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Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

The *PA Update* in other languages?

One of the concerns and even an occasional discussion in the past has been about the fact that the *PA Update* is only available in English when it would be rather useful in other languages as well. That a lot of our conservation communication and outreach material is in English has been a serious issue and there is a huge gap to be filled there. While a number of initiatives in different languages have come up in the recent past, it is clear that much more needs to be done. It is a huge bottleneck in reaching out more widely and ensuring more positive conservation outcomes.

An odd attempt or two notwithstanding, the *PA Update* is no exception. Many years ago, we did, in fact, make a brief effort in collaboration with the Paratwada based NGO, Khoj, to work on a Marathi version. A couple of issues were produced even, but we never managed to take it any further. The challenges were related to both, human and financial resources.

Now, many years later, we are hoping that a first big change will happen as the idea of a Marathi version of the newsletter takes shape once again. The intention is to create a Marathi *PA Update* in a format and style based on the English original, but with a primary focus of news from Maharashtra. The effort will be to source news and information from the Marathi media and compliment it with translated stories of relevance from other parts of the country. A team is already in place for this and efforts are currently on to raise the necessary financial resources. If readers have any suggestions and ideas of how we can take this forward and also raise the necessary resources we will be very happy to hear from you.

Perhaps there are other teams, organisations and/or individuals who think other language versions can also be tried. We would be happy to hear from you as well. We can play

catalyst, we can be the sounding board, we can discuss ideas and we can also think of other creative ways to go beyond just a newsletter. It would indeed be an exciting day when we have multiple language versions of the *PA Update*, each tailored for specific geographies and issues even as we contribute towards a common goal.

We hope, in the mean time, that the Marathi version takes off soon and will be needing all your good wishes and support.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Not enough central funds for elephant conservation: AP officials

Andhra Pradesh forest officials have said that insufficient support from the Centre is not allowing for conservation measures for elephants in the state, including in the Rayala Elephant Reserve, the only reserve in the state, which borders Tamil Nadu.

The state is estimated to have 90 elephants, 40 of which are in the Rayala Elephant Reserve. The elephants have moved into Andhra from Odisha on the one side and from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu on the other. There has been a demand for creating an 'elephant reserve' in the northern part of the state as it plays host to a population that has migrated from Odisha.

The Centre has allocated less than Rs. 20 lakhs per annum to Andhra for the last few years under Project Elephant when the requirement is for at least Rs. three crore. In the recent budget, in fact, only Rs 1.87 lakh were allotted to the state under Project Elephant.

Source: 'Meagre funds from Centre stunt tusker reserves in AP', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 08/07/19.

ASSAM

'Special Rhino Protection Force' deployed in Kaziranga NP

A 82 member strong 'Special Rhino Protection Force' with the sole objective of protecting the rhino was recently deployed in the Kaziranga National Park (NP). The force, comprising of 74 men and eight women, underwent 43 weeks of training and participated in a passing-out parade at the 9th Assam Police Battalion (APBN), Berhampur, Nagaon on June 28. It will be divided into eight teams, which will be deployed respectively in Agratoli, Burapahar, Bokakhat, Kohora, Bagori, Panpur, Biswanath and Gomeri.

The force has been designed on lines of the Assam Forest Protection Force (AFPF) (formed in 1986 for the 'better protection and security of the forests, forest produce and wildlife of Assam'), and has been created in collaboration between the central and state governments, following an initiative of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). While primary focus would be protection of the rhino, the NTCA can ask for the services of the force to be used in tiger conservation in any other part of the state as well.

The force has been created keeping in mind the rampant poaching of rhinos seen in the Kaziranga over the years. While 2013 and 2014 saw 27 poaching incidents each year (the highest in the last decade), the figure decreased to 17 in 2015 and 18 in 2016. The last two years have seen a total of 6 cases each year, with three being reported in the first half of 2019.

The maximum age of the constables comprising the force would be 40 years.

Source: Tora Agarwala. 'In Kaziranga, now a special force to protect the one-horned rhino', www.indianexpress.com, 03/07/19.

Unique IDs based on characteristic body features used for elephant census in Kaziranga NP

Researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society India and Assam Forest Department have used systematically documented photographic identities of individual elephants to estimate elephant populations in the Kaziranga National Park (NP).

Based on their characteristic body features such as shape of the ear lobes, tusk orientation and tail length among others, each elephant was assigned a unique ID. This ID was then attached to all subsequent recaptures of the same elephant. The elephants were divided into adult males and herd-adults (comprising adult females and sub-adults) based on social structure. The researchers photographed 890 elephant sightings, out of which 720 sightings yielded usable photographs for individual identification. Of them, the number of unique elephants comprised 210 adult females, 23 sub-adult females, 88 adult males and 28 sub-adult males. Of the 88 adult males, 48 were tusked and while 40 did not have tusks.

The study estimated that a total of 908 animals including 228 adult males and 610 juvenile and young comprise the population of elephants found both within the national park and the adjoining habitats.

The research team included Varun R Goswami, Mahendra K Yadava, Divya Vasudev, Parvathi K Prasad, Pragyan Sharma and Devcharan Jathanna. The findings have been published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Source: Monika Kundu Srivastava. 'Photographic identities may help in elephant census: Study', www.downtoearth.org.in, 19/06/19.

Project under MGNREGA for Golden langur conservation in Kakoijana RF

Bongaigaon district authorities have launched a Rs. 27.24 lakh project under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to plant guava, mango,

blackberry and other fruit trees for the Golden langurs *Trachypithecus geei* in the 17 sq. km Kakoijana Reserve Forest (RF). The saplings will be taken care of jointly by the Assam Forest Department and the local communities.

Community-based conservation initiatives involving 34 villages had helped the Golden langur population in Kakoijana rise to 500 by the year 2015. But scarce food saw some of them set up colonies in nearby forest patches such as in Malegarh, Nigamghola and Bhumeswar. Also, several Golden langurs have died due to electrocution and in road accidents while looking for food beyond the RF.

The state electricity distribution unit has in response been working on the Bongaigaon administration's proposal to insulate overhead wires around Kakoijana while the highway authorities have put up signs for speed regulation at vulnerable points.

Wildlife activists have pointed out that Kakoijana was once contiguous with the Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), about 40 km away and straddling adjoining Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts. They have also noted that the joint forest management approach for Kakoijana is not a long-term solution and that Kakoijana needs to be declared a WLS (*PA Updates* 29, 26, 25 and 20).

There are estimated to be about 600 Golden langurs scattered across western Assam and the foothills of Bhutan.
(Also see *PA Updates* 50 & 44)

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Golden langur to get fruits of MGNREGA', www.thehindu.com, 09/06/19.

Simleng River Impenetrable in Dima Hasao district to be Assam's sixth NP

The Simleng River Impenetrable National Park (NP) in Dima Hasao district is proposed to be Assam's sixth NP. The other five are Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Dibru-Saikhowa and Orang.

The new NP will cover an area of approximately 100 sq. km and form a large contiguous conservation belt along with the adjacent Borail Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in

Cachar district and the Nampuh (Narpuh) WLS in neighbouring Meghalaya.

Source: 'Assam's 6th national park to be set in Dima Hasao', www.guwahatipius.com, 03/06/19.

BIHAR

Gangetic dolphins found in Bihar's Mahananda river

A survey conducted in March-April 2019 by a team of scientists from the Vikramshila Biodiversity Research and Education Centre (VBREC) of Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, has reported the first sighting of the Gangetic river dolphin in the Mahananda river, a tributary of the Ganga in Bihar's Kishanganj district. The survey recorded a total of 14 animals - seven adults and seven calves.

