystem (SECURE)

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has sanctioned a project, Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystem (SECURE) for implementation across the range of the Snow leopard in the four states of Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. It aims to support conservation of the Snow leopard, its prey base and associated biodiversity and also seeks to contribute to sustainable livelihoods and community participation living in the high-altitude areas. Besides this, it will also promote sustainable land and forest management in the alpine

pastures in high range Indian Himalayan ecosystems.

The project will be implemented in an area from Gangotri National Park (NP) to Govind NP and Govind Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand, in Lahaul in Himachal Pradesh, Northern Sikkim in Sikkim and the Changthang Plateau in Leh. The implementing partners for the project are the MoEFCC, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the concerned four states.

Source: 'Himachal to prepare baseline data of high altitude eco-system under SECURE',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
16/01/19.

Lack of clarity on cause of tiger deaths

A study by the Association of Indian Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (AIZWV), which has been compiling a database on wild mammalian species with reference to morbidity and mortality, has found out that the cause of death could not be ascertained in a substantial number of cases involving tigers for the period 2009 to 2016.

The study suggests that of the 28 tiger deaths that occurred in Uttar Pradesh in this period, nine were unspecified. Similarly, 30 out of 86 tiger deaths in Karnataka, 22 out of 73 in Maharashtra, 31 out of 137 in Madhya Pradesh, 20 out of 40 in Tamil Nadu, 11 out of 30 in Kerala, nine out of 83 in Uttarakhand and three out of 15 in Rajasthan were due to unspecified reasons.

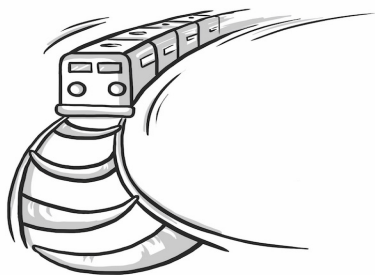
The data for the study was collected from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and through right to information applications.

It has been suggested that autopsies of the dead animals should be done near forests as cause of death is difficult to ascertain if the carcass is decomposed. Even the post-mortem should be done immediately as much time is wasted in transporting the carcass from inside the forest to elsewhere and completion of formalities. In a few cases, carcasses are sent for

autopsy 150 km or more from the forest area, the study noted.

Source: 'What kills most tigers? Even experts clueless',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
01/01/19.

49 elephants killed in railway accidents between 2016-18



Data made available by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC) shows that 49 elephants were killed in railway accidents across the country between 2016 and 2018. The year-wise break up is as follows: nine in 2015-16, 21 in 2016-17 and 19 in 2017-18.

West Bengal and Assam together accounted for 37 of these 49 deaths of elephants on train tracks. While the number of elephant casualties on railway tracks in West Bengal has fallen from five in 2015-16 to three in 2016-17 to two in 2017-18, the number in Assam has increased – from three elephant deaths in 2015-16, to ten in 2016-17 and further to 14 in 2017-18.

Low hanging or sagging electric wires have also become a major threat. 461 elephants are reported to have been killed by electrocution due to such wires between 2009 and 2017 in different parts of the country.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. '9 elephants killed in Railway accidents between 2016-18: MoEFCC', www.thehindu.com,
14/01/19.

Recognition of 13 zoos cancelled

In information provided in the Lok Sabha recently, the government has said that the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has cancelled the recognition of 13 zoos for not operating in accordance with rules and considering physiological, biological and behavioural requirements for wellbeing of captive animals housed in the respective zoos.

The zoos whose recognition has been cancelled include the Deer Park NCFL in Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh, Tungabhadra Mini Zoo in Karnataka, Maharajabaug Zoo in Nagpur, Deer Park Kasoram Cement and Sanghi Mini Zoo in Telangana, VOC Park Mini Zoo in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Shri Kshetra Sogal Soundatti in Karnataka, Mahatma Gandhi Zoo in Solapur, the Aurangabad Municipal Zoo in Aurangabad and Snake Park Shetkari Shikshan Mandal in Dholgarwadi in Maharashtra.

Three zoos that have shut down voluntarily include the Wildlife Rescue Centre in Gopalpur Khera in Gurugram in Haryana, Sivagangai Garden Zoo in Thanjavur and the Deer Park in Udthagamanadalam in Tamil Nadu.

Source: 'Recognition of 13 zoos cancelled: Minister', www.business-standard.com,
04/01/19.

