



Vol. XXV, No. 3

June 2019 (No. 139)

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

More than a line on the map

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

WII's dugong scholarship programme extended to North Andaman

Assam

DFOs under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council cannot issue mining permits: CEC

Chattisgarh

CRPF accused of hunting in Udanti-Sitanadi TR

Gujarat

Gujarat proposes a tiger corridor in state
Additional steps for lion conservation in Gujarat

Haryana

More than 20 wild animal road kills in four years on Gurugram-Faridabad road

Himachal Pradesh

Study in Khokhan WLS suggests Himalayan yew on the brink of extinction

FD & WII to study changing behaviour pattern of Asiatic black bear

Jammu & Kashmir

LaCONES – CCMB to initiate assisted reproduction technology project for hangul conservation

Karnataka

Kuvempu University continues to violate laws in Bhadra TR

Heavy fines for teasing animals inside Bandipur NP

River tern killed by drone during wildlife film shoot in Bhadra TR

Wild animal deaths due to speeding trains on the rise in Khanapur

No widening of NH 4A inside Dandeli WLS: NHA
Kerala 9

75 tigers in Wayanad WLS; highest in state
Purple frog might become state frog of Kerala

Maharashtra

88 ha of forest land diverted for industrial project in corridor connecting Bor-Pench-Melghat TRs
Large carnivores adapted to human dominated landscapes: Study

Baramati wolves to be tracked with GIS collars

FD mulls closure of wolf collaring project in Pune forest division

Activists demand closure of taxidermy centre at SGNP

Hamlet in SGNP achieves waste-management at source

Junona village says 'no' to TATR's community conservancy project

Odisha

New vine snake species described after 113 years; found in Similipal BR

Hatching reported from more than one lakh Olive ridley turtle nests

Tamil Nadu

Restoration of water flow in Sigurhalla river helps wildlife in Mudumalai TR in summer

Telangana

Waterhole census conducted in state's PAs

Tripura

ONGC gets clearance for drilling in Trishna WLS

Uttarakhand

Spate of elephant attacks on vehicles in Corbett TR

West Bengal

94 tigers photographed in Sunderbans

GPS collars to monitor elephant movement in North Bengal

Forest officials attacked by family of the accused in tiger poaching case in Sunderbans
Captive bred Red pandas to be released in the Singalila NP

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

CCMB scientists sequence Asiatic lion genome
NGT seeks report on constitution of biodiversity management committees

SOUTH ASIA

Nepal

Common leopard gecko confirmed as 11th gecko species in Nepal

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

National News

NGT seeks report on status of GIB

Gujarat

Thol and Nalsarovar completely dry

Haryana

Release of captive-reared vultures postponed by six-eight months

Maharashtra

19 ha of mangroves including in Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary to be cut for bullet train

Nagaland

Radio-tagged Amur falcon returns to India on her way back to China

Tamil Nadu

Rs. 4.9 crore development works proposed in Vellode Bird Sanctuary

17

18

20

FROM THE ARCHIVES

23

PERSPECTIVE

24

The need of the hour – systematic scientific information for conservation!

Protected Area Update

Vol. XXV, No. 3, June 2019 (No. 139)

Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

Editorial Assistance: **Reshma Jathar, Anuradha Arjunwadkar**

Illustrations:

Ashvini Menon (Visual Design Studio), **Shruti Kulkarni,**
Madhuvanti Anantharajan & Peeyush Sekhsaria

Produced by

Kalpavriksh and the **Centre for Policy Studies, IIT Bombay**

Editorial Address

C/o Kalpavriksh

Apartment 5, Shri Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004, Maharashtra, India.

Tel/Fax: 020 – 25654239

Email: psekhsaria@gmail.com

Website: <http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods1/protected-area-update>

Publication of the PA Update has been supported by

Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust

C/o Foundation for Ecological Security <http://fes.org.in/>,

Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies

and

Donations from a number of individual supporters

EDITORIAL

More than a line on the map

The theme for the editorial of this issue of the *PA Update* emerges from a rather peculiar challenge that comes with the editing and production of a newsletter such as this. The question of where a particular news item should be placed in a periodical that is defined primarily by a geographical unit - the protected area - may seem at first instance to be a rather insignificant, even an innocuous, question. For most part it does not even arise, but this issue of the *PA Update* has been different and here are some examples to illustrate the challenge and the questions that arise.

Refer, for instance, to page 7 for a story on the proposal by Hyderabad based LaCONES-CCMB for the assisted reproduction of the hangul, one of Jammu & Kashmir's most enigmatic and endangered creatures. The story has a strong Hyderabad connection but the choice of placing it in the relevant state section appears straight-forward and obvious. But then there is a similar story (pg. 17) on the successful sequencing, also by the Hyderabad based CCMB, of the genome of the Asiatic lion that is discussed in light of the genomes of other big cats including the tiger, leopard and the African lion. Now, where should this story be placed given the existing framework and the structure of the *PA Update*? Should it be in the National News of India section (where it has been currently placed), or should it have been placed under Gujarat? Would an International News section be more appropriate or maybe another larger, overarching category needs to be created for news such as this?

The challenge becomes even more interesting if we look at one of the most fascinating research and conservation stories from India in recent times - that of the Amur Falcon (pg. 22). Longleng, a female falcon that was tagged in Nagaland two years ago has been 'happily' transiting through Nagaland as she flies

back and forth from her breeding grounds in China to different countries on the African continent. For a newsletter published in India, the obvious link is the state of Nagaland and this prompts the story to be placed in that geographical unit. There's no gainsaying that the choice would make no sense to the falcon whose lifeworld and time horizons are governed by concerns entirely different from those of the editor of the *PA Update*.

Tens of animals dying every year on an highway that connects one state capital from another; birds breeding in one geography but wintering in another; policies made in New Delhi that can re-configure realities all over the country; a decision in Bengaluru that impacts wildlife in neighbouring Kerala, construction of a dam in the hills that will forever impact the water flows, ecosystems and wildlife in a geography a 10000 kms downstream... how would one decide where the relevant story should be placed?

The point here is not merely structural or even academic, even though these are important. The maps we make and the boundaries we draw on the planet are our, human, efforts at making sense of the world that we are part of. There is no escaping the choices that we make but we need to remember that these have serious implications for everything else we share this planet with, even the planet itself. A protected area is much more than a line on the map - it is an entity with multiple identities and realities, a complex history and a future that could chart out into multiple directions. Longleng's story is not merely that of Nagaland or of China or of Africa; it is indeed larger, much larger, than the sum of its parts.

How we do justice to this larger reality is, in the final analysis, the only challenge that will matter. The faster we take it up the better, because time surely does not seem to be on our side!

In a new development that promises to be both exciting and challenging, the *PA Update* is happy to welcome the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB) as a new collaborator; the *PA Update*

will henceforth be a joint publication of Kalpavriksh and CPS, IIT Bombay. We hope this and other such collaborations will help chart out new paths and directions for the *PA Update*, certainly in its continued publication but also in addressing the larger themes and concerns that the newsletter has been engaging with from the beginning.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

WII's dugong scholarship programme extended to North Andaman



The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has expanded its dugong scholarship programme to North Andaman. The aim is to financially aid fisherfolk children studying in government schools in the islands.

A dugong awareness programme was conducted in the Government Senior School, Durgapur, in North Andaman in April earlier this year as part of this initiative. 60 students from class 6 to 10 participated. The awareness programme was followed by the scholarship examination based on multiple choice questions about the islands, its biodiversity, the dugong and sea grasses. The programme was supported

by Bhagirath Roy, school headmaster, Neelkanth, teacher-in-charge and Diglipur Forest Department – Territorial Division.

