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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXV, No. 6, December 2019 (No. 142)

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Note: Stories that appear in the *PA Update* are edited version of the original news reports first published in the source mentioned at the end of the story

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

State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra - a new book from the *PA Update* archives

For 25 years and still running, the *Protected Area Update* has religiously presented a consolidated account of India's wildlife and protected area (PA) network. It is, as its regular readers would know, based almost entirely on what the English media in India reports on wildlife and is, perhaps, the most comprehensive account of the developments in the PA system for over two decades now. With 7,000+ stories and news reports carried over this period it is, evidently, a huge and valuable database.

Thus far, however, the newsletter has appeared in a fixed, standardized format: it is published every two months, the reporting is organized state-wise and the primary unit of the information is the PA.

Changing the structure

What would happen if the format were to be changed a bit? If this huge set of information was to be reorganized to get a picture from a different vantage point? What if the focus was not the entire PA network over a two-month period, but a single PA or even a state over a period of say 20 years? What if the focus was not a particular protected area but an ecosystem or a particular species? What might be made visible if the news was organized based on the source it came from—in this case a particular newspaper?

The possibilities are as varied as they are exciting and *State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra - News and information from the Protected Area Update 1996–2015*, a new book based on this extensive archive is our second effort along precisely these lines. It follows *The State of Wildlife in North-east India 1996- 2011: A compilation of news from the*

Protected Area Update that was published in 2013.

The primary unit of organising is still the individual PA, but the timeline now is not the two months of one issue of the *PA Update* but two decades in case of the Maharashtra book. In following one news item after another of each of the PAs we can now see what happened month after month, year after year in the particular PA; what developments recurred at what periodicity; what were the issues that were important and what was done about them. It is in some senses an historical account of the place as viewed through the lens of contemporary media reporting.

The relevance?

A key question is about the relevance of an exercise such as this. What does it indeed help achieve considering there are evident limitations? For one, this is only an account through the lens of what the English media, mainly the English press, is presenting. Even here the reporting is representative and not complete on account of both lack of access to the full corpus of news published and also limited space of 24 pages that the *PA Update* has available in any case. And finally there is the crucial gate-keeping function performed by the editorial team that puts the newsletter together.

The claim here, therefore, is not that this is a complete and comprehensive picture of what has happened in the PAs of Maharashtra. It is a representative account that offers on the one hand understandings on multiple axes of what indeed has been happening in these PAs over the years and on the other an understanding of the media, its pre-occupations and the choices that it makes.

The book also has a second section with a set of five specially commissioned articles covering a diverse range of topics such as analysis of wildlife reporting in the media, the conservation status of lateritic plateaus in the state and on the importance of communities and community conserved areas.

Put together the book offers interesting insights into historical trajectories, trends and

developments and presents a picture more fuller than might be available elsewhere. And we shall be waiting for readers to get copies and get back to us with their responses, questions and critiques.

PS: The book is available at an initial discount of 25%; it is 35% for bulk orders of more than 10 copies. Please write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com for details.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Joint FD-ICG initiative for marine protection in Godavari Delta, Coringa WLS

The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department (FD) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG) have jointly launched an initiative to check the fishing of marine species in the Godavari delta, including in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). As part of this initiative, surveys covering all the minor and major fish landing points have been completed and ICG personnel are monitoring the catch of the listed species in the delta.

The initiative is expected to help prevent fishing in the strategic habitats of sharks, whales and humpback dolphins. It is also aimed at mapping the strategic areas for the respective species being sighted in the Godavari delta, keeping a vigil on fish landing points and the scientific study on the threats to marine species.

The FD is in talks with the ICG to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for involving the coastal security wing to protect the marine species here. A similar initiative will be launched along the Machilipatnam coast once the MoU is signed.

Source: Appala Naidu Tippana. '24x7 vigil to protect marine species in Coringa sanctuary', www.thehindu.com, 13/10/19.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

New snake species found in Tale Valley WLS

Researchers have discovered a new species of a non-venomous burrowing snake in Arunachal Pradesh. Named *Trachischium apteii*, it was found under fallen logs inside a thickly forested area of the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) during a field expedition by researchers in July 2019. Three specimens of the new species were found in field that helped diagnose the new species. A paper reporting these findings was published recently in the international science journal *Comptes Rendus Biologies* by the researchers — Harshal Bhonsle, Gaurang Gowande and Zeeshan Mirza. The researchers are associated, respectively, with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Mumbai, Pune's Fergusson College, and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru.

The snake was named *Trachischium apteii* to honour the contribution of Deepak Apte, well-known marine biologist and director, BNHS.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'New snake species found in Arunachal', www.thehindu.co.in, 27/11/19.

ASSAM

Feral buffalo carcass in Pobitara WLS tests positive for anthrax; urgent measures by FD

One of two feral buffaloes found dead inside the Pobitara Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the month of October tested positive for Anthrax leading the forest department (FD) to initiate urgent measures to prevent its spread.

A veterinary officer at World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India had found signs typical of anthrax in one of the two buffalo carcasses found within a distance of 100 m from each other inside the sanctuary. The other carcass was already decomposed. The sample was sent to two labs including the North Eastern Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory and the

College of Veterinary Science. Both the reports noted anthrax as the provisional diagnosis.

Since anthrax was being suspected as the cause of death, the carcasses were given a deep burial even as officials tried to disinfect with lime and formaldehyde. The area was also cordoned off. It was decided to erect an electric fence of a one km in periphery around the spot to keep other animals away.