The presence of the dolphins in the Mahananda in neighbouring Araria district during monsoon floods, had been reported long ago by environmental activist Sudan Sahay but it had never been verified.

Sunil Choudhary, director VBREC, has said that the survey was not conducted in the ideal season and has proposed that a fresh survey be conducted in the Mahananda from October 15 to February. He noted there was inadequate water in the river during the recent survey and it was difficult to even use a boat for navigation to examine the dolphins. He noted that their population in this river and its tributaries could be much higher.

Source: Mohd Imran Khan. 'Gangetic dolphins found in Bihar's Mahananda river', www.downtoearth.org.in, 03/07/19.

GUJARAT

Rusty-spotted cat reported in Jessore WLS for the first time

A Rusty-spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* has been sighted in the Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) for the first time. This is the

second time in the last decade the cat has been sighted in the state; the earlier instance being in the Kutch region in 2013.

One of the camera traps installed in the sanctuary by the forest department captured an image of an adult cat recently. The management plan for the sanctuary will now include management for the Rusty-spotted cat, said a forest official.

Source: 'Rusty-spotted cat sighted in Jessore',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
09/06/19.

Two leopards electrocuted in two days near Gir WLS

Two leopards died after being electrocuted in two separate incidents in two days near Gir Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The incidents occurred in the first week of June. In both the cases, officials said, the leopards were trapped and electrocuted by electric transformers while chasing prey.

A four-year-old female leopard was found dead with its corpse stuck to an electric transformer at a farm in Talala village in Talala forest range while in an earlier incident, an eight-year-old female leopard was found dead with its carcass also stuck to an electric transformer in a farm in Vangdhra village in Tulsishyam forest range.

Such incidents of leopards dying of electrocution are a regular occurrence in Gir and safety measures regarding electric transformers have not yet been taken to avert these accidental deaths.

Source: Vijaysinh Parmar. 'Two leopards die after being electrocuted by transformers near Gir Wildlife Sanctuary',
www.news18.com, 07/06/19.

Resort owner held for organising lion shows near Gir

Mahendrasinh Solanki, owner of a resort in Bhalchhel village of Sasan Gir of Mendarada taluka was arrested recently for allegedly

organizing illegal lion shows. His premises were also sealed.

Forest department officials said Solanki had been advertising the shows on social media platforms; he had uploaded video clips on Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The shows were also being advertised for Rs 999 on his website. He had also offered to facilitate tourists to walk side-by-side with the lions.

Source: 'Resort owner held for organising illegal lion shows',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
07/07/19.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Photographic evidence of Musk deer in Kalatop Khajjiar WLS

The first photographic evidence of the presence of the Musk deer in Kalatop Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) was obtained recently by a local businessmen and wildlife enthusiast. He clicked a photograph of the deer somewhere on the road between Lakkar Mandi and Kalatop.

Forest officials had recorded droppings and footprints of the deer earlier this year but photographic proof was not available.

The exact number of the deer in the sanctuary will only be known after the 2020 census. Notably, during the 2018 census the wildlife department had recorded photographic evidence of Musk deer in the Kugti WLS as well.

Source: 'Musk deer caught on camera in Kalatop Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
22/06/19.

Snow leopard population rises in the state

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department wildlife wing has, in a recent exercise, recorded 49 Snow leopards in upper Kinnaur, Pin Valley, Tabo, Tharot-Miyar, Bhaga, Chandra and the upper Spiti landscape. Areas that still need to be

counted include Chamba, Kinnaur and the Great Himalayan National Park.

The estimation project is being carried out by the wildlife wing in association with the Mysore based Nature Conservation Foundation. More than 30 cameras have been installed at various locations on the left bank of Spiti river to be able to arrive at a rough estimate of the Snow leopard population here.

Studies in 2016, though not very scientific, had put the number of Snow leopards in the state at 67, which was far higher than the earlier figure of less than 20. With the launch of a Snow leopard conservation project in the state now, the number is said to have shot up and forest officials estimate that their present number could be as high as 100.

Source: Pratibha Chauhan. 'Snow leopard population goes up in state', www.tribuneindia.com, 16/06/19.

KARNATAKA

Proposed Mekadetu project to submerge nearly 32 sq km of Cauvery WLS

Of the 52.52 sq. km needed for the proposed Mekadetu Balancing Reservoir project, 31.81 sq. km will be in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). Another 18.69 sq. km is adjacent forestland while the remaining 2.01 sq. km is revenue or private land.

The Rs. 9,000-crore project will utilise an additional 4.75 tmcft of drinking water to provide for the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region, will store floodwaters to prevent it from "escaping to the sea" and to generate 400 MW of energy. The project is estimated to provide nearly one crore people in Bengaluru with 135 litres of water per day.

The project has been vehemently opposed by Tamil Nadu over fears that the project will result in lower release of water to the state. Environmentalists have also expressed opposition fearing large-scale, irreversible damage to the eco-system of the sanctuary.

Maps made available with the pre-feasibility document show that a linear path

along the existing forest along the river will be submerged, cutting off many wildlife and elephant migratory routes. The project will also see the displacement of the Iruliga tribals and other residents of five villages: Madavala, Kongedoddi, Sangama, Bommasandra, and Muthathi.

The report estimates that 250 buildings and houses will be submerged. The popular Bheemeshwari Fishing Camp and Galibore Fishing Camp, apart from tourist spots in Muthathi will also go under water.

Source: Mohit Rao. 'Mekadetu project to take land away from Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary', www.thehindu.com, 02/07/19.

Study in Nagarhole NP finds NDVI not reliable for estimating food availability for elephants

A field study has shown that the normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) that remotely estimates density of vegetation does not yield a reliable estimate of food abundance for elephants in tropical forests. It shows, in fact, that the NDVI has a negative correlation with graminoids – preferentially consumed by elephants in tropical forests. Because of the poor correlation, NDVI cannot be reliably used as a measure of forage abundance in a multi-storey forest with a low proportional abundance of food species.

The study was conducted in the Nagarhole National Park (NP) by a team of researchers from the Evolutionary and Organismal Biology Unit of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru and was led by TNC Vidya. It was published recently in the journal *Biotropica*.

NDVI has been used in the past to estimate the amount of food abundance available to herbivorous animals. It has also been used in attempts to track the presence of elephants using the vegetation they consume. This study claims that the method can be misleading.

Other experts are reported to have said that the results are not surprising and that this pattern was shown in other settings as well.

Source: Shubashree Desikan. 'Remotely sensed indices unreliable in informing elephant forage', www.thehindu.com, 22/06/19.

Kappatagudda CR declared a sanctuary

The Karnataka government has notified the Kappatagudda forest as a wildlife sanctuary (WLS) superseding the earlier notification of Kappatagudda as a conservation reserve (CR) (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1). The sanctuary will comprise an area of 244.15 sq. km spread across the three taluks of Gadak, Mundargi and Shirahatti in Gadag district.

Kappatagudda had been declared a CR in 2017 partly as a result of the 'Save Kappatagudda' movement led by the late Siddalinga Swami of Tontadarya Mutt (popularly known as the Green Seer) and supported by 15 religious mutts here. A number of other people including farmers, forest officials, students and environmentalists were also involved in the movement to secure these forests that have been under threat from the mining industry as the region is rich in gold and iron deposits.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Kappatagudda forest is now a wildlife sanctuary', www.newindianexpress.com, 18/05/19.

Sharavathi Valley WLS extended, renamed to ensure conservation of Lion-tailed macaque

The Karnataka government has passed an order extending the boundaries of the Sharavathi Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to ensure conservation of the Lion-tailed macaque (LTM). The decision was taken at the 11th meeting of the State Board for Wildlife, held on January 9, earlier this year. The official order for the same was passed on June 7. The sanctuary has also been renamed the Sharavathi Valley LTM Sanctuary.