Selected students will be awarded a scholarship of Rs. 500 per month for the next two years.

Source: Denis Giles. 'Wildlife Institute of India expands Dugong Scholarship Program to North Andaman', www.andamanchronicle.net, 03/05/19.

ASSAM

DFOs under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council cannot issue mining permits: CEC

The Supreme Court constituted central empowered committee (CEC) had said that the divisional forest officers (DFOs) under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) are not the competent authorities to issue mining permits. The matter is directly related to the recent issue of mining for stones in the elephant corridors connecting Kaziranga National Park (NP) and the Karbi Anglong Hills (KAH).

The CEC has said that the competent authority for issuing permits for minor mining is the principal chief conservator of forests while the DFOs are authorized to exercise various provisions of the Assam Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 2013. It pointed out that environmental clearance, payment of taxes and mining permits are issued by DFOs working with the council after the state government's director of geology and mining approves a mining plan.

The CEC, in its report on the complaint filed by an environmental activist against illegal mining of stones, stated that KAAC is vested with 30 subjects, including forest. However, mining is not a subject that is included among these. It also added that the DFO of KAH Division has issued 17 permits for stone quarrying within the eco-sensitive zone of the park.

Taking cognizance of the CEC report, the apex court, had on April 12, ordered a ban on all types of mining activities along the

southern fringes of the park boundary and all the catchment areas of rivers and streams originating in Karbi Anglong. The report was compiled following the CEC's site inspection of stone-mining areas from March 28 to April 1 and May 30 to June 1 last year. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, No. 1 and *PA Update* 27)

Source: 'DFOs under KAAC can't issue mining permits, says SC panel',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
27/04/19.

CHATTISGARH

CRPF accused of hunting in Udanti-Sitanadi TR

The Chattisgarh Forest Department has started an investigation after a National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) report alleged that Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel posted in the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (TR) were hunting wild animals and using firewood from the forests.

The NTCA had released its supervisory report on the allegations in October last year after its officials visited the TR. The principal chief conservator of forest, Rakesh Chaturvedi, noted that while the report was yet to come to the department officially, the inquiry has been ordered keeping in mind the serious nature of the allegations. He added further that in 2017, there were reports that CRPF personnel had shot dead a wild bear. In this instance the bear had attacked the personnel and jawans had opened fire in self-defence.

The CRPF has, however, denied the charges made against its personnel.

Source: 'CRPF accused of hunting in tiger reserve',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
15/05/19.

GUJARAT

Gujarat proposes a tiger corridor in state

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has proposed a tiger corridor connecting the forest areas of Lunawada and Dahod in Gujarat to those in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The proposal with a budget of Rs. five crore has been sent to National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). It includes a series of initiatives such as boosting the prey base, creating water holes, setting up camera traps in Lunawada and Dahod and educating people about tigers.

The move comes in the wake of the recent sighting and subsequent death of a tiger in the area (*PA Update* XXV, No. 2). It was the first sighting of a tiger in Gujarat in 27 years; the animal died less than a month later, reportedly of starvation.

A senior forest official said that if NTCA refuses to release funds for the project, the FD would approach the state government for money.

Source: 'Tiger death spurs corridor plan',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
16/04/19.

Additional steps for lion conservation in Gujarat

The Gujarat government has initiated a number of steps in an effort to provide lions in the state with a larger safety cover. These include the:

- establishment of a new Shetrunji Wildlife Division (SWD) outside Gir Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). Currently, there are two wildlife divisions in Gir - Gir East and Gir West, both of which function under the Junagadh Wildlife Circle. The new division will also fall under the same circle. Seven new wildlife ranges - Rajula, Jafarabad, Liliya, Mahuva, Jesar, Palitana and Talaja - will be established in this new division.

- creation of 104 new posts including deputy conservator of forests, two assistant conservator of forests and seven range forest

officers and other administrative staff, for the new division.

- creation of the Maliya-Hatina Wildlife Range under the Gir West division.
- creation of a conservation reserve spread over an area of 109 sq. km area in Bhavnagar and Amreli districts.
- setting up of seven wildlife rescue centres in Amreli, Gir-Somnath, Junagadh and Jamnagar districts.

Source: Vijaysinh Parmar. 'Gujarat govt to set up new wildlife division outside Gir sanctuary, expand safety cover for Asiatic Lions', www.news18.com, 01/04/19.

HARYANA

More than 20 wild animal road kills in four years on Gurugram-Faridabad road

More than 20 wild animals have been run over by speeding vehicles in the last four years on the Gurugram-Faridabad road. Five such cases involving a leopard, two jackals, an Indian fox and an Indian hare respectively have been reported in the first three months of 2019 itself. Besides this, the Pali road that transects the Gurugram-Faridabad road in Faridabad, and the Surajkund-Badkal road bisecting the Pali road, have both reported additional cases of road kills. Each of the three roads bifurcate the wildlife corridor between Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi and Sariska Tiger Reserve in Alwar, Rajasthan.

Little effort has gone into ensuring the safety and protection of wildlife in the region. On a four km stretch on the Gurugram-Faridabad road - between the check-post in Mangar village and the Pali road - there is just one speed-breaker. Similarly, the Pali (8.4 km) and Surajkund-Badkal (7.8 km, till the shooting range in Faridabad) roads have only four speed-breakers. There is not a single signboard indicating the presence of wild animals on the three stretches. Many cases go unreported and activists have pointed out that authorities don't even lift the carcasses, except in the case of leopards.

A 2017 study by the Wildlife Institute of India had confirmed the presence of 10 carnivore species in the Aravalis of south Haryana. The study had called for prioritising conservation in Mangar Bani and other areas contiguous to the Gurugram-Faridabad road.

Source: 'Speed proves fatal for wildlife on this stretch bisecting Aravalis', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/04/19.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Study in Khokhan WLS suggests Himalayan yew on the brink of extinction

A study conducted in Khokhan Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) by the Kullu based GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development has suggested that the Himalayan yew, a highly valued medicinal plant in the Himalayas might be on the brink of extinction.

Titled 'Population Ecology of the Endangered Himalayan Yew, in Khokhan Wildlife Sanctuary of North western Himalaya for conservation management', the study was conducted in six forest communities where the species is present. It revealed that abundance of the species, impacts of harvesting and its current regeneration patterns might soon lead to its disappearance from the sanctuary. The information gathered during this study indicated that 50% of the surviving yew trees have been affected by bark removal and the remainder are subject to lopping and felling for fuel.

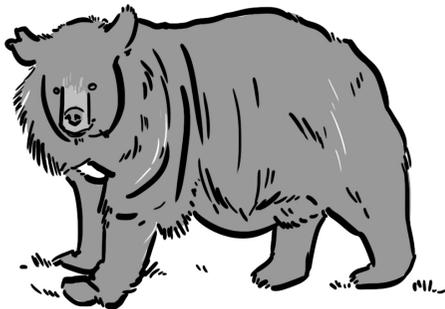
Globally, the yew is primarily valued for the medicinal properties of taxol, the anti-cancerous properties of which were first reported in 1964. The tree is also a source of drug Zarnab, which is frequently used in the Unani system of medicine. The extract derived from the bark and leaves is used to cure bronchitis, asthma, acute headache, cough & cold and poisonous insect bites. It is also used as aphrodisiac. Besides its medicinal use, yew wood is also valued for its hardness and durability. The plant's habitats have been degraded by deforestation and human land uses.

These effects are further exacerbated by the species' relative intolerance to fire and drought and poor regeneration.