Ten domesticated elephants and a calf, which are used for safaris, were also vaccinated and the state's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Directorate issued an advisory and initiated measures to start vaccination of domestic livestock in the peripheral villages. The personnel who dealt with the carcasses were put on a 10-day preventive antibiotic drug regime.

Source: Sadiq Naqvi. 'Assam forest dept on its toes after anthrax kills feral buffalo in Pobitora', www.hindustantimes.com, 20/10/19.

BIHAR

500 pairs of camera traps installed at Valmiki TR for annual tiger census

A total of 500 pairs of camera traps are being installed in division II of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (TR) for the first phase of the annual tiger census here. A month later they will be installed in division I of the reserve.

The census, which is being carried out with the technical assistance of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), will follow the phase IV tiger monitoring mandate of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

As per the four-yearly countrywide tiger census, figures of which were released by PM Narendra Modi in July, the total number of tigers in Valmiki TR is 31.

Source: Piyush Tripathi. '500 pairs of camera traps installed at VTR', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/11/19.

GOA

Three villages want exclusion from Netravali WLS

A delegation of the Netravali panchayat accompanied by Sanguem MLA Prasad Gaonkar, met the Goa deputy chief minister, Chandrakant Kavalekar, and handed him a memorandum demanding that three villages – Tudav, Verlem and Saljini – be excluded from the Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). Referring to a gram sabha resolution passed in June in this regard the memorandum said that the forest department (FD) had imposed restrictions on the villagers carrying out any development work as the villages were situated within the sanctuary,

The frequent confrontation between the residents and the FD has also raised questions over the utilisation of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority funds in the village.

Source: 'Exclude three villages from Netravali wildlife sanctuary', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22/10/19.

GUJARAT

Lion presence confirmed in Surendranagar district

Lion pugmarks were recently found in Dheduki village of Chotila taluka in Surendranagar district for the first time, making it the fifth district of the state with lions. The other four are Gir Somnath, Junagadh, Amreli and Bhavnagar.

Some villagers have also claimed to have seen the animals. Forest officials said that the big cat may have come here from the Babra grasslands some 35 km away.

According to the May 2015 census, there were 523 lions in Gir of which 168 were outside the sanctuary area. An internal assessment of the state government has, however, hinted at the presence of 800 lions in the region - 340-odd within the protected area

and the rest in the rural areas of Amreli, Gir-Somnath, Bhavnagar and Junagadh.

Source: Nimesh Khakhariya. 'Gujarat: Forest department confirms presence of Asiatic lions in Surendranagar district', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/11/19.

Initiative to curb fisherfolk-otter conflict in Surat

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has in association with the Wildlife Trust of India and Nature Club, Surat, launched an initiative for the conservation of the Smooth-coated otter in Surat.

Nylon nets left overnight in the river by fishermen to catch fish are torn by the otters almost every day. The fish trapped in the nets attract otters and the frequent catch losses and damages have led fishermen to adopt aggressive methods such as installing trap cages and using poisoned fish as bait against otters.

A compensation scheme has now been started for the fishermen in which they are being given fishing nets in lieu of those destroyed by otters in Tapi River.

Source: 'Fishermen to be compensated for saving smooth-coated otters', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 25/10/19.

KARNATAKA

Karnataka to study wildlife in state's eastern plains

In an effort to bring attention to the issues and wildlife in the state's eastern and dry plains, Karnataka has decided on a special focus on this region. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will take up one study on wolves and foxes as part of the initiative. Lesser known species such as pangolins and porcupines will also be studied. A study of Great Indian Bustards will also start soon in collaboration with the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON).

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Karnataka Forest Department to study eastern plains, its wildlife', www.newindianexpress.com, 14/11/19.

Karnataka cabinet approves 118 km rail barricades in PAs, other forest areas

The Karnataka state cabinet has decided to erect rail barricades to the extent of 118 km in various protected areas and forest areas of the state by spending Rs. 110 crore this year. It has estimated a cost of Rs. 120 lakh per km for the project, which is aimed at reducing human-animal conflict in these regions.

Barricades are to be erected to an extent of 24 km in Nagarahole National Park (NP), 17 km in Bandipur NP, 19 km in Madikeri, three km in Virajpet, 13 km in Male Mahadeshwara-Kollegal, 15 km in Kollegal forest reserve, six km in Ramanagaram, 15 km in Bannerghatta NP, and six km in Hassan district.

Source: 'Rail barricades to be erected for 118 km', www.thehindu.com, 04/10/19.

FD proposes higher pay and allowances for ground staff

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has recommended enhanced pay scales and rise in allowances on par with the police force for its frontline staff including the deputy range forest officers, forest guards and also mahouts and kavadis working in elephant camps.

Further, adequate allowances will be paid for uniforms and uniform maintenance as their posting is in difficult terrains and inaccessible forest locations. The FD has recommended a uniform allowance of Rs. 500 per month on par with police in addition to Rs. 600 as weekly-off allowance and Rs. 1,000 as hardship allowance. Special allowances of Rs. 2,000 in forest areas and Rs. 4,000 in wildlife areas have also been suggested.

The strength of the Karnataka frontline staff is 8,670 in both wildlife and territorial areas and the working hours stretch round the clock. Apart from this, seven elephant camps in

the state have a staff of 262 comprising kavadis (122), mahouts (132) and jamedars (8).

Nearly 45 forest personnel – most of them forest guards – have lost their lives while on duty in the last five decades in the state.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Forest dept recommends pay rise for foot soldiers', www.newindianexpress.com, 04/10/19.