DGCA regulation might obstruct use of drones for wildlife surveillance

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) recently released 'The Drone Regulations 1.0' are likely to come in the way of the country's ambitious plan of implementing high-end gadgets for surveillance and habitat management in protected areas.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) are likely to jointly send a representation to the DGCA soon with demands such as allowing them to fly drones at night, in protected areas and along international borders sharing the boundaries of Indian tiger reserves. They also insisted that maintaining "full visual

line of sight” at all times, as prescribed in the new guidelines, is impractical.

Much before the regulations had come into force, the WII under the supervision of the NTCA had already taken permission from the regulatory bodies for deploying drones fitted with GPS device and hi-resolution cameras in five tiger reserves - Panna, Corbett, Kaziranga, Sundarbans and Sathyamangalam. However, the WII experts feel that plans to implement more drones will not be easy in view of the new policy.

The drone policy has introduced a ‘No Permission - No Take-off’ (NPNT) clause. It means drone hardware have to be configured in such a way that unless regulatory permission is given, the drone cannot take off. It has demarcated the Indian space as Red (no-fly zones), Yellow (restricted permissions), and Green (all access). Also, drones must only be flown during daylight, while maintaining full visual line of sight at all times. The policy has also designated test sites across states to experiment. Just a few agencies engaged in security have been kept out of its ambit.

Source: Archana Jyoti. ‘Anti-poaching drones face shooting down by DGCA’, www.dailypioneer.com, 05/01/19.



SOUTH ASIA

India, Nepal officials meet to discuss crop damage by Nepalese elephants



A meeting was held recently between Indian and Nepalese forest officials in the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR) to discuss steps to monitor intrusion and crop damage in Indian territory caused by elephants from Nepal.

In order to block the movement of Nepalese elephants in the Lagga Bagga jungle belt, it has been decided to launch an intensive program to provide the pachyderms with fodder. A series of water holes, equipped with solar pumping units, will also be installed to cater to their needs for water. These steps, it is hoped, will ensure that the animals do not cross the border and destroy crops in border villages.

The officials also agreed to exchange information regarding the activities of wildlife criminals and poachers who are active in this border region. The Sashastra Seema Bal, which was also present in the meeting, extended its support to stop wildlife-related crimes.

It was also agreed to revive the Lagga Bagga-Kishanpur-Shukla Phanta natural wild corridor, which earlier served as a link between the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Shukla Phanta in Nepal.

Source: ‘India, Nepal forest officials hold meet to mitigate crop damage by Nepalese elephants’, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/01/19.

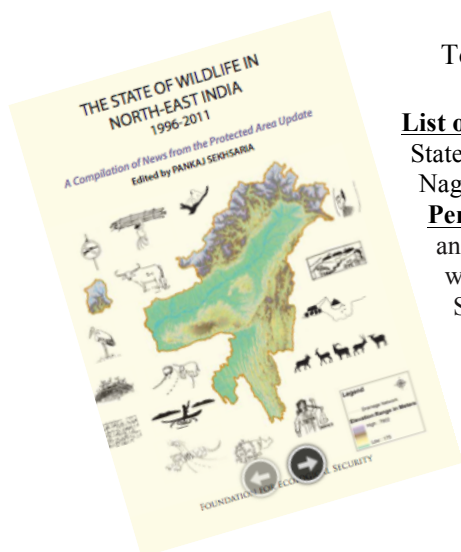
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Annexures

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WILDLIFE AND PROTECTED AREAS IN MAHARASHTRA

News and information from the Protected Area Update (1995-2015)