SS Samant, head of the GB Pant Institute, said that though the study was limited to only one location, its findings indicate that there is an urgent need to develop an appropriate conservation strategy for this species. He has suggested the development of a monitoring plan to determine trends in existing populations and also the implementation of sustainable methods of bark and leaf extraction that could then be disseminated to local inhabitants. Research is also needed on the regeneration of this species, both vegetative and by seed. He further recommended that an effort should be made to enlist the aid of local residents in propagating the species.

Source: 'Endangered Himalayan yew, high value medicinal plant of Himalaya, on the brink of extinction', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 09/05/19.

FD & WII to study changing behaviour pattern of Asiatic black bear



The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has collaborated with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to conduct a study of the changing behaviour pattern of Asian black bear. While the bear traditionally hibernates in winter, there have been many reports of bear attacks on humans in this season in different regions of the state. The bear was known to come down from the higher reaches in search of food during the

summer and monsoon period. In recent times this has been observed in the winter as well.

One official noted that human interference including by the construction of roads close to the forest is likely to have disturbed the bears. A WII scientist pointed out that if winter is not very harsh then bears do not hibernate and go around searching for food in human habitation.

In Himachal Pradesh, the bear is found in Sarahan in Shimla district, Rampur Bushahar, Bharmour, Pangi in Chamba, Sirmaur and Barot in Mandi district at the height of 5000-7000 ft.

Source: 'WII to study changing habits of Asian Black Bear in Himachal Pradesh', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/04/19.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

LaCONES – CCMB to initiate assisted reproduction technology project for hangul conservation

The Hyderabad-based Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), a part of the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB), will soon begin a project for the conservation of the hangul using assisted reproduction technology.

The initiative has been launched as part of larger project titled, 'Improving capacity and strengthening wildlife conservation for sustainable livelihoods in Kashmir'. It has been taken up by the National Mission on Himalayan Studies, ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

Rs 3.4 crore has been sanctioned for the project thus far by the Centre.

Source: 'Hyderabad lab takes steps to conserve prized Hangul deer', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/05/19.

KARNATAKA

Kuvempu University continues to violate laws in Bhadra TR

The forest department (FD) has stopped Kuvempu University's ongoing construction of a road, a stadium and a hostel in the Singhanamane forest of Bhadra Tiger Reserve's (TR) Lakkavali Range. According to forest officials, the university has failed to obtain the necessary clearances for the work. During an inspection carried out by the FD in the Aldara section of the Lakkavali Range, it was found that the university had no clearances, but they were still digging, trenching and concreting the area.

This is not the first time the university has accused of violating forest and wildlife laws. Work had been similarly stopped last year as well (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 4) but restarted after sometime.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Forest department stops construction work in Bhadra tiger reserve', www.newindianexpress.com, 30/04/19.

River tern killed by drone during wildlife film shoot in Bhadra TR



A River tern died after it was hit by a drone being used to shoot a wildlife film in the Lakkavalli range of Bhadra Tiger Reserve (TR). A senior forest officer was also present when the accident happened. Wildlife activists have demanded a thorough inquiry into the incident.

River terns come in large numbers to an island here and the forest department and a

private resort run boat safaris for tourists. One such boat was used to transport the crew, the forest official and equipment including the drone camera to the island. Whether permissions were taken for the shoot is also not known.

Conservationists have been demanding for long that the boat safari be stopped. They have also claimed that many videos shot here illegally.

Source: Amit S Upadhye. 'Drone flown for wildlife film kills bird in Chikkamagaluru district of Karnataka', www.newindianexpress.com, 13/04/19.

Heavy fines for teasing animals inside Bandipur NP

The forest department (FD) has said that they will be levying heavy fines on tourists who are found teasing wild animals while passing through the Bandipur National Park. The move is in response to the increasing incidents of tourists stopping their vehicles on road, clicking pictures of wildlife and teasing them.

The FD staff are on a regular patrol on the Ooty and Kerala roads and closely monitoring tourist vehicles. Stopping a vehicle illegally in the forest attracts a fine of Rs. 1,000.

Source: 'Teasing wildlife invites fine at Bandipur National Park', www.starofmysore.com, 27/04/19.

Wild animal deaths due to speeding trains on the rise in Khanapur

Over 30 wild animals including three elephants have been killed in the last four years by speeding trains in the forest area of Khanapur taluk, particularly in the Londa and Nagaragali forest ranges. 20 of these deaths including of gaur, leopards and tigers were reported in 2017.

The forest department (FD) has given many suggestions to the Railways including reducing the speed of trains while passing through forest areas, fencing the track in the region and enforcing a ban on passengers throwing food to reduce the possibility of these

incidents. No action, however, is reported to have been taken. The FD had also registered a complaint against the Railways in 2017 after the death of an elephant near Tavarakatti.

It has also been pointed out that once the ongoing track doubling work on the Londa route is completed the movement of trains will increase and so will the instances of animal deaths. (Also see *PA Update* XXIV, No. 3)

Source: 'Tracks turn death traps for animals in Khanapur', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 31/03/19.

No widening of NH 4A inside Dandeli WLS: NHAI

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has said that it will not be widening national highway (NH) 4A inside Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). In a statement submitted to the Karnataka High Court recently, NHAI has said that as 12 m right of way is available within the sanctuary, it is only improving the curves. It has also given up 6.4 ha of the 85 ha of forest land for which permission was granted to them.

NHAI has further stated that all necessary clearances have been obtained and they would be providing one underpass and four additional animal and elephant underpasses as part of the minimum mitigatory measures. They will also be putting up speed-breakers and ensure that speed does not exceed 40 km/hour.

The statement was filed in response to a public interest litigation by environmentalists, which cited media reports regarding felling of about 22,000 trees to widen NH 4A connecting Khanapura with Londa. The petitioners had contended that the 14 km stretch in question is thick forest and comes under the Dandeli Elephant Reserve and that it is home to elephants, tigers, leopards, panthers and King cobras, among others. (And see *PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 5).

Source: 'Karnataka: No widening of NH 4A inside Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, says NHAI', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 05/04/19.

KERALA

75 tigers in Wayanad WLS; highest in state

A recent survey conducted by the Kerala Forest Department (FD) in association with the Parambikulam and Periyar Tiger Conservation Foundations has reported a total of 176 tigers in Kerala. The highest number of 75 was reported from the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) followed by the Periyar and Parambikulam Tiger Reserves (TRs) where the number was 25 each. Nine tigers were also camera trapped in the North and South Wayanad forest divisions.

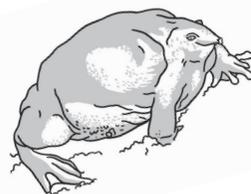
No tigers were reported from the Idukki WLS and the adjoining Kottayam and Kothamangalam forest divisions. The Kasargod forest division similarly did not report any tigers. The Nilambur North and South forest divisions were excluded from the study as camera traps could not be set up in the forests due to Maoist related security issues. These areas are expected to support a good tiger population.

The forest area in the state was divided into 10 landscapes and 1,640 camera traps were set up for the count that went on for nearly 18 months. A total of 500 trained staff participated in the exercise.

Source: EM Manoj. 'Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is tiger kingdom of the State', www.thehindu.com, 14/05/19.

Purple frog might become state frog of Kerala

The Purple frog *Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensis*, found only in the Western Ghats, might soon be declared as the state frog of Kerala.



Sandeep Das, a researcher at Kerala Forest Research Institute, had set things in motion in this regard and a proposal for the same is to be placed

before the state's wildlife advisory board soon. If accepted, Kerala would be the first Indian state to have an official frog.

The frog, also known as the Pig-nosed and Maveli frog, is believed to be closely related to a family of frogs found in Seychelles, near Madagascar in Africa, providing evidence for the claim that the continents of Asia and Africa were once part of the same landmass.