More than 12000 trees cut for NH 4A widening near Dandeli WLS; judicial intervention sought

Taking cognizance of the information that 12,258 trees were axed near the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary for work on the national highway (NH) 4A connecting Khanapura with Londa, the Karnataka High Court has restrained authorities for cutting any more trees in the area. It has also asked for a copy of the permission granted to cut the trees.

A public interest litigation in the matter was also filed by environmentalist Suresh Heblikar and others.

Source: 'After Aarey row, over 12,000 trees axed in Karnataka to widen NH-4A; HC takes cognisance', www.timesnownews.com, 17/10/19.

KARNATAKA/KERALA

NTCA to support Bandipur TR night traffic ban

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has suggested to the Supreme Court that the 35-36 km road (NH-212 also known as NH-766 passing through Mysuru-Gundlupet, Sulthan Bathery and Kozhikode) through the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR) should be closed and that the alternative Mysuru-Mananthwadi Road via Gonikuppa should be upgraded and strengthened. The NTCA is also expected, in its next step, to propose putting some restrictions on the movement of vehicles on this road as well during night hours as it passes through the buffer zone of the reserve.

The proposal has also got the support of the Karnataka Forest Department (FD), which is of the opinion that all roads passing through protected areas should be closed and alternative roads be strengthened instead. The FD gave its backing for this proposal after a report from the Wildlife Institute of India showed that closing down traffic completely on the road connecting Bandipur and the southern part of Nagarahole TRs has helped improve the wildlife population.

The Ministry of Road Transport and National Highways too has agreed to consider alternative routes connecting Mysuru and Kerala. In its affidavit to the apex court the ministry has suggested that state highway-90 (Hunsur-Talacauvery) and state highway-89 (Madikeri-Kutta), the Thalasseri-Bavali Road and Katikullam-Tholpatti Road can be used.

A committee comprising officials from NTCA, National Highways Authority of India and Ministry of Environment and Forests, that surveyed NH-212 and the alternative route in September, had also agreed that alternative routes should be strengthened. The NTCA will also submit this report to the court.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXV, Nos. 5 & 1; Vol. XXIV, No. 6; Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, Nos. 2 & 1; Vol. XVII, No. 6; Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 & 2; Vol. XV, Nos. 5 & 4 and Vol. XIV, No. 6).

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'NTCA to support Bandipur traffic ban', www.newindianexpress.com, 17/11/19.

KERALA

Butterfly survey records 191 species in Wayanad WLS

A four-day survey conducted recently by the forest department in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has recorded 191 species of butterflies here. This includes the first sightings of six species in the sanctuary including three rare ones.

The species for the first time included the *Catochrysops panormus* (silver forget-me-not), *Ypthima asterope* (common three-ring) and *Horaga viola* (brown onyx). All three have been

spotted very rarely in the state and silver forget-me-not was spotted for the first time outside Chinnar WLS in Kerala. It was also only the third sighting of the brown onyx in the state.

The survey was held by dividing the 344 sq km sanctuary into 18 blocks. It was taken up during the annual butterfly migration in south India from the plains to the Western Ghats and butterfly migrations were recorded in all the 18 camps where the survey was conducted.

As many as 70 butterfly enthusiasts participated in the survey, which was held in association with Ferns Nature Conservation Society. Researchers from Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), KUFOS, SACON, Malabar Natural History Society (MNHS), SEEK, Payazhannur and students of Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) participated in the survey.

Source: 'Butterfly survey records sighting of 191 species',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
12/11/19.

MADHYA PRADESH

Tiger T17 shifted from Kanha TR to Van Vihar in Bhopal

The 16 year-old tiger, T17, was recently shifted from Kanha Tiger Reserve (TR) to Van Vihar in Bhopal as he had become a threat to human life due to its old age. Also known as Munna, the tiger was once the dominant male across the Kanha and Kisli range. He settled eventually in the buffer area after being displaced by younger males and was surviving by killing cattle since 2018.

In October 2019, however, it injured a man and then killed a 14 year-old girl in Jhangul village. Following an agitation by locals and fearing possible conflict, the chief wildlife warden issued orders to capture and shift T17 from Kanha to Van Vihar.

Source: 'MP: Munna shifted from Kanha to avoid man-wildlife conflict, says official',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
25/10/19.

MAHARASHTRA

New night safari at Tadoba-Andhari TR

The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) has started a new night safari on the Palasgaon-Karwa-Shivni route in the buffer area. The new route will be in addition to the existing night safari from Padmapur gate to Kondegaon, which is 32 km via Mohurli in the buffer zone. The new route is expected to benefit tourists coming to the Kolara gate. The safari will cost Rs. 3,500 per trip - Rs. 2,000 for the vehicle, Rs.1,000 gate fee and Rs. 500 towards guide fee. The carrying capacity has been fixed at six vehicles from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Night safaris have been attempted in different PAs in Maharashtra with different success rates in recent years. A night safari was launched in December 2015 in the Nagalwadi range from Surewani gate in Pench TR buffer zone but only 60 vehicles with 300 tourists availed it. It was shut down eventually because of the poor response. A similar night safari was launched in the Melghat TR buffer zone in November 2017. The 40 km route on the outskirts of the Narnala Wildlife Sanctuary, Akot, initially received good response but later tourist numbers dwindled. An official said that the night safari is closed now as roads have been badly damaged due to rains. It was expected to be re-opened in November.