The original sanctuary was spread over an area of 43,123 hectares. Now the Aghanashini LTM Conservation Reserve in Uttara Kannada district, spread over 29,893 hectares, and around 20,000 hectares of reserve forest in Shivamogga and Uttara Kannada districts have been brought under the purview of the new sanctuary. With this, Sharavathi Valley LTM Sanctuary will have a total area of 93,016 hectares.

The rights, including ownership, utilisation and possession, enjoyed by locals on the non-forest land will remain unaffected by the new order. Even the encroached area ordered for regularisation by the government in 1997 and falling within the limits of the notified area is to be excluded from the purview of the sanctuary.

Source: PM Veerendra. 'Sharavathi sanctuary boundary extended to protect lion-tailed macaque', www.thehindu.com, 09/06/19.

Proposal for wildlife forensic lab in Karnataka

The Karnataka Forest Department has mooted setting up its own wildlife forensic sciences laboratory in the state to make its legal battle stronger. This follows the setting up recently of such a lab in Chennai. The matter was also discussed in a recent meeting of officials from the two states.

Matters that a lab such as this would help resolve would include identifying if seized meat is of cattle or of wild animals and also in cases pertaining to carcasses of wild animals.

The FD is said to be worried, however, of the cost of setting up such a lab, the seriousness among political circles, expertise training to staffers and getting a dedicated team of experts for the lab, among others.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Karnataka to have its own wildlife forensic lab', www.newindianexpress.com, 03/07/19.

Task force recommends Article 371(J)-like special status for 11 Western Ghats districts

The Western Ghats Task Force, in a report recently submitted to the Karnataka

government, has recommended that eleven districts that harbour forests of the Western Ghats should get special status on the lines of Article 371(J) for Hyderabad-Karnataka. The districts range from Chamarajanagar along the eastern edge of the state to Dakshina Kannada and upwards till Belagavi and also Dharwad.

The report, which recommends 33 points of action for the conservation of the Western Ghats, has suggested that the state government pursue the matter with the Centre as the special status would also guarantee reservations in education and employment for those residing close to forests here.

The recommendations made include one for the prohibition of all new projects in the Western Ghats such as road, railway, power, and river-diversion projects. It notes that there should be no more projects after the Yettinahole River Diversion is completed and the diversion of Sharavathi waters to Bengaluru should also not be allowed.

The report recommends further the regulation of heavy earthmovers and machinery through permits and mandatory installation of GPS, revision of the sand mining policy to exclude areas in the Western Ghats, conservation of sacred groves, development of an eco-tourism policy, and establishment of elephant corridors, among others.

The proposal needs to be first accepted by the state chief minister and cabinet before it can be forwarded to the Centre for its approval.

Source: 'Task force recommends Article 371(J)-like special status for 11 Western Ghats districts', www.thehindu.com, 03/07/19.

MAHARASHTRA

Dam project will impact 719 ha of forest in Tansa WLS

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has submitted an updated proposal to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for a project involving three new dams - Gargai, Pinjal and Damanganga to augment water supply to the city of Mumbai.

The project will need the diversion of 719 hectares of forest of the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in addition to 135 ha of non-forest land. The BMC will also need to arrange for the resettlement and rehabilitation of 280 tribal families from seven villages - Ogada, Fanasgaon, Pachghar, Tilmal, Amale, Khodade - in the proposed project area

In a note justifying the location for the project the BMC has noted that, "Although a considerable length of the Gargai river passes through reserved forests and Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, the submergence of forests and/or sanctuary has not been considered as a long-term adverse impact in concluding the location of the dam. In fact, a dam enriches the surrounding flora and fauna, due to the reservoir formed (...) upstream. It is seen as a long-term positive impact that the dam may have on its surrounding region."

The note has also proposed to develop pastures to help increase the herbivore population, which in turn will benefit the wild cats and other carnivores in the sanctuary. It has further proposed to reserve 0.5 per cent of the project's water capacity for wildlife.

Conservationists have expressed concern over the impact that the project will have on the sanctuary in addition to the forests and wildlife of Shahapur, Khardi, Vaitarna and eastern Wada that will come under the catchment area of the project.

Mumbai currently gets 3,800 MLD of water daily from seven dams and if this project is approved, it will provide an additional 2,891 MLD water to Mumbai by 2050.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'New dam in Tansa will kill 719-hectare forest', www.mid-day.com, 08/07/19.

1600 acres forest cut in Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor since 2014

An estimated 1600 acres of dense forest has been cut in the Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor in the last four years. This destruction at 103 locations across 48 villages within the proposed Western Ghats eco sensitive area

(ESA), has been mapped by the NGO Vanashakti using Google Maps.

The deforestation has happened after the 2013 Bombay High Court order banning tree felling in the 30 km corridor that connects Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Maharashtra to Bhimagad WLS in neighboring Karnataka. The felling is more in private lands, but trees in government forests are also being felled. Where felling on private land is concerned, forest officials say they are unable to take action because the matter comes under the district collector's jurisdiction.

Forest officials have said that they will be able to ensure there's no tree felling in 25 villages once the ESA is notified. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 5; Vol. XX, No. 5 and Vol. XIX, No. 6).

Source: '1,600 acres of forest cut in key south Konkan wildlife corridor', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 05/06/19.

Special drives to search for snares around Tipeswar WLS

The forest department (FD) has started a special operation wherein local villagers, NGOs and volunteers are being involved in the search for snares around the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The FD had advertised the special drive in Marathi newspapers appealing to wildlife lovers and representatives from NGOs to take part in the de-snaring and search operations starting from June 6. Forest officials have divided the villages as 'sensitive' and 'very sensitive' and has prioritized villages where drives will be carried out. The best team and best volunteer will be given awards on Independence Day.

A minimum of two drives will be carried out per week.

In drives already conducted in four villages - Tembhi, Sunna, Bahathar and Sushri - 12-14 snares including nylon ropes, wires and clutch wires were seized. In Tembhi village, a group even managed to recover a snare, which was connected to an electric line.

The drives are being carried out in response to increased incidence of wild animals being found here trapped in snares. This year alone two tigers were found stuck in snares in Tipeswar, one of which eventually died.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'Volunteers to comb forests for snares to prevent deaths of animals', www.mid-day.com, 07/06/19. Virat A Singh. 'Forest officials, volunteers initiate de-snaring operation near Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary', www.dnaindia.com, 07/06/19.

BJP legislator's firm's illegal hill-cutting work in SGNP's ESZ

The Sanjay Gandhi National Park's (SGNP) eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) committee has deemed the hill-cutting work near Versave village by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislator and former mayor of Mira-Bhayander, Narendra Mehta's firm, as illegal. Violations under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 carried out by Mehta's firm, Seven Eleven Construction Pvt. Ltd., will be brought to the notice of the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board for action to be initiated.

A range forest officer (RFO) found that a 300m x 7.3m hilly area had been destroyed through blasting and cutting to make way for a road within the ESZ of the national park. Two water bodies at the site were being reclaimed through dumping of stones and debris generated by cutting of the hill, the RFO mentioned in his visit report. According to Jitendra Ramgaonkar, member secretary of the ESZ committee and deputy conservator of forest, Thane, none of the concerned departments had received any proposal for the construction work.

Mehta said that he plans to develop the area as a residential zone with recreational facilities and confirmed that he had not submitted a formal proposal to any state agency.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'BJP MLA's firm to face action for hill cutting in SGNP's ESZ', www.hindustantimes.com, 07/06/19.