The frog was discovered in Kerala's Idukki district in 2003 by Professor SD Biju of Delhi University and Franky Bossuyt of Free University of Brussels.

Source: Somanath E. 'Kerala all set to get a state frog', www.english.manormaonline.com, 01/05/19.

MAHARASHTRA

Large carnivores adapted to human dominated landscapes: Study

Large carnivores like leopards, wolves and hyenas have adapted themselves to share space with people, says a recent study undertaken across a large area of 89,000 sq. km in western Maharashtra. The study, published in the international journal *Conservation Science and Practice*, was conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society – India in collaboration with Foundation for Ecological Research and Learning, University of Florida, Centre for Wildlife Studies and the Maharashtra Forest Department.

The study, which was spread over seven districts – Nashik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Satara, Sangli, Solapur and Kolhapur - included a mix of semi-arid lands and agricultural fields, and the protected zones contributing less than 3% of the area. It revealed that leopards, wolves and hyenas respectively occupied 57%, 64% and 75% of the landscape. A high probability of all three species existing together was estimated in 25% of the study site that supports human densities ranging from 59.32 to 1,169.26 persons per sq km. Factors like agricultural land-use, built-up areas, domestic livestock and

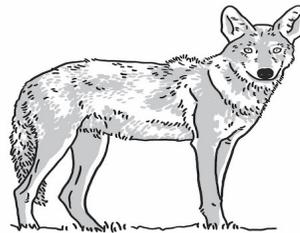
presence of wild prey species influenced the carnivores' distribution patterns.

Iravatee Majgaonkar, lead author of the study, said that the work clearly shows the importance of areas outside designated protected zones for conservation of large carnivores.

Source: 'Leopards, wolves adapt to share space with humans: Study', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/04/19. Snehal Fernandes. 'Maharashtra's Wild West: Wolves, hyenas, leopards share space with humans', www.hindustantimes.com, 16/04/19.

Baramati wolves to be tracked with GIS collars

The



Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be jointly tracking the movement of wolves in the Baramati area using Geographical Information System (GIS) based collars. Five wolves have been identified for the study, which aims at finding out the range of their movement.

It is hoped that the study will help suggest mitigation measures for the movement of the animals that have been adversely affected on account of linear intrusions like roads and canals.

A similar project is being conducted by the WII in the Nannaj area of Solapur district where two wolves have been collared.

Source: 'Forest department to track wolves' movement', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 31/03/19.

FD mulls closure of wolf collaring project in Pune forest division

The forest department (FD) is considering closing down the wolf collaring and study project that is currently going on in the Pune forest division. Officials claim there is no update and information about the progress from the parties concerned.

The first-ever study of wolves in the area was commissioned in 2014 when a group of enthusiasts —Wolfgang — working on the protection of wildlife approached the FD seeking to study these animals here. The year-long study under the project ‘Ovitla Landga’ (named after local wolf lore) was started in early 2018 with collaring of the wolves by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), in collaboration with Wolfgang and the FD (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 6). The study was to cover wolves from Saswad, Solapur and other neighbouring parts of Pune district. Four wolves have been collared so far and daily monitoring of their movements is being done. The target is to collar a total 12 wolves.

The FD has said there are no updates on the progress of the project and that information was being provided only when asked for by the department. It was then that they decided to contact the head office. The Wolfgang group has said that they were only involved with collaring of the wolves and played no role in the actual study. The WII, meanwhile had noted that all the necessary information was being shared as the institute was directly liaising with the wildlife department in Pune.

Source: Himanshu Nitn. ‘Forest dept mulls closure of wolf collaring’, www.punemirror.indiatimes.com, 14/05/19.

Activists demand closure of taxidermy centre at SGNP

Mumbai-based activists Farooque Dhala and Irfan Macchiwala have written a letter to chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, the chief secretary and the state forest minister requesting for

closure of the taxidermy centre at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The letter has stated that tax-payers’ money should be spent on something better - education, infrastructure and food. Taxidermy is of no use to anyone, they have argued.

They have also argued that it is important to test taxidermy specimens for hazardous chemicals and materials such as arsenic, mercury, naphthalene, paradichlorobenze, asbestos, and DDT, all of which are commonly found in taxidermy collections. The duo has also demanded that Bajirao, SGNP’s white tiger that succumbed to age-related illnesses, not be used for a taxidermy project.

Dr. Shailesh Pethe, veterinary officer at SGNP has, however, said that the allegations related to taxidermy have been made out of lack of information on the subject. He added that chemicals such as DDT and arsenic are no longer used in present-day taxidermy. Also, use of taxidermy specimen in teaching veterinarians and biologists regarding animal structures and anatomy, helps avoid handling live animals.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. ‘Activists seek closure of Sanjay Gandhi National Park’s taxidermy centre in Borivli’, www.mid-day.com, 05/05/19.

Hamlet in SGNP achieves waste-management at source

For over three months, the residents of Chunapada inside Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) have been segregating their waste at source. The 220-odd residents living in 43 homes have been sending dry waste for recycling while the wet waste is being turned into compost. Every week, the hamlet generates 20 kg organic waste and another 150-200 kg dry waste, mostly plastic. Four pits have been dug along the periphery of the hamlet for composting of the wet waste. The dry waste is collected using a tempo and sent for recycling to four private plastic manufacturing companies.

The project is led by SGNP forest staff, lawyer Afroz Shah and his 25 volunteers, who

have removed over 20,000 kgs of waste from Chunapada in over 14 weeks with clean-up drives scheduled every Tuesday.

The SGNP staff, led by range forest officer Priyanka Barge and eight forest guards, have been sensitising other hamlets to follow the model. The project will be implemented across all 43 tribal hamlets with houses varying from 40 to 200 in each hamlet in SGNP. The next hamlet will be Navapada, which has 120 houses and a population of 500.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'SGNP hamlet tackles waste at source to combat man-animal conflict', Hindustan Times, 23/04/19.

Junona village says 'no' to TATR's community conservancy project

Junona village, adjoining the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) has opposed a move to set up a community conservancy project in their area. Taking a cue from Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, the state forest department (FD) had in 2015 introduced the community conservancy idea by encouraging farmers adjoining parks not to cultivate land for which they will get a compensation. The idea is that farmlands that will get converted into grasslands and meadows would attract wildlife and boost tourism.

There are 40-45 households in Junona with people holding a total of 70-acres of agricultural land. The plan is to pay an annual compensation of Rs 10,000 per acre from the TATR foundation for not cultivating the fields. The initial idea was to have a 11-month lease agreement with the landholders, which would then be renewed after evaluating results. There are six tigers in the Junona area, which witnesses considerable crop depredation and is vulnerable to human-wildlife conflict.

The Junona villagers have, however, rejected the proposal alleging that it was an attempt to make them landless, especially at a time when central government had a plan to double the income of farmers by 2022. Some families had shown an initial interest as they were to be given jobs as daily wagers on

protection huts to each family, but they too are opposing the proposal now.

The sarpanch of the village, Sanjay Monde has argued that most of the locals were marginal farmers dependant on agriculture and they would be at the mercy of the FD once cultivation was stopped. He said further that were at least assured of food grain for the entire year in the current situation but would be forced to purchase food once the conservancy agreement comes into place. Another issue raised by the villagers was related to ownership of land. One farmer noted that he owned 16-acre but the 7/12 extract had 20 names on it. The money the individual claimant would get from the conservancy agreement would therefore be marginal.

The villagers have also alleged arm twisting by officials to get the conservancy project going. A delegation from village recently met the state chief wildlife warden, Nitin Kakodkar, to express their concerns. He is reported to have assured them that participation in the scheme was voluntary.