An evening-night safari at Gorewada Zoo is reported to get a good response on weekends. The safari starts at 5.30 p.m., the time when most wild animals venture out. Besides, it is cost-effective and close to the city of Nagpur. (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 4)

Part of the reason why these night safaris are getting a poor response is the fact that wildlife lovers are increasingly more interested in photography, which is difficult during the night safari. Sightings during the night safaris too are, reportedly, not very easy.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'New night safari launched in Tadoba buffer',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
21/10/19.

SGNP still awaits return of 51 acres land from Film City

Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) has asked the Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari, also known as Film City, to return 51 acres of forest land that was transferred to it in 1969.

The state government had handed over 215 acres of forest land that comprised of two villages – Sai (102 acres) and Gundgaon (113 acres) to the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in 1969. A government resolution (GR) issued in 1970 confirms the same. According to the forest department (FD), when MIDC further handed over the area to Film City, over 245 acres had been transferred. The survey number issued as per a 1970 notification incorrectly identified the survey number of Gundgaon village, resulting in the transfer of excess land to Film City. Later, the area of land to be transferred to Film City was decided as 194 acres. Another notification was issued in 1984-85 with a corrigendum, demarcating the correct areas of the villages and a total of 194 acres was handed over in place of 215. Therefore, additional 51 acres that were transferred needed to be given back to the FD. This has, however, not happened and the exact boundary of SGNP was not carved. SGNP officials said they have been asking Film City authorities to give back the land since 1970; the last letter was sent to Film City authorities in August, earlier this year.

Film City officials have, however said that Film City does not have any forest areas or areas belonging to SGNP under its jurisdiction. Whatever was handed over under the 1970 GR was meticulously measured by the city survey department, which was further monitored by the revenue department and then handed over. Thus, there is no question of returning any land to the FD. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6).

Source: Badri Chatterjee. ‘Sanjay Gandhi National Park wants Film City to return its 51 acres of forest land in Mumbai’, www.hindustantimes.com, 09/10/19.

Approval for construction of wall to demarcate zoo plot in Aarey, near SGNP

The Maharashtra government has in a resolution passed on October 9, approved a grant of Rs. 60 lakh for construction of a wall for the proposed zoo in Aarey, adjoining the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The government has handed 190 acres of land in Aarey for the project, which has been in the pipeline since 2009. The project’s total cost is estimated to be Rs. 500 crore.

The state had, in July, inked a pact with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to set up an international-standard zoo at Aarey Milk Colony (*PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 4). The BMC will soon appoint a project management consultant and prepare a comprehensive master plan for the zoo, which will be executed using its own resources. However, the net revenues will be shared by both BMC and FD.

The zoo plans to offer a jungle safari as an attraction and host a captive breeding programme for conservation of endangered species. It will also receive several animals under its exchange programme with other zoos across the country.

A number of people including residents of the area had objected to the state government’s move to allot a plot in Aarey for the zoo as many stand to lose their land because of it. Environmentalists too have demanded that the entire Aarey colony be declared a reserve forest and merged with the neighbouring SGNP.

Source: Sanjana Bhalerao. ‘Maharashtra govt gives financial nod for ‘international-standard’ zoo’, www.indianexpress.com, 14/10/19.

ODISHA

119 elephant deaths due to electrocution in Odisha in the last decade

The Odisha state assembly was informed recently that 119 elephants were killed by being electrocuted in the state in the last decade. It

was also informed that 133 people, 11 forest personnel and four energy department officials have faced actions for these deaths.

The state forest and environment minister, Bikram Keshari Arukha, also outlined the steps that had been taken to deal with the problem. He noted that officials of all power distribution companies, principal chief wildlife warden, regional chief conservator of forests and divisional forest officers now regularly conduct coordination meetings to prevent such deaths. The energy department has also been asked to insulate live electric wire in 1519.36 km-long low tension transmission lines in 17 forest divisions of the state and to also insulate wires in other areas where elephant movements have been noticed.

In the Angul forest division, in addition, movements of elephants are tracked with the help of drones and a control room has been set up for better coordination between people and field level staff.

Conservationists have, however, argued that the actions are insignificant. In most cases, they have noted, officials are asked explanations and those culminate in suspension. They are, however, reinstated a few months later. There is no stringent action, in the absence of which lapses are not rectified.

Source: 'Odisha loses 119 elephants to electrocution in a decade',
www.thehindu.com, 20/11/19.

PUNJAB

Three Indus river dolphins sighted in post-monsoon survey in Beas CR

Three Indus river dolphins, including one juvenile, were spotted in a four-day post-monsoon survey carried out in the Beas Conservation Reserve (CR). The dolphins were seen 25 km upstream of Harike, near village Gadka, and the sightings have allayed fears of the threat to the dolphins following the massive molasses spill that occurred here last year. The survey was conducted by a joint team of the state department of forest and wildlife and

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India in a 185 km stretch of the Beas.

In the previous survey conducted in June 2019, four dolphins were spotted, including a calf. The next survey would be conducted in December 2019 to estimate the population size of dolphins in lean flow period.

There are estimated to be about 2,000 Indus river dolphins in Punjab, India and Pakistan.

Source: Vinod Kumar. 'Punjab: 3 dolphins spotted in Beas conservation reserve',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
24/10/19.

RAJASTHAN

State proposes 'tiger reserve' tag for Kumbhalgarh WLS

The Rajasthan Forest Department has initiated the process to declare Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) a tiger reserve (TR). A proposal for the same has been submitted to the chief wildlife warden of the state.