MoU signed for Aarey zoo in vicinity of SGNP

The Maharashtra government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for setting up a zoo on a 120 acres plot in the Aarey Milk Colony. The zoo would cost Rs. 500 crore.

Locals and activists have opposed the proposal. Close to 500 members from the local tribal community, along with members of Save Aarey and Aarey Conservation Group held a protest rally in Aarey Milk Colony on June 9.

The land where the zoo is coming up is close to Gavdevi-pada and Khambyacha-pada, which according to locals, is frequented by leopards and other wild animals. Tribals have claimed that the main agenda of the government is to displace tribals from Aarey and sell the land as it has high real estate value. Tribals from six hamlets have been farming on close to 70 acres of the 120 acres plot proposed for the zoo.

They have also claimed that the proposal was finalised without any consultation with them.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'Proposed Aarey Zoo in leopard corridor, say locals', www.mid-day.com, 10/06/19.

HC seeks land records of SGNP to check whether Aarey falls within the PA

The Bombay High Court has, in a recent order, asked the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) to submit original land revenue records showing the entire expanse of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The court has sought the records to ascertain if Aarey Colony is a part of the NP.

The court's order came in response to an application filed by the NGO, Vanashakti, in which it has claimed that an area of 20.76 sq. km here is an integral part of SGNP. It stated that Aarey, categorised as an unclassified forest, was transferred to the state FD in 1969. The claim is based on a government document dated July 22, 1980, which it had accessed through an

application made under the right to information act. While the respondents claimed that the petition was related only to the 20.76 sq. km of area, the HC has asked for all survey numbers and details of land of SGNP.

The details are expected to be presented to the court during the next hearing, which is scheduled for the first week of August.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Is Aarey part of SGNP? HC seeks docs for entire Mumbai park', www.hindustantimes.com, 22/06/19.

'Warriors of SGNP' for protection of the PA

Forest department authorities along with a group of researchers have started an initiative named 'Warriors of SGNP' to protect the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) from poaching, forest fires and trespassing.

In the first phase of the project, which started in February this year, the park's periphery has been divided into 10 zones. Each zone will have volunteers from housing colonies and padas/hamlets, who will provide information to be acted upon by the concerned assistant conservator of forest (ACF) and range forest officer (RFO). 20 buildings in and around SGNP have already been identified and a WhatsApp group for the purpose has been created.

The project team plans to conduct camera trapping at the entry and exit points. This will help get information about leopards and other wild animals that roam in the area. An anti-poaching team comprising the ACF, RFO and ground staff would be formed in the coming months, and it would conduct surprise visits to the park and keep a tab on trespassers.

The project is a brainchild of honorary wildlife warden of Mumbai and member of the State Board for Wildlife, Mayur Kamath and his team.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'New plan to conserve Sanjay Gandhi National Park and protect it from poaching', www.mid-day.com, 18/06/19.

BMC to buy 100 acres near Tadoba Andhari TR to compensate for loss in SGNP

The Bruhanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has agreed to compensate the forest department (FD) for allowing it to construct an underground tunnel through Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) for the Goregaon-Mulund Link Road (*PA Updates* Vol. XXV, No. 1; Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3 & 2) by purchasing more than 100 acres of land adjoining the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and hand it over to the FD for afforestation.

The BMC had initially refused compensation to the FD claiming that the project would not disturb the surface area of SGNP. The FD insisted, however, citing provisions of the Forest Conservation Act that the user agency was bound to procure equal amount of non-forest land and also pay for its afforestation in addition to the cost of the forest land itself. Maharashtra had also issued guidelines in 2014-15, stating that it is better if compensatory land is given near sanctuaries and national parks.

The BMC plans to build a 4.7km twin tunnel (three lanes per tunnel) connecting Goregaon and Mulund, which according to the FD will need 19.8 hectares (49 acres) beneath SGNP. It demanded land double that area and suggested a private land parcel near TATR for the purpose. The BMC has got all permissions for the tunnel, except the forest department's clearance, which is pending due to the compensation clause.

A land parcel in Palasgaon village, adjoining TATR near the Kolara gate, is now reported to have been identified for purchase by the BMC.

Two months ago, an explosives company took 88 hectares forest near Nagpur but compensated with land in Chiplun in Ratnagiri district (*PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 3).

Source: Vijay Singh and Vijay Pinjarkar. 'BMC to buy 100 acres near Tadoba reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/07/19.

CAG raps Maharashtra govt on lapses in management of TRs

The Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) of India has rapped the state government for severe lapses in management of tiger reserves (TRs) across the state. In its recently released report CAG observed that apex level interventions for enabling policy decisions and implementation of major initiatives with regard to protection and conservation of tigers were ineffective. Tiger Conservation Plans, which play a crucial role in the formulation of management strategy for 10 years, were non-existent in two TRs while in remaining four TRs the plans were delayed for 2.5 to 7 years.

CAG, in its report, which was tabled in the state legislature on the concluding day of the monsoon session, expressed displeasure over lack of compartment histories maintained in any of the TRs as they are important for providing inputs to the Tiger Conservation Plan (TCP).

Further, CAG found that the state revenue and forest department did not disclose the resolve to secure inviolate spaces available for tiger habitats and these were being curtailed due to encroachment by human settlements and tourist facilities. These were further fragmented and crisscrossed by highways and railway lines. As a result, tigers have died due to electrocution and road accidents.

The report also noted that the support infrastructure, which is critical for the protection of tiger habitats, was inadequate. Unregulated tourism, particularly in Tadoba Andhari TR was a major cause of concern. Moreover, CAG observed that monitoring and internal control mechanism was also weak.

CAG has called for a focused strategy to ensure safe corridors and adequate eco-sensitive zones, timeliness and due diligence in preparation and implementation of the TCP. Apart from this, CAG suggested that TRs may be brought under unified control to facilitate a focused approach in tiger conservation and adequate infrastructure needs to be provided to field staff.

Source: Sanjay Jog. 'Maharashtra: CAG raps govt on lapses in management of tiger reserves', www.dnaindia.com, 03/07/19.

MADHYA PRADESH

Tigers sighted in Kheoni WLS for first time

Five tigers have been spotted for the first time in the Kheoni Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). A tiger, two tigresses and two cubs were photographed when drinking water recently by the night-vision cameras set up in the sanctuary.

Forest officials said that vigil has been tightened across the sanctuary following this sighting.

Source: 'Tigers Spotted for First Time in Madhya Pradesh's Kheoni Wildlife Sanctuary', www.new18.com, 24/06/19.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Yeoman declared state butterfly of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Yeoman *Cirrochroa thais*, a butterfly species endemic to the Western Ghats, has been declared as the state butterfly of Tamil Nadu. The tawny-coloured butterfly with a dark brown outer ring is also known as Tamil Maravan, which means warrior.

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) had formed a technical team to prepare a proposal to suggest a butterfly species, which could be declared the state butterfly a few months ago. The team comprised representatives from the FD as well as butterfly experts and enthusiasts from across the state. After shortlisting two species - Tamil Yeoman and Tamil Lacewing - a few weeks ago, it finally decided on the former.

Tamil Nadu has become the fifth state in the country to announce its state butterfly. Maharashtra was the first to declare Blue Mormon as its state butterfly, followed by Uttarakhand (Common peacock), Karnataka (Southern bird wings) and Kerala (Malabar banded peacock).

The state had declared its various other icons earlier; state animal - Nilgiri tahr; state bird - Emerald dove; state tree - palm tree; state flower - Gloriosa; and state fruit - jackfruit.

Source: 'Winged wonder: Tamil Yeoman declared state butterfly of Tamil Nadu', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/07/19.