What is community conservancy?

- It is basically ecotourism project on private lands near parks benefiting both communities and lodge owners
- Country's first such project is being implemented at Umred-Karhandla's Gothangaon in Kuhl where 39 families have agreed to part with 105 acres of land
- Similar project is in place at Alizanza (Kolara), where a lodge owner pays money to three landowner families for homestays he built on their seven-acre land
- The idea aims at promoting responsible land use through strict management planning, covering tourism development, grazing and settlement

Source: 'Junona village says 'no' to TATR's community conservancy project', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/05/19.

88 ha of forest land diverted for industrial project in corridor connecting Bor-Pench-Melghat TRs

The Maharashtra government has recently diverted 87.97 hectares of rich forest land that falls in the corridor of the Bor-Pench-Melghat Tiger Reserves and is home to six resident tigers. 60.31 hectare of the total diverted land falls in Chakdoh village in Katol range while the remaining 27.66 hectare is in the Bazargaon range, both in Nagpur forest division. 1,760 trees will have to be axed in the actual project area of 4.73 hectares. The diversion has been effected for Solar Industries India Limited (SIIL), which already has its unit here and has expansion plans to manufacture ammunition, starting with hand grenades, for the Indian Army.

The forest is part of Wildlife Institute of India's (WII) 'Corridor Atlas of Eastern Vidarbha Landscape' which was released in August 2016. Maps based on a scientific study prepared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and WII show that the area is regularly used by tigers and other wildlife.

SIIL had first demanded the land in June 2011 for manufacturing of HMX explosives needed for the army. A formal proposal under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, was moved in 2014 when the Devendra Fadnavis government came to power in Maharashtra. The BJP-Shiv Sena government fast-tracked the proposal and sent it to Centre in December 2016, following which approval by the central environment ministry was granted in December 2018. The issue remained pending for certain compliances and was finally sorted out following a visit by a ministry official in April earlier this year. The state issued its final order on the diversion on April 15.

A senior forest official has said that only 4.73 hectares of land is needed for the project and the remaining area will be maintained as a safety zone where the only activities allowed will be fencing and construction of watchtowers.

Compensatory afforestation will be taken up by SIIL in 90 hectares of land in

Hirapur village in Chandrapur and the company has also handed over 88.34 hectare of non-forest land to the forest department (FD) in Chiplun, in Ratnagiri district, in lieu of the diverted forest land. SIIL is also reported to have deposited Rs. 14.03 crore with the FD towards net present value (NPV), compensatory afforestation, chain-link fencing and other activities to be taken up in the diversion area.

Source: 'State okays felling of 1,760 trees in tiger path for grenade unit', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/04/19.

ODISHA

New vine snake species described after 113 years; found in Similipal BR

Zoologists have described a new vine snake species from Odisha, the first after nearly 113 years. The last time a vine snake species was described was in 1906. It took about 10 years of field and laboratory work to describe the new species, which has been named *Ahaetulla laudankia* or Laudankia vine snake since it was found in Odisha. The local name for vine snakes is Laudankia or Laudaka, as the snake resembles dried stems ('danka') of bottle gourd ('lau').

The discovery has an interesting story behind it. Researchers had collected a brown coloured snake from Similipal Biosphere Reserve (BR) in 2009 and they initially thought it may be *Haetullana sutaisabellinus*, a subspecies of the common vine snake found in India. However, after studying another brown vine snake specimen *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* from Baripada also in Odisha, they noticed some variations in color between the specimens. The researchers felt that the specimen they had collected from Similipal may be a new variety. However, they came across three more specimens from Balasore district of Odisha, which further intrigued them.

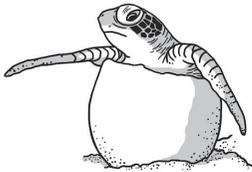
A molecular analysis was conducted and it proved that the initial specimen was indeed a unique species. It was genetically distinct from green vine snakes. After reviewing

all the literature pertaining to the brown coloured vine snakes from India and after cross-validating it with two old collections of brown vine snakes from Rajasthan, the team was convinced it had discovered a new species. They have published a report on their work in the *Journal of Natural History*.

The research team that discovered the snake included scientists from different institutions - V Deepak (Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru); Surya Narayanan (Wayanad Wild), Vivek Sarkar (Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun) and Sushil K. Dutta (Nature, Environment & Wildlife Society, Angul).

Source: S Suresh Ramanan. 'Found: new vine snake species after a gap 113 years'. www.thehindubusinessline.com, 13/05/19.

Hatching reported from more than one lakh Olive ridley turtle nests



The Odisha Forest and Environment Department has reported the hatching from nearly 1.25 lakh Olive ridley turtle

nests on Kalam Island off the Odisha coast in the month of April. The unmanned island, located close to Wheeler's Island defence test range centre, is one of the largest rookeries in the world.

4.5 lakh turtles had arrived at beaches under Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary to lay eggs earlier this season.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXV, No. 2; Vol. XXIV, No. 2, Vol. XXIII, No. 1; Vol. XXII, Nos 6 & 1; Vol. XXI, No. 1; Vol. XX, No. 1 and Vol. XIX, No. 6).

Source: 'Over one lakh Olive Ridley turtles enter sea in Odisha', www.thehindu.com, 21/04/19.

TAMIL NADU

Restoration of water flow in Sigurhalla river helps wildlife in Mudumalai TR in summer

Wildlife in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (TR) is expected to survive better through summer this season due to the successful restoration of water flow in the Sigurhalla River. The river used to go completely dry until 2017 when the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited (Tangedco), following an order of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), began releasing enough water to maintain a minimal flow throughout the year. The order from the NGT came in response to a petition filed in the matter by lawyer, M. Santhanaraman. The Sigurhalla had been a perennial river till the construction of the Kamaraj Sagar Dam.

Ecologists have noted encouraging signs following the restoration of the flow. It has been noted, for instance, that elephants don't remain near Mavanallah village and surrounding human habitations anymore. This suggests they have a much greater range, allowing them to search for food along the river without needing to trek back to a few established water-holes. Farmers and local residents, too, now have more water from underground aquifers.

Conservationists and activists have expressed the hope that similar such initiatives will be taken elsewhere in the Nilgiris as well.

Source: Rohan Premkumar. 'Restored Sigurhalla a lifeline for wildlife in Mudumalai', www.thehindu.com, 23/04/19.

TELANGANA

Waterhole census conducted in state's PAs

Forest staff and officers, along with volunteers and members of various NGOs such as the Friends of Snakes Society, World Wide Fund for Nature, Deccan Birders and the Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society took part in a two-

day waterhole census in the state in the 2nd week of May.

A total of 104 volunteers, who were divided into 43 teams, visited the Amrabad and Kawal Tiger Reserves and the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary as part of the exercise. The teams identified 241 water bodies and made two trips, once in the morning, and then again late in the evening for the enumeration exercise. Each team was accompanied by a local forest department (FD) staffer. The teams spent the night at base camps with forest officials making arrangements at these locations for them.

The FD had made special arrangements for transportation of the volunteers in three buses from Aranya Bhavan in Hyderabad.

Source: 'Waterhole census conducted in state's wildlife sanctuaries',
www.thehansindia.com, 13/05/19.

TRIPURA

ONGC gets clearance for drilling in Trishna WLS

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has got clearance from the union environment ministry and the state authorities to start drilling for gas in the eco-sensitive zone of the Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The company has also got a clearance from the National Board for Wildlife for the same.

ONGC is targeting one-and-a-half years to complete the drilling task at a cost of Rs. 150 crore. Last year, ONGC drilled 25 wells and harnessed gas at an optimum level thereby balancing demand and supply in Tripura, informed a company official.