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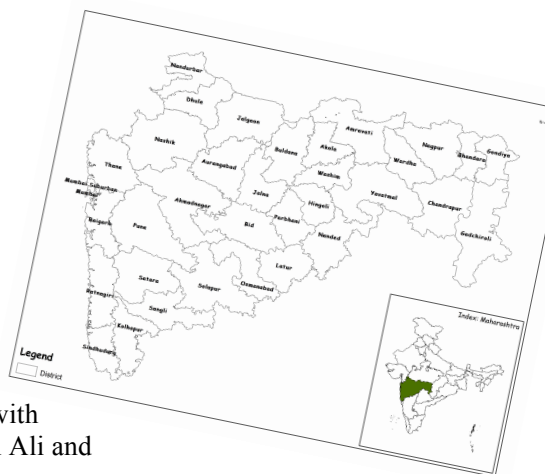
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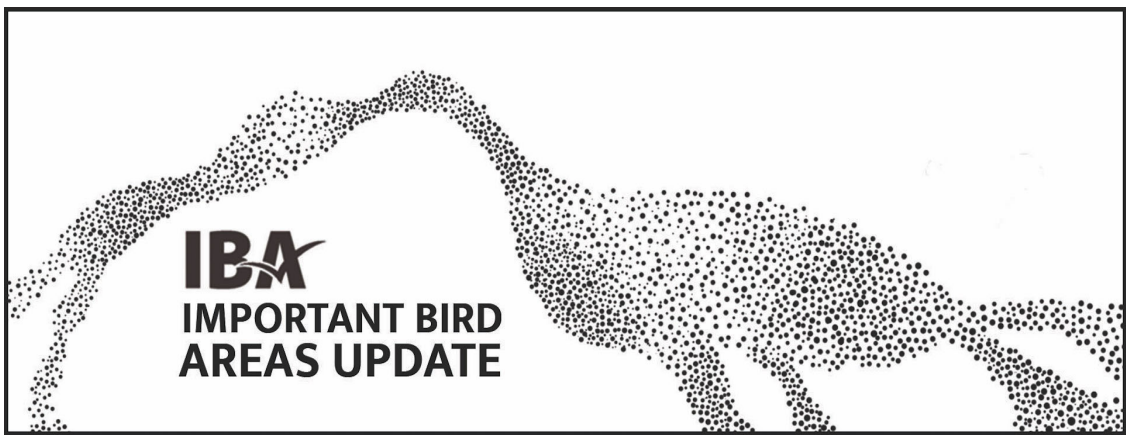
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- Section 2: Analysis and Perspective:

1) Media reporting on the protected areas in Maharashtra

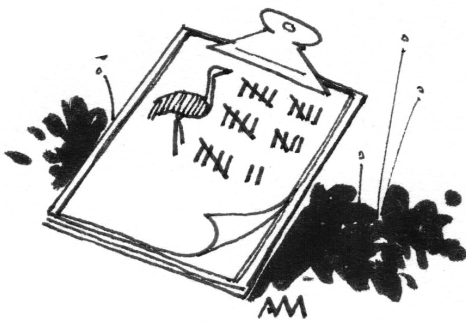
- A thematic analysis (Trupthi Narayan and Pankaj Sekhsaria); 2) Wildlife coverage in the Marathi Print Media – a practitioner's perspective (Reshma Jathar); 3) Dividing lines- tribal rights and tiger reserves (Shiba Desor); 4) Rocky plateaus: Little understood treasures of the Western Ghats (Aparna Watve) and 5) Community Conserved Areas in Maharashtra (Neema Pathak Broome with Sneha Gulgutia, Shruti Mokashi, Kavya Chowdhry, Sarosh Ali and Rupesh Patil)





NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

MoEFCC requests cooperation from power ministries to save the GIB



In letters sent in January to the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and the Ministries of Power and New and Renewable Energy, the secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), SK Mishra, has highlighted the critically endangered status of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and the threat posed to them by overhead power lines in their habitat.

The secretary has requested the chief secretaries of Rajasthan and Gujarat to “issue necessary directions to power transmission line agencies and wind energy farm developers to identify critical power transmission lines and wind energy farms passing through the GIB habitats in Rajasthan, Gujarat and other states in consultation with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII)” and to take up the recommended mitigation measures such as “putting up bird

diverters on the conductors, painting of vane tips of the wind turbines and undergrounding of transmission lines”.

Mishra has also written to his counterparts in the Ministry of Power and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to direct power transmission line agencies and wind farm developers to undertake suggested power line collision mitigation measures and to direct the concerned senior officers and associated agencies to participate and collaborate in efforts being made for the conservation of the bird.

Fewer than 150 GIBs survive today, the majority of which live in the fragmented grasslands of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Collision with overhead power lines has proved to be the most serious threat to the survival of this species. Based on ground surveys, the WII estimates that 15% of the global population of the GIB succumbs to power line collisions every year.

A nation-wide campaign was launched recently by Conservation India, The Corbett Foundation and Sanctuary Nature Foundation to save the GIB. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, Nos. 4 & 1 and Vol. XIX, No. 4).

Source: ‘MoEFCC requests cooperation from power ministries to save GIB’, www.sanctuaryasia.com, 07/01/19.