Fined for collecting plants from Kalakkad Mundanthurai TR

Four individuals from Kanavur, Asirvathapuram and Agasthiyapuram were recently slapped a fine of Rs. 15,000 each for illegally entering and collecting herbs from the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (TR).

The four were found with the Urinji plant in the Kadayam range, Ambasamudram division of the reserve.

Source: '4 fined for collecting herbal plants from tiger reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/07/19.

TELANGANA

In-principle approval for drilling for uranium exploration in Amrabad TR

The Central Government has given an in-principle approval for drilling for uranium exploration in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR). The Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), had submitted a proposal to carry out survey and drilling of boreholes in four blocks of the reserve, three of which are located in its core. The Centre gave the clearance in a May 22 meeting, with a Forest Advisory Committee of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change noting that, "... considering the fact that the proposal is of critical importance from national perspective, it is recommended for in-principle approval, subject to submission of all required document/information in due format. After receipt of the same, the complete proposal may

be placed before the Competent Authority for approval.”

The DAE is seeking permission for survey and exploration of uranium over 83 sq km, though the exact locations of the drilling are not known.

Forest officials including the state principal chief conservator forests (PCCF) have expressed concern over the proposal. In a report submitted ahead of the May 22 meeting, the field director of the reserve had noted his concerns regarding the impact of the drilling on the flora and fauna here. He had questioned the claims of the exploration agency that no trees would be cut when there was no road or path leading to the blocks to be surveyed. The report has also outlined a number of negative impacts that will take place if the proposed drilling is allowed to go ahead.

Source: Sreenivas Janyala. 'Centre nod to drilling, Telangana forest officer says won't let anyone in', www.indianexpress.com, 08/07/19.

UTTAR PRADESH

Census records substantial increase in wildlife populations in Dudhwa TR

A recently conducted census has reported a significant increase in wildlife populations in the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (TR). The census that was conducted in three phases on May 9, 16 and 25, counted a total of 99,480 animals across 32 species and sub-species of fauna. This is significantly higher than the 86,560 wild animals that were counted in the 2016 census.

The population of elephants in the reserve is reported to have increased from around 125 in 2016 to 225 in 2019. Officials said that a few elephants migrating from Nepal have also contributed to the 80% increase in the number of elephants in the reserve. 179 Fishing cats were found in 2019 against 164 in 2016, while the Swamp deer rose from 2,226 to 2,538. Though there were no blackbuck here in 2016, two were found in this count. The number of chital has gone up to 21,199 from 18,733 in

2016 and the fox number has also increased from 65 in 2016 to 236 now.

The count of rhinos also showed a marginal increase – from 42 three years ago to 46 in 2019.

Source: 'Dudhwa shows jumbo surge, count goes up by 80% in three years', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 02/06/19.

NGT seeks final notification for Hastinapur WLS within six months

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed Uttar Pradesh and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to issue the final notification for the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) within six months. The area is commonly referred to as a sanctuary but has not been legally notified yet even though the primary notification covering an area of 2037 sq km had been issued in 1986.

The NGT orders came in response to a petition that had cited a report of the Wildlife Institute of India, which says that endangered species such as the Swamp deer and Hog deer were at risk due to dense human presence in the region here.

The NGT also asked the forest department to explain the reason behind the delay of over 30 years.

Source: 'Issue notification for Hastinapur wildlife sanctuary in 6 months: NGT to MoEF, UP government', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/06/19.

UTTARAKHAND

Fossils of Asian elephant's ancestral species found in Corbett TR

An expert on Himalayan fossils from Kumaon University has confirmed that the fossils found in the Bijrani range of Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) likely belong to an elephant species *Elephas hysudricus*, the ancestor of the existing

Asian elephant species *E. maximus* and could be 0.2 to two million years old.

After MPS Bisht, director, Uttarakhand Space and Application Centre, had found the fossils of an elephant-like creature in Bijrani range during his visit in May this year, the TR administration approached palaeontologist Ashok Sahni who advised them to contact Prof. BS Kotlia from Kumaon University.

Prof. Kotlia has confirmed that the fossils likely belong to *E. hysudricus* that lived in the Indo-African continent during the Pliocene-Pleistocene time period and is now extinct. He noted further that based on his research in Ramnagar Siwalik, only the Upper Siwalik sediments are exposed from Kosi Barrage to Garjia temple in Ramnagar and these date from two million to 0.2 million before the present.

Prof. Kotlia has sought permission for carrying out further excavation in the Bijrani range, stressing there is the possibility of finding more fossils of elephants and mammalian species like the horse and deer. The TR administration has sent a proposal to the principal chief conservator of forest and the chief wildlife warden that a fossil museum could be set up in the under-construction building outside Dhangadi gate, where fossils from across the state could be exhibited.

Similar fossils have also been discovered from other parts of India - Karewas in Kashmir, Siwalik in the Jammu hills, Nadah, Chandigarh and the Pinjor hillocks.

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'Elephant fossil found in Corbett believed to be 2 million years old', *Hindustan Times*, 24/06/19.

Study on inter- and intra-species fighting in Corbett TR reveals interesting information

A study on wildlife deaths in Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) has found that 21 elephants, nine tigers and six leopards have died due to infighting in the last five years.

Of the 21 elephants, 13 were calves that were killed by tigers. Park officials said that tigers have been seen eating elephant meat including of those that died while fighting each

other. The study also found that in three cases, two tigers killed the calves together.

Of the nine tiger deaths, seven were due to infighting, while one each was due to injuries caused by a wild boar and by porcupine's quills. Of the six leopard deaths, four were due to attacks by other carnivores. In two cases there was evidence of killing by tigers, while in the other two, the particular species that killed the leopard could not be established.

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'Infighting in Corbett Reserve led to death of 21 elephants, 9 tigers in last five years', www.hindustantimes.com, 06/06/19.

Tourism revenue of Corbett TR meant for local people being diverted: Director

In a letter to the state's principal chief conservator of forest on June 15, Director, Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR), Sanjeev Chaturvedi, has noted that tourism revenue earned by the TR was not being spent for the welfare of the local population.

Citing the Wildlife Protection Act, the letter states that tourism revenue of Rs 37.09 crore that was earned by the reserve in the past four years should have been spent on the local inhabitants; the money, instead, has been diverted to the treasury. The letter also notes that for a few years, 20% of the earning was being spent on the welfare of the poor people, but this has now been stopped.

Chaturvedi noted further that guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) were being violated regarding collection of cess from the local hotel industry. As per an NTCA order, Rs. 500 to Rs. 3,000 per room per month was to be charged from each hotel located in the vicinity of CTR. However, officials have made no effort to follow the guidelines on cess collection, he claimed.

Source: 'Poor around Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve devoid of welfare', www.thehansindia.com, 22/06/19.

NTCA objects; SC stays the construction of Chillarkhal-Laldhang road between Rajaji and Corbett TRs

The Supreme Court (SC) has stayed the construction of the Chillarkhal-Laldhang road passing through the corridor between the Rajaji and Corbett Tiger Reserves (TRs). The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had already raised its own objection to the project earlier.

The NTCA observed that the road was being built without the mandatory no-objection certificates, and the activity was in violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WLPA), and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (FCA). The NTCA's letter to the chief secretary of the state stated that the construction of the road did not have the mandatory clearances from the Government of India and the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL). Further, it demanded corrective measures in pursuance of both, the WLPA and the FCA.

A vacation bench of justices Deepak Gupta and Surya Kant, while citing the same reasons, issued notice to the Uttarakhand government and sought its reply within three weeks.

The order was passed after perusing a report filed by the apex court appointed Central Empowered Committee, which said that the road traverses a corridor between Rajaji and Corbett TRs and it falls within the buffer area of Rajaji TR. The road is being constructed without statutory approval of the NBWL and in violation of the WLPA and the FCA, it said.