There is some lack of a clarity in the matter however, with a Supreme Court judgement questioning the 'mining' in the sanctuary'. ONGC's response says that it will be undertaking drilling operations, which are not the same as mining. The state government is yet to clear this issue.

Source: 'ONGC gets nod for drilling in Tripura sanctuary',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
27/04/19.

UTTARAKHAND

Spate of elephant attacks on vehicles in Corbett TR

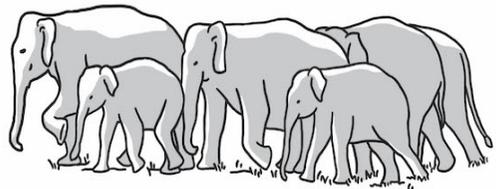
A series of incidents have been reported in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) in the month of May where elephants have attacked tourist and other vehicles.

In an incident that occurred in the 2nd week of May, a Gypsy vehicle carrying Indian Revenue Services (IRS) trainees who were on a safari in Bijrani zone of the TR, was attacked by an elephant. The jeep was slightly damaged but its occupants were safe. In another incident in Mohaan area of Ramnagar forest division, an elephant stopped traffic movement and tried to push a government bus carrying 25 passengers. Fortunately, no one was injured in this case either. Earlier, on May 2, a group of women tourists in Mohaan range faced a similar situation when an angry elephant came charging towards their stationary safari jeep. A 12-second video of the incident which went viral shows the tusker running towards the vehicle as the tourists scream to the driver to leave the spot.

Source: 'Elephant attacks jeep carrying IRS trainees in Corbett Tiger Reserve',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
13/05/19.

WEST BENGAL

GPS collars to monitor elephant movement in North Bengal



The West Bengal Forest Department has decided to initiate a project for GPS based monitoring of the movement of elephant herds in North Bengal. The animals will be fitted with collars that have been procured from France.

Each weighs 14 kg and costs Rs. two lakh. The collars will initially be fitted on one female adult elephant each from two different elephant corridors.

The project is part of a larger initiative being executed in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Assam and West Bengal in association with the Indian Institute of Science. Some elephants have already been collared in Karnataka as part of the project. (Also see PA Updates Vol. XXIII, No. 6; Vol. XXII, Nos. 5 & 1; Vol. XXI, No. 5; Vol. XX, No. 4)

Source: 'GPS collars to track elephant herds', www.telegraphindia.com, 24/04/19.

94 tigers photographed in Sunderbans

At least 94 tigers have been photographed in the Sunderbans – in the tiger reserve (TR) and the South 24 Parganas forest division - in a camera trapping exercise conducted in 2018. It is expected that the total population of tigers will be eventually estimated at about 110 animals. The numbers have not been released officially yet and the final tally will only be known after compilation and analysis by the Wildlife Institute of India.

While 64 tigers were photographed in the TR area, the remaining 30 were in the buffer zone.

The 2016-17 numbers were 62 in the tiger reserve and 25 in the buffer zone. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 6 and Vol. XXIX, No. 4)

Source: '7 new cats spotted, Sunderbans tiger count set to rise', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/05/19.

Forest officials attacked by family of accused in tiger poaching case in Sunderbans

A party of eight forest officials were attacked with bamboo sticks and stones on the evening of April 20, 2019, as they were trying to arrest an accused in a suspected tiger poaching case in Sunderbans. Led by the divisional forest officer

(DFO) of South 24 Paraganas Forest Division, G R Santhosha, the party had gone to pick up a person against whom another accused had given evidence in the said case. The family of the accused resisted and attacked the officials causing them injuries that led to their hospitalization.

According to the Superintendent of Police, Baruipur, Janab Rashid Munir Khan, the DFO went with his men to a spot that falls under Maipith police station without informing the police. Following the attack, the DFO sent an SOS to Khan to help them. The policy later conducted raids in the area and arrested the two accused whom the forest team was trying to arrest.

On April 8, earlier in the month, a tiger was found dead with a snare made of metal wire around its waist in Ajmalmari. It is believed to be a case where the tiger was caught in the snares set up locals for chital or wild boar.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Forest officials attacked in the Sunderbans', www.downtoearth.org.in, 22/04/19.

Captive bred Red pandas to be released in the Singalila NP



The West Bengal Zoo Authority will soon release two male and two female captive bred Red pandas into the wild in the Singalila National Park (NP). The release is expected to happen in September later this year. The decision was driven by the success of the Red panda breeding program at the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZA) in Darjeeling.

The captive breeding of the animals at PNHZP was started in 1990. At that time, the zoo had one male and three female pandas. One more male was brought from Rotterdam Zoo In 1993 and two cubs were born in June 1994. The current captive stock of Red pandas at PNHZP is 21.

The planned conservation breeding programme gained momentum with the setting up of a new conservation centre within the Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary. The Pandit Ballabh Pant High Altitude Zoo, Nainital, is the participating zoo for the conservation breeding programme and has also reported successful breeding. The Gangtok Zoo too has started a conservation breeding centre and two animals were shifted there from PNHZP.

Source: Soumitra Nandi. 'After successful breeding plan, pandas will be released into wild', www.millenniumpost.in, 31/03/19.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

CCMB scientists sequence Asiatic lion genome

Scientists at the Hyderabad based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) have sequenced the entire genome of Asiatic lion. The study was recently published online BioRxiv, by a team led by Dr Ajay Gaur. Comparative analysis with other felids and mammalian genomes unravelled the evolutionary history of the Asiatic lion and its position among other felids. The study noted that the evaluation of genetic diversity placed the Asiatic lion in the lowest bracket of genomic diversity index highlighting the gravity of its conservation status. The genome is estimated to be 2.3 Gb (Gigabase) long and is found to have 20,543 protein-coding genes.

Gaur noted that now with the complete genome available of the tiger, African Cheetah and the jaguar, comparative studies of all these big cats would be possible. He also said that

since only partial genomic information of the African lion was yet available, comparative genomics between African and Asiatic lions could take some time.

Source: Y Mallikarjun. 'CCMB scientists sequence Asiatic lion genome', www.thehindu.com, 11/09/19

NGT seeks report on constitution of biodiversity management committees

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) to submit, within three months, a report on the constitution of biodiversity management committees (BMCs) in every state. A bench headed by NGT chairperson, Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel, asked the states who have not constituted BMCs to file an affidavit stating the reason for the delay.

On August 8 last year, the NGT had directed a monitoring committee comprising officials from the MoEFCC and the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) to furnish a report in the matter. During the hearing, the committee informed that as against 2,52,709 panchayats where BMCs were to be constituted, a total of 1,44,371 BMCs had been formed. It also noted that only 6,834 people's biodiversity registers had been created while another 1,814 were in progress.

The hearings and directions are in response to a plea filed by a Pune resident seeking implementation of the provisions of Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and Biological Diversity Rules, 2004.

Source: 'NGT directs govt to submit report on constitution of Biodiversity Management Committees', www.business-standard.com, 15/04/19



SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

Common leopard gecko confirmed as 11th gecko species in Nepal

The Common Leopard Gecko (CLG) *Eublepharis macularius* has been confirmed as the 11th gecko species recorded in Nepal.

These ground-dwelling geckos have been reported to occur in arid habitats of Afghanistan, north-western India, and Pakistan. In Nepal, however, they were spotted for the first time in *Shorea robusta* mixed deciduous forest on December 30, 2016. Two individuals were first sighted hibernating in the Kamdi Biological Corridor, which connects the Banke National Park in Nepal with the Suhelwa Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh in India. The team later found evidences of the CLG occurring in other places as well. On 18 April 2017 two individuals were found in Nawalparasi district and on June 10, 2018, in Surkhet district of western Nepal.