KERALA

Growth in vulture populations in Wayanad WLS

A recently conducted raptor survey has recorded a significant increase in vulture numbers in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

Preliminary estimates suggest the presence of around 100 White-rumped vultures here as opposed to 53 individuals spotted in the 2017 survey. It is also estimated that the sanctuary has a population of around 10 Red-headed vultures; the others being recorded include a Himalayan griffon vulture and a single Long-billed vulture, the first such sighting here in five years.

Though the survey was conducted in all the forest divisions in the district, including the South Wayanad and North Wayanad divisions, vultures were only recorded in the sanctuary area. Around 35 White-rumped vultures were spotted around a single animal carcass in Muthanga range and vulture presence was recorded in all the nine base camps located inside the sanctuary.

The survey has recorded a total of 32 raptor species, including five owl species.

Source: 'WWS safe haven for critically endangered vultures',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
15/01/19.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Conservation measures prioritized for Gharana wetland

The Jammu & Kashmir Commissioner Secretary Forest, Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, recently assessed the status of Gharana Wetland Conservation Reserve and prioritised certain steps for the conservation and protection of the wetland. These include the setting up of a sewage treatment plant, ensuring optimum water level in the wetland, timely de-silting and selective de-weeding, and boosting eco-tourism in the area and generating livelihood

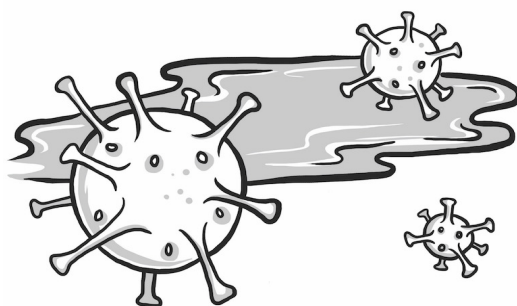
opportunities for the communities and stake holders.

He also asked the revenue department to expedite and complete the acquisition of land for the wetland, the indent for which has already been placed by the wildlife department in compliance with directions issued by the high court.

Source: 'Dwivedi prioritizes conservation measures for Gharana Wetland',
www.dailyexcelsior.com, 09/12/18.

ODISHA

H5N1 infection detected in the Chilika Lake area



Migratory birds, which have congregated at the Chilika Lake, might be facing a threat following the detection of avian influenza (H5N1) virus barely a few km from the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary.

Some crows and chicken were found dead inside poultry farms in Krushnaprasad block in the month of December 2018. Samples that were sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, for testing reported positive for H5N1 virus. A decision was taken by the Puri district administration to cull birds within one km radius of the place where the carcasses were found. Besides, officers of animal husbandry department have been asked to intensify surveillance in 10 km radius area.

The chief executive of the Chilika Development Authority said that there was no immediate threat to the migratory birds and no preventive action was possible in any case

because it is difficult to sanitise such a large area as covered by the sanctuary.

Source: Satyasundar Barik. 'Migratory birds at Chilika face flu threat',
www.thehindu.com, 14/12/18.

More than 10 lakh birds counted in Chilika in January

The annual bird census conducted by the Chilika Wildlife Division in the first week of January 2019 counted a total of 10,47,868 birds belonging to 181 different species in the 1,100 sq km water body. This is an increase of 1.55 lakh birds as compared to the count last year.

The largest number of nearly four lakh birds were counted in the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary inside the lake. Around 60,000 birds of various species were seen in the adjoining Mangalajodi area as well. Lesser flamingos were also spotted here after a gap of four years.

It has been suggested that part of the reason for the increase in bird numbers this year is the greater availability of open space, following the eviction of illegal prawn gheries by the Chilika Development Authority (CDA).

Source: 'Bird population increases by more than 1.5 lakh in Chilika lake',
www.indianexpress.com, 06/01/19.



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New google-group for the PA Update

The *PA Update* now has a new google-group. The creation was necessitated on account of the de-activation of the existing yahogroup due to unavoidable reasons. The egroup will not be a discussion platform, but only for the mailing of the newsletter for those interested. Only one email a month on an average will be sent on the group. Readers who were on the earlier group or would like to receive the *PA Update* as a soft copy are requested to subscribe to this mailing list by visiting:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/paupdate>

FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago
PA Update 75, December 2008

KARNATAKA

Tribal people block entry to Nagarahole NP

Nearly 250 tribal people from the Nagapura Rehabilitation Centre, Unit 2, recently blocked tourists from entering the Nagarahole National Park. The protesters alleged that the Forest Department has failed to allot five acres of land to each family as promised during their resettlement; and that most of them had received only 2-3 acres of land. They accused the department of transferring land meant for the tribal people to private resorts. Some also claimed that the residential units including the Samudaya Bhavan constructed by the department had collapsed.