The bench said that it is apparent that the advice of NTCA had not been taken.

Source: 'NTCA objects to construction of road in Rajaji buffer zone', www.business-standard.com, 20/06/19.

'SC stays construction of road through Rajaji tiger reserve', www.hindustantimes.com, 21/06/19.

'SC stays construction of road via Rajaji, Corbett', www.tribuneindia.com, 21/06/19.

Corbett TR will not entertain requests with references from VIPs

Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities have decided that references from VIPs requesting stay and safari facilities either for themselves or for their relatives and friends will not be entertained any more. Instead, these requests would be reported to their higher authorities.

The move comes as the TR administration has been receiving a large number of communications, through explicit use/display of official position/state symbols, for arranging safari, stay and other private arrangements of various highly placed authorities, which is otherwise a purely personal activity and has nothing to do with discharge of any official duties of the authorities concerned. On many occasions, even cases of friends/other known ones have been referred to the authorities and sometimes the matter has been pursued in a coercive manner as well.

Source: 'No more 'VIP stay' at Corbett Tiger Reserve', www.business-standard.com, 18/06/19.

Geophones for monitoring elephant movement near railway tracks in Uttarakhand

Geophones – ground motion transducers that convert ground movement into voltage – are being laid along railway tracks frequented by elephants in Uttarakhand in an effort to reduce elephant deaths in train accidents.

Geophones trigger an alert when there is some movement. The frequency data is then sent to a central server, which is monitored by the patrolling teams. To ensure that the alert sent by the geophone is of an elephant and not another animal, the system uses images from infra-red cameras installed along railway tracks. A Wi-Fi system is also being developed so that the data is simultaneously transmitted from central servers to train drivers and the patrolling staff.

Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India used movements of elephants at Rajaji

National Park to gauge the effectiveness of the device. The pilot project aimed at minimizing elephant deaths along railway tracks, is being conducted between Kansro and Motichur railway stations. Notably, 26 incidents of elephant deaths have been reported in the past three decades on this stretch.

Meanwhile, scientists have maintained that the device doesn't do away with the need of physical patrolling of the tracks.

Source: 'To minimise deaths, geophones along railway tracks to tap elephant movement', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/06/19.

WEST BENGAL

Rhino numbers increase but with lopsided gender ratio in Jaldapara and Gorumara NPs

Results from a recent estimation suggest that rhino numbers have increased in West Bengal, albeit with a lopsided gender ratio. Of the 237 rhinos counted in the Jaldapara National Park (NP), 98 are males and 94 females. The number of unsexed animals — calves and sub-adults — stands at 45. At Gorumara NP there are 25 males, 17 females and 10 unsexed rhinos. The 2015 count had reported 204 rhinos in Jaldapara and 49 in Gorumara.

Ujjal Ghosh, the chief conservator of forests (wildlife, north) and the nodal officer of the census expressed concern over the sex ratio, which in the case of the rhino should be one male for every two females. In Jaldapara, in contrast, the present ratio is almost 1:1, while in Gorumara it is worse with nearly two males for every female.

The authorities are mulling a few steps to arrest the declining gender ratio; it includes sending some of the males to a shelter for rhinos coming up in Cooch Behar.

Source: Debraj Mitra. 'More rhinos, skewed ratio in north Bengal', www.telegraphindia.com, 19/06/19.

Siren warning system in Gorumara NP to warn of elephants

In an initiative to minimise human-animal conflict in North Bengal, the forest department has installed a sensor-based early warning system to help keep elephants away from settlements near the Gorumara National Park (NP). The sirens are supposed to blare when elephants come within 150 to 200 metres of the settlements, alerting the forest guards who can then take action to prevent the elephants from entering the habitations.

The system was installed recently on a pilot basis at eight places in Kalipur eco village and Bheluardanga areas of the NP after being tested at several settlements over the preceding fortnight. The system will be set up at 40 places in the park and the numbers will be increased if found effective.

If successful the system might also be set up along other vulnerable sections to prevent accidents involving elephants.

Source: 'Sirens to keep wild elephants off human habitations', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/07/19.

Radio collar helps prevent elephant raids in Jalpaiguri

Radio-collaring for research purposes helped forest officials prevent an elephant herd from raiding a tea estate in Jalpaiguri on two occasions in the month of July. Two elephants from different herds had been tagged on April 29 and May 2 as part of a joint project of the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation and the Bengal Forest Department to understand the movement patterns and mitigate their raids on human settlements.

A herd of over 25 elephants with Meenakshi, an adult female that was collared in the Gorumara National Park in May, was tracked by researchers to be moving to a tea garden on two occasions. The information allowed for forest staff to reach the spot in time and drive away the herd.

The animal collared in the first herd is named Shanta. She had been collared near Siliguri's Bengal Safari Park, adjoining the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary in April. The herd was reported to be deep inside the sanctuary and was off grid for because of the absence of network connectivity.

The region has a serious problem of human-elephant conflict with a number of humans and elephants being killed every year in different types of incidents.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, No. 6; Vol. XXII, Nos. 5 & 1; Vol. XXI, No. 5; Vol XX, No. 4)

Source: Debraj Mitra. 'Radio collar stops elephant raids in Jalpaiguri', www.telegraph.com. 05/07/19.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

No more roads through wildlife sanctuaries and national parks: MoRTH

The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has asked states as well as the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) to avoid any road alignment through wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, unless absolutely unavoidable.

A circular to this effect was issued recently to NHAI, National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd., Border Roads Organisation and the states. It directed the state governments and other agencies entrusted with the development of roads to abide by the manual prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India in the matter.

Source: 'Centre says no to highways through wildlife sanctuaries', www.starofmysore.com, 16/06/19.

596 new species of flora and fauna discovered in India in 2018

Details made public by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India

(ZSI) in *Plant Discoveries 2018* and *Animal Discoveries 2018* respectively show that 596 new species of flora and fauna were discovered in India in the year 2018. The fauna species discovered were 372 (311 invertebrates and 61 vertebrates) while the plant species were 224.

About half the new faunal discoveries were reported from the Western Ghats while 31% of the new plant species described were from the Himalayas. Of the 61 species of vertebrates 30 were reptiles, 21 fishes, nine amphibians, and one was a mammalian sub-species. Kerala recorded the highest number of discoveries with 59 species. West Bengal recorded 38 and Tamil Nadu recorded 26 species.

With these new discoveries, the updated list of animal species in India has risen to 1,01,681, which is about 6.49% of all the species in the world. The number of plant species in the country has been updated to 49,441, which is 11.5% of all flora in the world.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'Reason to cheer: 596 new plant and animal species discovered in India last year', www.thehindu.com, 06/06/19.

218 leopard deaths in first four months of 2019

At least 218 leopards have died in the country in the first four months of 2019 — a significant increase compared to the 500 leopard deaths reported for the year 2018. A majority of these incidents were registered in Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka.

According to the data released by the Wildlife Protection Society of India, rail and road accidents account for a majority (16-35 per cent) of all leopard deaths. Independent data agency IndiaSpend has pointed out that deaths by rail/road accidents have risen steadily — from 41 in 2014 to 51 in 2015, 51 in 2016, 63 in 2017 and 80 in 2018. The 2nd most significant cause of leopard deaths is electrocution.

Source: Anurag K. 'Indian leopards more endangered than ever', www.deccanchronicle.com, 10/06/19.