According to the draft, the Kumbhalgarh TR will be constituted by the Kumbhalgarh and Todgarh-Raoli WLSs and adjoining forest areas. The area of the proposed TR will be 1280.49 sq. km, out of which 355.25 sq. km will be the core area and 925 sq. km the buffer in phase I. It will be spread across the districts of Pali, Rajsamand, Udaipur and Ajmer.

Five breeding tigers, including two males and three females, might be brought to the reserve. It is hoped that the population would eventually increase to 20 in a period of 10 years. A little over Rs. 6000 lakh will be needed over a five year period for the implementation of the project. Apart from developing soft release enclosures at the release site of reintroduced the tiger, various habitat development initiatives will be undertaken to develop grasslands for herbivores.

Source: 'Kumbhalgarh Tiger Reserve proposal gathers steam',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
25/10/19.

TAMIL NADU

FD to test beehive fences to curb human-elephant conflict in Coimbatore forest division

The Tamil Nadu State Forest Department (FD) is in the process of putting up beehive fences to drive crop-raiding elephants away from tribal farmlands. The state government has sanctioned Rs. 1.15 crore to pilot this project in Coimbatore forest division (CFD). The proposal has been sent by the Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation Limited (TANTEA) and an official order has been passed by the Department of Environment and Forests.

According to forest officials, a family will be given 10 bee boxes, which will allow them to harvest and sell upto five litres of honey once in four months, besides protecting their village from wild elephants. A total of 20 tribal families from 29 villages in seven forest ranges of the CFD have been chosen as custodians for 2,000 beehive boxes to be placed at locations visited frequently by elephants. The Little bee will be used because of feasibility, easy maintenance and local climatic conditions. The Keystone Foundation, an NGO working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), has been roped in to provide training to the tribals.

The project was originally approved during the last budget, but since the northeast monsoon failed last year it could not be implemented. Good flowering is necessary to sustain the bees. The monsoon this year is expected to be bountiful and the flowering will start by the first week of December.

In last three years, 126 persons have died in elephant attacks in Tamil Nadu and the conflict is on the rise due to change in land-use patterns and fragmentation of elephant corridors.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'Can bees solve deadly man-elephant conflict? Tamil Nadu govt finds out', www.newindianexpress.com, 22/10/19.

Draft notification proposes almost no ESZ around Sathyamangalam TR

A recently issued draft notification has proposed almost no eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) for the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR).

The notification has, on one hand, stated that the reserve is highly critical to accommodate the spill-over population of tigers from Mudumalai and Bandipur TRs and Nilgiri North forest division through Moyar valley, and similarly, the Biligiri Rangan Temple TR and Kollegal forest division connecting on the other side with Hassanur range. The Sathyamangalam TR acts as a bridge between the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats, ensuring a vast territory for tigers, and thus enhancing long-term conservation measures through exchange of genes between meta populations. Therefore, it is necessary to conserve and protect the area around STR as ESZ, for the better management and protection of wildlife, especially tigers.

At the same time, the same notification has ensured that there will not be any ESZ along the border in many stretches of the reserve. The boundary description shows that the ESZ would be zero in the TN Palayam block in Erode district. Granite quarries near Bhavani Sagar dam, which are located in crucial elephant habitats and corridors (*PA Update* XXV, No. 5) and the TN Palayam areas, have been excluded from the ESZ.

Activists have also noted that the TR has a number of revenue enclaves, which are being eyed by the rich and there is a real estate boom, with local lands being bought by outsiders. They have planned farmhouses, resorts and other commercial activities that can't be regulated if the areas don't fall under the ESZ. While activists argue that forest and reserve officials should have objected to the draft and have impressed upon the Collector, the need to have a bigger ESZ, the officials themselves were unwilling to comment on the draft.

Source: B Aravind Kumar. 'Down to zero: STR's shrinking buffer zone', www.thehindu.com, 28/09/19.

Three tonnes of sea cucumber seized from Gulf of Mannar

Three tonnes of sea cucumber valued at around Rs. 40 lakh and meant to be smuggled out of the country was seized from a country boat in the Gulf of Mannar in October. Two persons were arrested.

According to the police, wildlife rangers, on an intensified patrolling drive in the area following a tip-off, found a country boat and proceeded towards it. All the occupants of the boat, except the two who were eventually arrested, managed to escape. The boat and 261 bags of unprocessed sea cucumber weighing around 3,200 kg were seized.

Another smaller seizure of 350 kg of sea cucumber had also been made a few days earlier, on September 24, at Pamban.

The threatened marine species is said to be in demand in Sri Lanka and other South East Asian countries for use as a delicacy and in preparing medicines.

Source: 'Three tonnes of sea cucumber seized in TN, 2 arrested', www.business-standard.com, 13/10/19.

TELANGANA

Phase 4 monitoring of tigers in Telangana

Camera traps have been installed in the Amrabad and Kawal Tiger Reserves (TRs) as part of the phase 4 tiger monitoring schedule. The TRs have been divided into grids of 1.4 to 2 sq km each for the purpose and the camera traps will be in place for a period of 45 days.

As per recent NTCA tiger census, Telangana has 26 tigers in two tiger reserves. It is estimated that Amrabad has around 17 to 20 tigers and Kawal has 6 to 9 tigers.

The current exercise is separate from All India Tiger Estimation, which happens once in four years.

Source: U Sudhakar Reddy. 'Phase 4 monitoring of big cats begin in Andhra and Telangana', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/11/19.