The protesters relented after the Deputy Commissioner gave an assurance over the telephone and the local elected representatives promised to take up their demands with the Government.

Source: 'Tribal people block entry to national park,' *The Hindu*, 08/07/08

Initiative to control traffic in Bandipur National Park

The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has initiated a Rapid Action Project (RAP) to control the high incidence of wildlife casualty along the road cutting through Bandipur National Park. Funded by the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, the RAP is the outcome of a road-kill study conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Foundation.

The project envisages the enforcement of a speed limit on vehicles plying through the park by placing barricades in critical sections of the 12.5 km stretch. Their placement is decided on the basis of the data collected since 2004. Eight signboards have already been put up along animal

crossings and areas with high road kill frequency to help prevent accidents.

The RAP will also produce and distribute pamphlets to create awareness amongst drivers about their responsibility towards the park's wildlife. This work will be executed at the Kekkanahalla and Melukamanahalli points of entry. Constant monitoring is also on the cards.

It is reported that at least three large animals, including tigers, leopards, and even elephants are killed on this road every month. Spotted deer are particularly vulnerable as they migrate daily in the East-West direction, homing in for the night in Bandipur (forest headquarters), where human presence offers them protection from predators. At day break they cross the road and return to the wilderness.

This particular stretch is a lifeline for Ooty's tourism industry and has a high volume of traffic even at night, when animal activity is high. One vehicle enters the Park every five minutes at an average speed of 80 km/hr.

Though the project is still in its initial stages, it has already begun to yield results. Vehicle speed here is said to have reduced considerably as people are now aware of the 40 km/hr speed limit.

Conservationists are also concerned about the proposed upgradation of this road to a national highway. Road widening work on the Mysore-Ooty highway has already begun in areas external to the protected areas, though the MoEF is yet to endorse this upgradation.

Source: 'Taming traffic in Bandipur National Park,'
http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org/current-news/081016_taming_traffic_in_bandipur.html, 16/10/08

PERSPECTIVE

Burrowing to oblivion: the crisis facing the pangolin in India

The Indian pangolin is on the brink of extinction. Despite being widely distributed across the country, its populations have crashed since the 1990s, and its IUCN status has gone from Lower Risk in 1998, to Endangered in 2014. All eight species of pangolins across Asia and Africa are currently threatened, with the four Asian species of pangolins being particularly close to extinction.

According to recent TRAFFIC reports, pangolins are heavily affected by hunting and are widely trafficked globally, primarily for their meat and scales, for which there is high demand, particularly in East Asia. In addition to skin, meat and scales, pangolin parts are frequently used for medicine and leather too. Live specimens are also traded. While China and Vietnam are the two largest markets for pangolins, they are also smuggled to other countries like the US and across Europe. There is significant demand for them within India too.

This demand arises from widely held misconceptions about pangolins having medicinal, talismanic and prophylactic powers. Pangolin scales fetch steep prices ranging from Rs. 10,000 to Rs 50,000 a kilo, depending on their size and condition. Live or whole pangolins are the most prized and are reportedly worth crores, as they can be smuggled abroad directly. However, pangolin meat is considered a delicacy in India itself. Our ongoing surveys on pangolin distribution in reserve forests (RFs) of the northern Eastern Ghats have shown that they are easily identified by locals and are frequently killed immediately and eaten. Their scales are later sold.

Despite various legal and policy measures, the plunge in the pangolin population continues unabated and is a cause for serious worry. Captive breeding offers some hope of ensuring their survival, but has several challenges as pangolins breed very poorly in

captivity. The survival of the pangolins in India appears bleak unless immediate efforts are initiated for their conservation. There is urgent need to have better assessments of their populations through field surveys. Studies could also focus on the levels at which hunting affects them and monitoring and regulatory mechanisms need to be made more effective. Capacity to identify pangolin parts and products (such as rings, amulets etc.) also needs to be strengthened in field staff.

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PS: To take an online survey to help map distribution of the Indian pangolin as well as to assess threats from hunting and illegal trade please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yarx5pr3>

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