NF Railway gets innovation award for innovation to keep elephants away from railway tracks

The Northeast Frontier Railways (NFR) has won the Indian Railways' 'Best Innovation Award' for 2018-19, for its initiative to drive away elephants from tracks using devices that play an amplified, buzzing noise similar to the sound made by honeybees.

The NFR had launched the project in September 2017 on an experimental basis and finalised it in May that year. The railway body claims that the bee sound system and other preventive measures saved the lives of at least 1,014 elephants between 2014 and 2019 (till June) in its area, which includes parts of North Bengal and all the Northeastern states. Currently, 46 such devices are installed across NFR's region.

The NFR claims that no elephants were hit by trains in 2018-19, near railway tracks or near level crossing gates, compared to five such deaths in 2017-18.

There are as many as 29 earmarked corridors in NFR's region where trains slow down to designated speeds. But, elephants often step onto a railway track in an area which is not in a corridor, leading to accidents. After several experimental methods deployed by NFR officials, along with those from the Assam Forest Department, authorities found during testing at the Phulbari Tea Estate under Rangiya Division, that wild elephants started moving away, once the honeybee sound was generated. A device was then designed to generate the amplified sound of a honeybee that is audible from a distance of about 700-800 metres. The first instrument was installed at a level crossing gate between Azara and Kamakhya station under Rangiya Division. Finding the results very encouraging, the instrument was installed in many level crossing gates in zones located in the vicinity of forest areas.

According to data provided by the Assam government earlier this year, 761 people were killed by elephants in Assam since 2010, while 249 elephants lost their lives due to non-natural reasons in the same period. Of the 249

elephants killed since 2010, 20 died due to poisoning, 54 in train accidents, 91 due to electrocution, 38 due to 'accidental' reasons, 30 due to poisoning and 15 due to other injuries.

Source: Abhishek Saha. 'Northeast Frontier Railways gets innovation award for 'Honeybee' system'.
www.indianexpress.com, 12/07/19.

Tourists cause stress to tigers: CCMB study

A study conducted by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB)'s Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES) in the Bandhavgarh and Kanha Tiger Reserves (TRs) in Madhya Pradesh has found evidence of tourism-induced stress in tigers here.

Published in *Conservation Physiology*, the study examined the relationship between anthropogenic disturbance (pollution due to human activity) and physiological stress levels among two tiger populations. Researchers assessed concentrations of fecal glucocorticoid metabolite (fGCM) – a marker of stress in individual tigers. Chronically elevated glucocorticoid levels can negatively impact growth, reproductive success, immunity and cause muscular atrophy.

The study team collected a total of 341 fecal samples from both the reserves during tourism and non-tourism periods and data on various anthropogenic disturbances, including tourism activities such as the number of vehicles and visitors. It found significantly higher fGCM concentrations in tigers at both the reserves during tourism period compared to the non-tourism period.

A significant correlation was also found between fGCM concentrations and the number of vehicles/disturbance level in these TRs. The study suggests that "unsustainable wildlife tourism causes distinct physiological stress in tigers in protected areas".

Previous studies from the same research group had shown that newly-introduced tigers in Sariska TR, Rajasthan, had failed to reproduce effectively, presumably due to high levels of

stress caused by high anthropogenic disturbance.

The study recommends a strict regulation of vehicular traffic, the number of tourist vehicles, shifting of artificial waterholes away from tourist roads and reducing other anthropogenic disturbances, including relocation of villages from the core area of TRs.

Source: 'Tourists can cause stress to tigers, says CCMB study', www.thehindu.com, 15/07/19.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH/INDIA

Wolf killed in Bangladesh could have been from the Indian side of the Sundarbans

An Indian grey wolf was killed in the first week of June by farmers in Taltali town near the Sundarbans in Bangladesh after it preyed on the livestock. Since the carnivore was believed to have been wiped out from the region eight decades ago, the individual, it has been suggested, could have been the one that was photographed in April 2017 in the Indian part of the Sundarbans.

Zoologists have collected DNA samples from the killed animal to confirm its identity.

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Grey wolf from India killed in Bangladesh', www.thehindu.com, 18/06/19.

Google-group for the *PA Update*

Readers who would like to regularly receive the electronic version of the *PA Update* can do so by to this mailing list by visiting:

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

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:

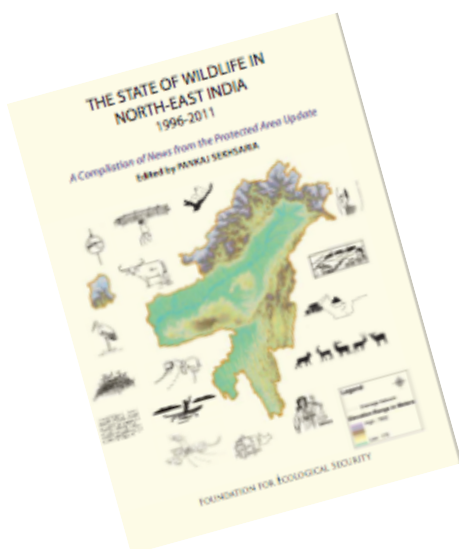
- 1) You can gift a subscription to a particular individual/officer/PA and send us the details of the individual/s who want the *PA Update* to be sent to. We will do the rest.
- 2) You can also give us a broad suggestion of whom you want the *PA Update* sent to - could be ground staff of a particular 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 psekharia@gmail.com or to the editorial address of the *PA Update*, C/o Kalpavriksh.

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Perspective & Opinion: The Print Media's Kaziranga obsession – An analysis (Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi); A case study of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in western Assam (Sonali Ghosh: Snow leopards in the land of the rising sun (Yash Veer Bhatnagar); Karbi Anglong: A little known wilderness of Assam (Anwaruddin Choudhury); Elephants and other memories of the Garo Hills (Nimesh Ved); Dams in the North East (Neeraj Vaghlikar) and Community conservation of wildlife (Neema Pathak)

Annexures

COMING SOON....

WILDLIFE AND PROTECTED AREAS IN MAHARASHTRA

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

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- Editor's Note

- Protected Areas in Maharashtra – a brief introduction

- Section 1: News and Information from protected areas

- 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

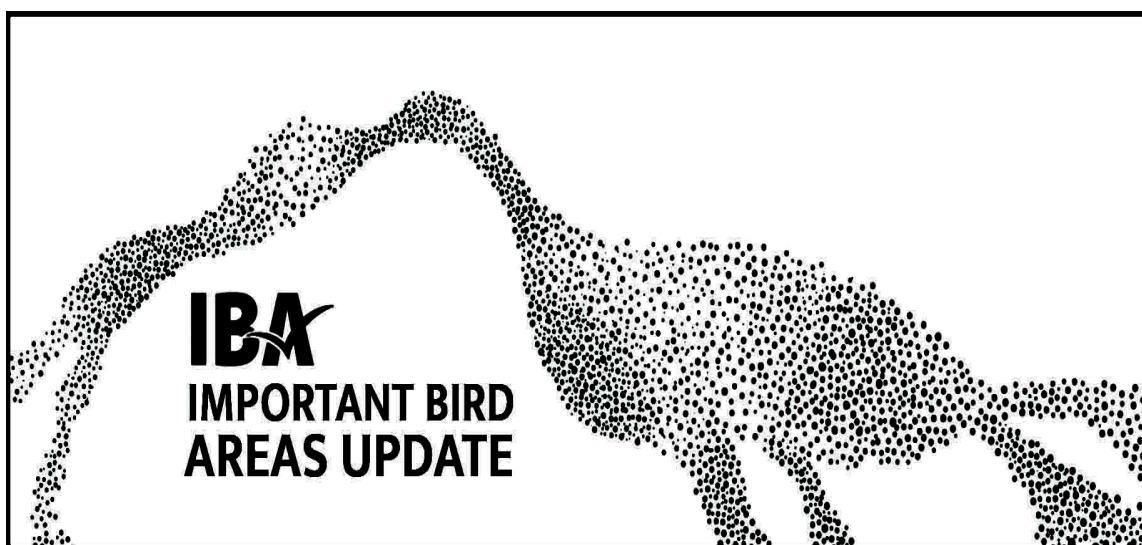
of the Western Ghats (Aparna Watve) and 5)

Community Conserved Areas in Maharashtra (Neema

Pathak Broome with Sneha Gulgutia, Shruti Mokashi,

Kavya Chowdhry, Sarosh Ali and Rupesh Patil)





ANDHRA PRADESH

Proposals for world heritage and Ramsar site tag for Coringa mangroves

The Andhra Pradesh government has constituted a committee to study the conditions needed to be fulfilled to get the UNESCO world heritage site tag for Coringa mangroves in East Godavari district.