Researchers suggest that the gecko was not detected till now on account of its secretive nocturnal nature and/or the limited research on the herpetofauna in western Nepal. These new records from three different localities indicate that the species is likely to have a much wider distribution in Nepal.

Fears have also been expressed that the discovery of these geckos here will give a boost to their illegal trade as it commands a high price in the exotic pet trade.

Source: 'Common leopard gecko found in Nepal for the first time', www.globalvoices.org, 01/05/19.



PA Update for PA and forest staff

Seeking your help and support

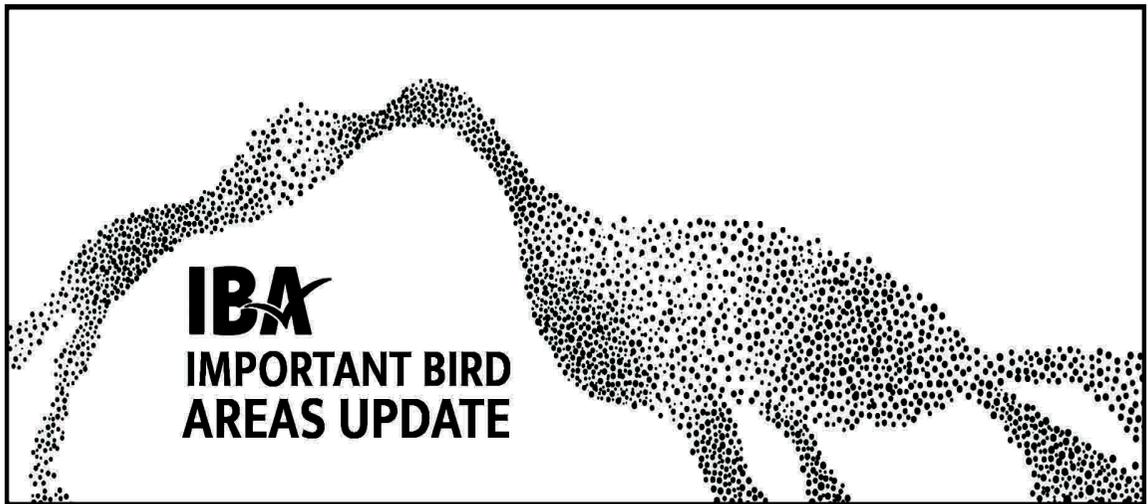
One section of readers who have found the *Protected Area Update* most relevant and useful is frontline forest staff and PA managers. The reason is that the newsletter has a simple and straight-forward format and also, importantly, that a print copy version reaches remote areas where online connectivity is still a far-away dream. We get this feedback intermittently but regularly and would like to increase the reach and the spread of the *PA Update*, particularly to people in and around forests and those working there.

We are launching an effort in that direction with a request to readers to help us by contributing towards this as gift subscriptions. The more subscriptions we are able to raise, the more widely we can reach out the *PA Update*. The annual subscription for the PA update is Rs. 150:

- 1) You can gift a subscription to a particular individual/officer/PA and send us the details of the individual/s who want the *PA Update* to be sent to. We will do the rest.
- 2) You can also give us a broad suggestion of whom you want the *PA Update* sent to - could be ground staff of a particular PA, could be PA managers of a particular state or could be region based. We will work with you to then identify the specific recipients.
- 3) At a third level you can indicate to us how many subscriptions you would like to support and we will identify relevant gaps and put those people on the mailing list.

There are multiple possibilities and we would look forward to other concrete suggestions and ideas that you may have.

Pls write to psekhsaria@gmail.com or to the editorial address of the *PA Update*, C/o Kalpavriksh.



NATIONAL NEWS

NGT seeks report on status of GIB

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) to submit, within two months, a report regarding the status of the last remaining Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) in the country.

The direction came in response to a petition filed by the Centre for Wildlife and Environment Litigation (CWEL) which stated that wind power was a major threat to GIBs as most of the wind power projects are located in the natural habitats of the bird in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

A survey by the Wildlife Institute of India in September 2018 had indicated that there were only around 150 GIBs remaining in India (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXV, No. 1; Vol. XXIV, Nos. 4 & 3; Vol. XXIII, Nos 4 & 3 and Vol. XXII, No. 6).

Source: 'Give report on last remaining Great Indian Bustards, NGT tells Union forest ministry', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 05/04/19.

ASSAM

Poisoned cattle carcass kills 37 vultures in Sivasagar



At least 37 vultures – mainly Himalayan griffon, but also Oriental white-backed and Slender-billed vultures - died in Sivasagar district after feeding on a pesticide-laced cattle carcass. Forest officials and a wildlife rescue team from the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre rescued an equal number of vultures in a critical condition. The incident happened at Bam Rajabari village where 20 vultures had died on account of carcass-poisoning in April last year.

It was a clear case of poisoning the carcass of a cow by villagers, meant to kill feral dogs. But, as is often the case, the vultures died, said the deputy ranger of Sivasagar. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 2 and Vol. XX, No. 3)

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Poisoned cattle carcass kills 37 vultures', www.thehindu.com, 30/03/19.

GUJARAT

Thol and Nalsarovar completely dry

Thol Wildlife Sanctuary and Nalsarovar, the only Ramsar site in Gujarat, have both completely dried up. While Nalsarovar has had no water since December last year, Thol dried up in April.

A senior forest official said that the situation this year is similar to that in 2010. Thol used to dry up every alternate year, but after it started getting water from the Narmada dam in 2000, this was seen only once in 2010. Poor rains this year and non-release of the Narmada waters for winter crops for the past two years are the main reasons for the drying up of the lake. Migratory birds have made Badla village in Surendranagar district — about 22 km from the sanctuary — their temporary home; many others are reported to have flown to Jamnagar and Porbandar on the Saurashtra coast.

On an average, Nalsarovar draws 30,000 birds in winter. The 2016 census had recorded over 55,000 birds at Thol.

Source: ‘Ahmedabad: Thol, Nalsarovar in deep waters’,
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
03/04/19.

HARYANA

Release of captive-reared vultures postponed by six-eight months

The release of eight captive-reared White-backed vultures from the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre in Pinjore has been delayed by at least six months owing to the delay in the arrival of platform terminal transmitters (PTTs). The project is a joint initiative of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Haryana Government.

While six of the eight birds to be released are between two and four years of age, the remaining two adults were rescued from the wild. The birds will be tracked for two years after release to check any drug-related mortalities, following which more birds will be

released. It is, therefore, necessary to release the birds after a PTT - a tracking device – is attached to them. Birds also cannot be released during the rainy season. Another factor is the migration of Himalayan griffon vultures to northern India from Central Asia and China during winter. Because vultures are free roaming social birds, the griffons will act as guides for food, shelter and basic necessities for the released birds, the BNHS said.

There are currently 290 vultures of three species – Oriental white-backed vulture, Long-billed vulture and Slender-billed vulture - at the Pinjore centre.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. ‘India’s captive-reared vulture release programme postponed’,
www.hindustantimes.com, 07/04/19.

MAHARASHTRA

19 ha of mangroves including in Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary to be cut for bullet train

The expert appraisal committee of the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) has given its nod for the removal of mangroves in Thane, Navi Mumbai and Palghar districts for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project. With this, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL) has all necessary permissions for the said project.

The Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) had in March earlier this year informed the Bombay High Court (HC) that the proposal by NHSRCL had been approved and a request was sent to MoEFCC for the final nod. The NHSRCL had moved the HC after the MCZMA told it could not grant permission to remove 19 ha of mangroves, owing to an HC direction not allowing for the same.