UTTAR PRADESH

Varanasi Turtle Sanctuary to be denotified

Three decades after it was declared India's first and so far only protected area dedicated to the conservation of freshwater turtle species, Varanasi's Turtle Wildlife Sanctuary is being denotified by the Uttar Pradesh government. The Allahabad-Mirzapur stretch of the Ganga might be declared as a sanctuary in lieu of this denotification.

The prod to denotify the sanctuary first came two years ago, when the Union ministry of environment forests and climate change (MoEFCC) wrote to the state government that the ghats were under threat. It also emerged that the Centre's 1,620 km national waterways project was to pass through the turtle habitat.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is said to have conducted a feasibility study and found the Allahabad-Mirzapur stretch of the river suitable for declaration as a sanctuary. The proposal was reviewed and approved in principle during a recent meeting of the state wildlife board, chaired by CM Yogi Adityanath.

The sanctuary, spanning the seven km stretch from Ramnagar Fort to the Malviya railroad bridge, was notified as the country's first freshwater turtle sanctuary under the Ganga Action Plan in 1989. The idea of a sanctuary was married to the concept of releasing four carnivorous species of turtles for organic cleaning of the Ganga. Since *kathawa Aspiderites gangeticus*, *sundari kachua Lissemys punctata*, *dhond Kachuga dhongoka* and *pacheda Pangshura tecta* are carnivorous turtles, it was expected that they would feed on half-burnt corpses floating in the waters of the Ganga.

Turtle eggs were secured from the Chambal river, hatched at the Sarnath breeding centre and released in the river. The state government subsequently banned sand mining in the area to save the nesting turtles, leading to sand accumulation and increased sedimentation that seemed to create a new set of challenges. Flagging this as a threat to the ghats, the

environment ministry wrote to the state government in 2017 seeking a remedy.

Source: Neha Shukla. 'Varanasi to bid adieu to turtle sanctuary', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/11/19.

AMU to help FD in conservation of threatened species

Research scholars in the Department of Wildlife Sciences (DWS), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), will now share their expertise with the state wildlife department for the conservation of many species on the verge of extinction in the state. The announcement was made by the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), wildlife, Sunil Pandey, during a recently held three-day international conservation conference organized jointly by the DWS-AMU and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

Presiding over the function, Pro Vice Chancellor, AMU Prof. Akhtar Haseeb urged young researchers to focus on multidisciplinary research work for better results, and said that wildlife conservation should be taken in a holistic way.

Prof. Wazahat Husain was conferred a lifetime achievement award jointly by AMU and WII on the occasion for his exemplary services.

Source: 'AMU to tie up with wildlife dept on conservation efforts', www.thehansindia.com, 23/10/19.

Census records 36 Ganges river dolphins in state

A census carried out jointly in the month of October by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India and Uttar Pradesh Forest Department's divisions of five districts – Bijnor, Meerut, Hapur, Amroha and Bulandshahar - has reported a total of 36 Ganges river dolphins in the state. This is three more than the count made last year. The count using the tandem boat survey method was carried out along the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and at Narora within the upper Ganga river stretch from October 9 to 15.

A majority of the dolphins were found in the Hastinapur WLS that stretches from Bijnor Barrage to Garh Mukteshwar in Hapur, showing a marked shift in its habitat upstream.

One of the main threats to the Ganges river dolphin is loss of habitat due in creation of dams on the tributaries of the Ganga and irrigation projects. Besides, water pollution is reported to have forced the animals into a small stretch of the river. The survey team also observed no threat from poaching, garbage dumping or illegal mining.

Source: Sandeep Rai. 'With three calves, Ganges dolphin population up to 36 in UP: Census', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/10/19.

UTTARAKHAND

Plans to introduce rhinos to Corbett TR

The Uttarakhand State Wildlife Board has recently approved a proposal for the reintroduction of rhinos on an experimental basis in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR). The proposal was approved in the 14th meeting of the board held recently in Dehradun under the chairmanship of chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat. The proposal will now be sent to the centre for its approval.

Qamar Qureshi, scientist at Wildlife Institute of India (WII), who had recommended reintroduction of rhinos in Corbett in 2007 along with two other experts, said they had studied the protected forest areas in Uttarakhand where the animal could be reintroduced. They had found three areas suitable for the reintroduction— one is Corbett, second is Surai Range of Terai East Forest Division on the south-eastern end of Uttarakhand and third is Paterpani, located south of the Dhikala grassland. Corbett was found to be the most suitable as it is a protected area and also has good floral diversity.

The rhinos to be introduced will be brought either from Assam or West Bengal, the

two states of the country that have the most significant populations of the animal.

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'Uttarakhand plans to introduce rhinos in Corbett', www.hindustantimes.com, 27/11/19.

Uttarakhand to declare monkeys 'vermin'

The Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) has decided to declare monkeys "vermin", allowing the local authorities to cull the animal. The decision was given an in-principle go-ahead by chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat during the 14th State Wildlife Board meeting held in Dehradun recently. The officials claim that the monkeys have become a nuisance for farmers as they are ruining their crops. Attacks by monkeys are reported to have gone up in urban areas as well.

The FD has said that the state is home to around 1.5 lakh monkeys and their population has shown a 36% annual growth. The species causing the most damage is the rhesus macaque *Macaca mulatta*.

The Uttarakhand High Court had last year directed the state government to find a solution to the monkey menace within the ambit of law in the most "humane manner possible". The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has also proposed population control plans to combat the simian menace in the state. WII scientists had in 2016 proposed the administration of an oral immuno-contraceptive, porcine zona pellucida (PZP), to restrict their population in the state.

Source: 'After Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand to declare monkeys 'vermin'', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 27/11/19.