The committee will be headed by the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and the chief wildlife warden. IFS officer Dr Shanti Priya Pandey, who is the chief conservator of forests, Rajahmundry Circle, will be its vice-chairperson. The other members of the committee include Dr K Thulasi Rao, Director, Biodiversity Research and Extension, AP State Biodiversity Board and Dr Ravi Sankar Thupalli, State Project Coordinator, EGREE Project.

The government has also sent a proposal to the Centre for identifying the mangroves as a Ramsar Site.

Source: 'Andhra Pradesh government forms panel to prepare Coringa for UNESCO world heritage site tag', www.newindianexpress.com, 18/06/19.

UTTAR PRADESH

MoEFCC seeks proposal to declare Dhanauri as Ramsar site, Sarus sanctuary

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has asked the Uttar Pradesh Government for a proposal to declare Dhanauri, a large wetland in Greater Noida, as a Ramsar site and Sarus sanctuary. A Noida based environmentalist had earlier written to the state government and the MoEFCC appealing for the same. The MoEFCC's letter comes a week after a right to information (RTI) application was filed asking for actions taken in the matter.

Dhanauri has a large population of the Sarus crane and regularly supports 20,000 or more water birds. While the forest department (FD) pegs the wetland area here at 25 ha, environmentalists have said that the total area including the buffer zone, is over 40 ha. The FD had submitted a 14-page document in September 2018 explaining the importance of the wetland, the need for its conservation, along with current status and threats.

Dhanauri does not have a formal wetland status at the moment.

Source: 'Centre offers green bounty for Greater Noida wetland', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/06/19.

FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago

PA Update 79, June 2009

GUJARAT

More wells around Gir covered after government hikes subsidy

The recent decision of the Gujarat State Government to double the subsidy for covering open wells on the periphery of Gir has seen a significant increase in the number of wells that have been covered. The government used to give a grant of Rs 4,000 on each well and had increased it to Rs 8,000 in 2008.

The Forest Department (FD), supported by NGOs and some corporate houses had initiated the move of covering the open wells after it was found that a number of lions and other wild animals had died after falling into them (see *PA Updates* Vol. XIV, No.; Vol XIII, Nos. 5 & 2 and Vol. XII, No. 6). State government figures put the number of lions that died in this manner at 57 for the period 2001 to 2009

The project to barricade the wells was initiated in September 2007. In the initial months 325 odd wells were barricaded on an average every month. Following the increase in subsidy this number has almost doubled and now nearly 650 wells are being covered every month.

Source: Vikram Rautela. 'More wells around Gir covered after government hikes subsidy', *The Indian Express*, 16/06/09.

KERALA

Tiger population in Wayanad WLS estimated at 20-25

The tiger population in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary has been estimated to be between 20 and 25. The numbers have been suggested following the conclusion of a census exercise in the month of May. Ten big cats, including three cubs, were sighted in the sanctuary during the three-day survey of tigers and co-predators. Five tigers including a cub were

sighted in Tholpetty range, one tiger and two cubs were seen in the Sulthan Bathery range and one tiger each was seen in the Kurichiayd and Muthanga areas during the count.

It is based on the actual sightings of these 10 tigers that the total population estimate of 20-25 has been suggested. If correct this would be at least 10 tigers more than were reported during the last census conducted two years ago.

It has also been pointed out, however that a firm idea of the exact number of big cats in the sanctuary could be given only after a detailed analysis of the indicators gathered during the survey, like pug-marks, droppings, hair and scratch marks on trees. The team that carried out the survey is reported to have come across about 50 pug-marks, droppings and hair and scratches on trees. DNA analysis is to be done at the Wildlife Disease Diagnosing Laboratory at Sulthan Bathery.

Source: 'Ten tigers sighted in Wayanad sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 12/05/09

RAJASTHAN

70 black bucks die in Tal Chappar WLS due to 'weather shock'

At least 70 black buck were reported dead in the last week of May and early June in the Tal Chappar Wildlife Sanctuary. The deaths were blamed on 'weather shock' following unseasonal downpours accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning.

The victims were mostly old animals and the infants and were said to have died due to heart failure on account of shock experienced because of the thunderstorms and lightning.

Source: Rakhee Roy Talukdar. 'Storm shock kills 50 black bucks', *The Telegraph*, 02/06/09

PJ Joychen. '70 blackbucks die of shock in rain-hit Tal Chappar', *The Times of India*, 02/06/09

PERSPECTIVE

Dolphins, Turtles & Relationships

The challenges of sustaining a marine wildlife stranding network

What do you get with 680 people watching the oceans every day? A network of eyes and ears that report every dolphin or sea turtle stranding occurring across Goa's coast, documented and responded to. Ocean Watch – Goa, is a collaborative marine wildlife stranding response and monitoring network between IUCN India, a conservation social enterprise, Terra Conscious, a private lifeguard service, Drishti Marine and Goa Forest Department (FD) established in 2017 to monitor Goa's coasts. It has documented 261 marine wildlife stranding incidents in the last two years across the state's 100 km coastline.

Early last year, a striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba* washed up in the morning on the shores of Goa's capital city, Panjim. A group of young local boys playing football spotted the animal and rushed over to help. Lifeguards who had by now been trained in response protocols due to the Ocean Watch network's capacity building programme, began constructing a shade, pouring water to keep the animal's skin moist, cool as well as keeping the crowd away to give it space. My colleagues and I were both on the phone with the FD, finding veterinary support, and on the site assisting rescue efforts, fielding media questions, trying to decide between the various courses of action being suggested and organising permissions. Finally, after a long exhausting day, the animal was released in deeper waters, with the help of trawler fishermen and lifeguards who braved squally weather and rough seas to make sure the dolphin had a chance.

Coordinating so many diverse personalities in high stress situations is challenging for one's mental and emotional health. The sheer enormity of the gaps we have currently in India to address stranding incidents reflect the tremendous opportunity we are losing right now to build large scale collaborative

community networks that can go beyond response and monitoring.

The core premise of collaborative stranding networks is trust and building a strong foundation of mutually respectful, empathetic relationships supported by well thought out processes. This may seem like common sense and an obvious narrative, but the way we have interpreted and in fact taught conservation for so long, has been exclusionary, in my opinion.

Young aspiring conservationists are taught how to understand the technical, scientific and the evidence based aspects of conservation. However, not enough stress is given on enabling them to strengthen their social empathy skills and broaden their perspectives by emphasising on relationship building, compassion, self care, diplomacy, advocacy and leadership. This often leads to networks collapsing because of personal dynamics, politics, poor communication which ultimately does not achieve a long term, sustainable conservation outcome. I am hopeful that networks such as Ocean Watch can encourage a more integrated systems based approach to conservation practice.

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