NHSRCL’s petition to the HC said that of the 508-km corridor, 155.642 km was in Maharashtra. This would affect 131.30 ha of forest, including mangroves spread over 32.43 ha. Only 53,467 mangroves spread over 13.36 ha would be actually affected by the project. The affidavit said that the project alignment passing through the creek is proposed inside an

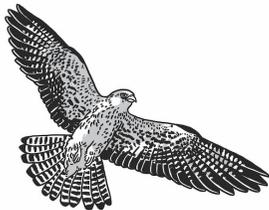
underground tunnel that will be 25 to 40 metres in depth. The underground tunnel project necessitates felling mangrove trees on the surface. It also noted that the project will not disturb the flora and fauna of the flamingo sanctuary or of the adjacent areas.

In its proposal, however, the NHRCL has stated that about 1.5 lakh mangroves spread over 18.92 ha will be affected by the project. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 2)

Source: 'Bullet train project: Ministry gives final nod to remove 1.5 lakh mangroves spread over 19 hectares in Maharashtra', *The Indian Express*, 09/04/19.
'MoEF cleared plan to cut 53,467 mangrove trees, Bombay high court told', www.hindustantimes.com, 09/04/19.

NAGALAND

Radio-tagged Amur falcon returns to India on her way back to China



A radio-tagged female Amur falcon, which flew non-stop for five days to reach Somalia in November last year, has returned to the

Indian sub-continent on her way to her breeding grounds in northern China. The bird was reported in Surat in the first week of May.

Longleng, a female Amur falcon named after a district in Nagaland, arrived in Somalia on April 18 from her winter sojourn in South Africa and started her four-day return passage to India on April 29 flying at a speed of 45 km/hour. The bird was radio-tagged in October 2016 as part of a project to study the migration route of these birds and environmental patterns along the route.

Two more falcons - Tamenglong (female) and Manipur (male) - were also tagged in Tamenglong district on November 4, 2018. Manipur was found dead four days later while Tamenglong has lost contact after reaching

Zambia. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 6; Vol. XXIII, No. 6 and Vol. XXII, No. 6)

Source: Sobhapati Samom. 'Radio-tagged female falcon returns to India after winter sojourn', www.hindustantimes.com, 04/05/19.

TAMIL NADU

Rs. 4.9 crore development works proposed in Vellore Bird Sanctuary

A Rs. 4.9 crore project for developmental works in two phases is to be taken up at the Vellore Bird Sanctuary. Work in phase I with an allocation of Rs. 2.35 crores includes bund strengthening, formation of new bunds and construction of culverts.

The first phase is expected to be completed in another six months after which phase II will begin. This will include fencing and creation of pathways, mound formation and installation of solar lights.

Source: 'Works to give facelift to Vellore Bird Sanctuary', www.thehindu.com, 15/04/19.

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 yahoogroup 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 79, June 2009

MAHARASHTRA

Taxidermy centre in Sanjay Gandhi NP

Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) will have the country's first taxidermy centre. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Maharashtra recently approved the proposal that had been received from the SGNP authorities a few months ago. Grants are now awaited from the Central Government and it is estimated that Rs. 10-15 lakhs will be needed for the same.

The centre will have provisions for skinning, tanning, moulding and casting of carcasses. It is hoped that the centre will play a useful role in education and creating awareness about wildlife and its conservation.

Source: Coming soon, country's first taxidermy centre at SGNP, *The Indian Express*, 14/04/09

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Rise in hangul population in Dachigam NP

A joint count carried out recently by the Jammu & Kashmir Wildlife Department and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has found an increase in the population of the Hangul in and around the Dachigam National Park. The estimated population of 217 animals is significantly higher than the figure of 160 for last year.

The increase in the population appears to be due to effective protection, check on poaching and various conservation measures taken by the department, apart from lending more credibility to the census operations through the involvement of independent volunteers, researchers, students and NGOs. The male-female ratio and female-fawn ratio have also exhibited a better trend in the current census.

The State wildlife department had prepared a Rs. 22 crore species recovery plan

for the hangul in collaboration with the WII and submitted it to the Central Government for funding. Rs. 99 lakh were released in March 2009

The department has simultaneously also started the census and survey of Hangul all over the state in collaboration with the WII and the Wildlife Trust of India and several other research and academic institutions. The purpose is to get a sense of the distribution and trend of Hangul population in the relic habitats in addition to that in the Dachigam NP. A conservation breeding centre for the Hangul is also being constructed at Shikargarh with financial assistance from the Central Zoo Authority.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'Endangered hangul's population shows growth', *The Tribune*, 22/04/09.

IN MEMORY

SMITU KOTHARI: One of the most well known figures in movements for social and environmental justice in India passed away suddenly following a massive cardiac arrest on April 23, 2009.

He inspired and initiated a number of path breaking initiatives; was a big advocate and supporter of indigenous knowledge systems and was a founder member of Lokayan in Delhi.

ALAN RODGERS: A biologist and official who worked at the Wildlife Institute of India for many years passed away after a protracted illness on March 31, 2009.

He was co-author of the voluminous 'Planning a Protected Area Network in India' and was the moving spirit behind the MSc Wildlife program at the Wildlife Institute of India. He had also worked extensively in others parts of the world, particularly in Africa.

PERSPECTIVE

The need of the hour – systematic scientific information for conservation!

Species assessments have come a long way from being mere assumptions of their status by individuals to increasing dependence on scientific publications for a higher standard of objective assessments. The process seems transitory but for the biodiversity-rich regions of South Asia and the world, the initial steps to compiling data in a scientific and systematic form began in 1999 with the publication of a 12-page peer-reviewed section within a popular magazine *Zoos' Print*. The birth of *Zoos' Print Journal* is an adventure, a story by itself, having its origins in the practicalities and the needs of the times.

Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO), having had a major role in the establishment of the Central Zoo Authority in the early 1990s, started exploring holistic species conservation issues. Associating itself with the Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG; then Captive Breeding Specialist Group), ZOO started assessing and planning conservation actions for species. The Conservation Assessment Management Plan (CAMP) workshop first conducted by ZOO/CPSG in 1995 led to a series of assessments involving plants, amphibians, reptiles, freshwater fish, soil invertebrates, mangroves, and mammals by 1997. Truly, the first nationally driven assessments were initiated. By then subjective assessments had been replaced by the more objective system introduced by the IUCN Red List, and these were incorporated into the process.

The first CAMP workshops were eye openers to us. The lack of peer-reviewed publications in almost all groups led to patchy information based on the memories and field notes of researchers. While the process established the need for hard-core scientific data, the lack of peer-reviewed articles became the precursor for a new venture in ZOO's conservation engineering strategy – to establish a journal. Voila, the *Zoos' Print Journal* was born in April 1999 with no funding, but with the commitment of a very small group of us at

ZOO. Sally Walker's incredible mind and the spirit of pursuance coupled with my prior experience in publishing helped in establishing the processes needed for the rigour. A commitment to bridge the gaping hole of publications for conservation started thus.

The journey since has been a roller-coaster ride with steady increase in the number of articles published and the renaming of the journal to the *Journal of Threatened Taxa* with its own online site since 2009. As we complete 20 years of continuous monthly publication, the commitment remains unwavering along with a drive to raise funds for sustenance. As a platinum open access monthly peer-reviewed international journal, we continue to build evidence for conservation globally!

- **Sanjay Molur** is founder & chief editor, Journal of Threatened Taxa; www.threatenedtaxa.org and Executive Director, Zoo Outreach Organization; www.zooreach.org

To

From: **Kalpavriksh**, Apt. 5, Sri Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004