Five Terai tigers to be translocated to western part of Rajaji TR

Five tigers from the Terai region will be translocated to the western part of Rajaji Tiger Reserve (TR) in three phases this winter. The National Tiger Conservation Authority has given the clearance for the move and the reserve

authorities are waiting for the soft release enclosure to be constructed after which the animals will be transported.

At present, the eastern part of the reserve, which spans around 300 sq km has around 38 tigers while the west, which is almost double the size, has only two tigresses. The presence of male tigers has not been recorded in this part of the reserve since 2005. Also, there are no confirmed reports of tiger movement between the two parts of RTR in recent years. The two tigresses of breeding age are thus genetically isolated from the rest of the tiger population in Terai landscape and there is no evidence of breeding in western RTR since 2005.

A male tiger would be released in the western region initially and another pair (a male and a female) would be transported again after a month. Similarly, one more pair would be transported after a gap of 45 days.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'Rajaji authorities to translocate 5 tigers from east to west', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 09/10/19.

HC seeks replies on encroachment in Corbett elephant corridors

The Uttarakhand High Court has sought replies from the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) and divisional forest officer (DFO), Ramnagar, after a public interest litigation filed by Advocate Dushyant Mainali alleged that there was heavy encroachment on the elephant corridors in and around the Corbett National Park.

The petitioner said that unregulated traffic around the corridors was hindering the natural route of elephants and effectively bringing a change in their behaviour. Also, there have been instances when forest officials have used chilli powder to keep the elephants away from places where numerous resorts and hotels have cropped up. Cases of man-animal conflict are on the rise in these areas.

The Wildlife Trust of India has identified 11 elephant corridors in Uttarakhand.

Three of these are near Ramnagar and are used by elephants to reach the Kosi river.

Source: Prashant Jha. 'U'khand HC seeks reply from forest dept over use of chilli powder to keep elephants at bay', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/10/19.

Uttarakhand's first biodiversity park to come up in Corbett TR buffer zone

Uttarakhand will soon get its first biodiversity park in the flood plains of Dhela river in the buffer zone of Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR). The park will house all the creatures that are found inside the reserve, giving the facility a miniature look of Corbett. It will have various activities, including bird watching, a butterfly park as well as live shows to promote conservation.

Spread across 5,000 ha, the biodiversity park will be crafted under the guidance of retired Delhi University professor and scientist, CR Babu, who has been instrumental in developing scientific methods of restoration of grasslands and other ecosystems with native species.

The Dhela zone has been chosen for the park as the region has a huge tourist influx. In 2018, 50% of the tourists visiting Corbett TR stayed in the Dhela and Jhirna zones. All of them entered the reserve through the Dhela region.

The forest department is also planning a biodiversity park in the Rajaji TR.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'U'khand to get its first biodiversity park in Corbett', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 21/10/19.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Big cats in conflict with humans won't be called 'man-eaters'

Big cats attacking and feeding on humans won't be called man-eaters any more. The revised

standard operating procedure drawn up by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for dealing with big cats straying into human-dominated landscapes has replaced the term 'man-eater' with 'dangerous to human life'. The decision whether a tiger is dangerous or not will be taken by a committee under the authority in consultation with the chief wildlife warden of the respective state.

The new guidelines also ban non-departmental individuals, like private sharpshooters, from participating in operations to eliminate/tranquillise or capture tigers in conflict. The development comes in the wake of the controversy over the death of tigress Avni in Maharashtra last year (*PA Update* Vol. XXV, No 2).

The guidelines/SOP signed by Surender Mehra, deputy inspector general of forests, NTCA, were issued on November 11, 2019.

Source: Rohith BR. 'Big cats in conflict with humans won't be called man-eaters', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/11/19.

Over 53000 paintbrushes made of mongoose hair seized in operations in UP, Maharashtra

In operations led by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), over 53000 mongoose hair paintbrushes were seized in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra in the month of October.

The operations in UP were carried out jointly with the police and the UP Forest Department. 10 places in Bijnor's Sherkot area were raided leading to the seizure of 113 kg of mongoose fur and 24,060 paintbrushes made of mongoose hair. 26 persons were also arrested. Investigations have revealed that the fur had been purchased from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and other parts of south India.

A similar operation in September in Sherkot last year yielded 145 kg of mongoose fur and 10,000 paintbrushes.

Sherkot is known for its brush making units, and some of them use mongoose fur for making the paintbrushes. The paintbrush unit

owners receive mongoose furs from several states, including Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Haryana, Rajasthan, some parts of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and some areas of UP. After manufacturing the paintbrushes, which are considered valuable by professionals around the world for painting fine details, the unit owners sell them in black markets of India, China and some European countries.

The raids in multiple locations across Maharashtra yielded 29,166 paintbrushes made from mongoose hair. The WCCB had identified 22 targets where these paintbrushes were being sold, raided them and arrested 15 people working at artwork, stationary and hardware stores in Andheri, Dadar, Dombivali, Goregaon, Lower Parel and Mira Road in Mumbai, apart from shops in Pune and Sawantwadi. 18 cases were also registered. Eight of these 18 cases were registered in Mumbai, from where 18,924 brushes were confiscated.

The raids were part of WCCB's nationwide operation, 'Clean Art', which is the agency's effort to control the hunting of the species for fur. WCCB has roped in multiple central agencies including Central Bureau of Investigation, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, forest departments, India Post, state police departments and an NGO named Wildlife Welfare Association. It had held capacity-building, target-identification and verification exercises between October 1 and 21.

Source: Source: 'Uttar Pradesh: Fur racket link found in south India', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/10/19.
Srinath Rao. 'Mumbai: Over 29,000 mongoose hair paint brushes seized, 15 held', www.indianexpress.com, 26/10/19.

Large-scale turtle trade in India: Study

A study conducted by the Turtle Survival Alliance India Program - TRAFFIC has pointed to large scale illicit poaching and smuggling of tortoises and freshwater turtles in India. A fact sheet 'Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles Under Siege' reveals that a minimum of 1,11,310

tortoises and freshwater turtles entered the illegal wildlife trade in a decade from September 2009 to 2019. However, considering that a large portion of illegal wildlife trade goes undetected, the actual numbers could be much higher, according to the study.

More than 60% of all reported seizures from 19 states and two union territories have taken place in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Around 14 Indian species of tortoises and freshwater turtles were found to be traded, of which Indian star tortoise accounted for 49% of the total identifiable individuals seized, followed by the Indian softshell turtle (26%), Indian flapshell turtle (15%) and Black spotted or spotted pond turtle (9%).

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Over 11,000 tortoises, turtles entered wildlife trade every year, reveals study', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 03/10/19.

SOUTH ASIA

Tripartite MoU between India, Nepal and Bhutan for transboundary conservation park

India, Nepal and Bhutan have drafted a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to create a trans-boundary wildlife conservation 'peace park'. The project is aimed at maintaining the natural connectivity of wildlife species, undisturbed by political boundaries. It will also help the local communities maintain the traditional and cultural continuity of villages that share similar traditions, but have been separated by the political boundary.

There is already one trans-boundary protected area in India and Bhutan, which includes the Manas landscape of Assam, and the new tripartite park will be an extension of this.

While the key agency in the Indian context will be the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) will also be

involved given the multinational nature of the project

Source: Ishan Kukreti. 'India, Nepal, Bhutan plan trans-border conservation area', www.downtoearth.org.in, 24/10/19.

BANGLADESH

Refugee Rohingyas part of initiative to prevent human-elephant conflict in Kutupalong

A project launched by UNHCR, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) 18 months ago to help reduce incidents involving elephants coming into conflict with forcibly displaced Rohingyas in Kutupalong and host communities living nearby, has been a success, according to a press release.

48 elephant response teams (ERTs), made up of 586 Rohingya volunteers, were formed to prevent elephants entering their settlements as well as protecting host communities living nearby as part of this initiative. The ERTs are reported to have successfully intervened in 93 cases where elephants had attempted to enter densely populated sites, helping to steer the animals back to the forest. The ERTs, able to monitor elephant movements from 94 newly-built elephant watchtowers, have averted fatalities inside the refugee settlements where they had been operational.

A recent meeting of environment, wildlife and conservation experts, also attended by Md. Mahbub Alam Talukder, the refugee relief and repatriation commissioner as a chief guest, discussed ways forward to broaden existing steps to tackle environmental degradation in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf peninsula. The meeting also discussed the need to provide enhanced protection for around 40 elephants in the area.

Source: 'UNHCR, IUCN highlight success in preventing human-elephant conflict', www.dhakatribune.com, 18/09/19.

NEPAL

Gharial found breeding in Bardia NP; first such record in Nepal in 37 years

100 hatchlings of the gharial were found recently in Bardia National Park (NP) by conservationists from Zoological Society of London and Biodiversity Conservancy Nepal, making it the first such record in Nepal since 1982. The findings of ZSL's EDGE (Evolutionary Distinct and Globally Endangered) of Existence was published by the IUCN SSC Crocodile Specialist Group in November.

The discovery is particularly relevant in context of the fact that there are plans to divert nearby river systems, which would likely have an impact on the habitat and quality of the river for the gharial.

There are estimated to be only 100 adult gharial remaining in Nepal including another population in Chitwan NP.

Source: 'Gharial found breeding in Nepal after 37 years', www.nepalitimes.com, 19/11/19.



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.

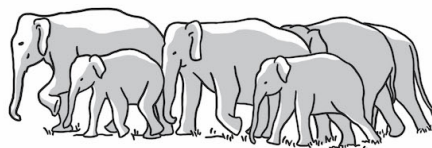
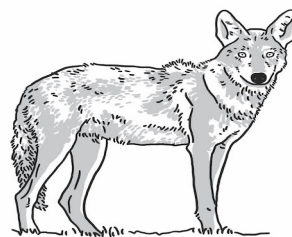
There are multiple possibilities and we would look forward to other concrete suggestions and ideas that you may have.

Pls write to psekhsaria@gmail.com or to the editorial address of the *PA Update*
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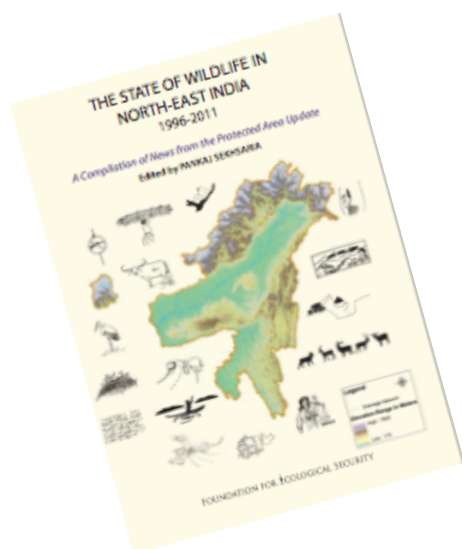
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Annexures

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**

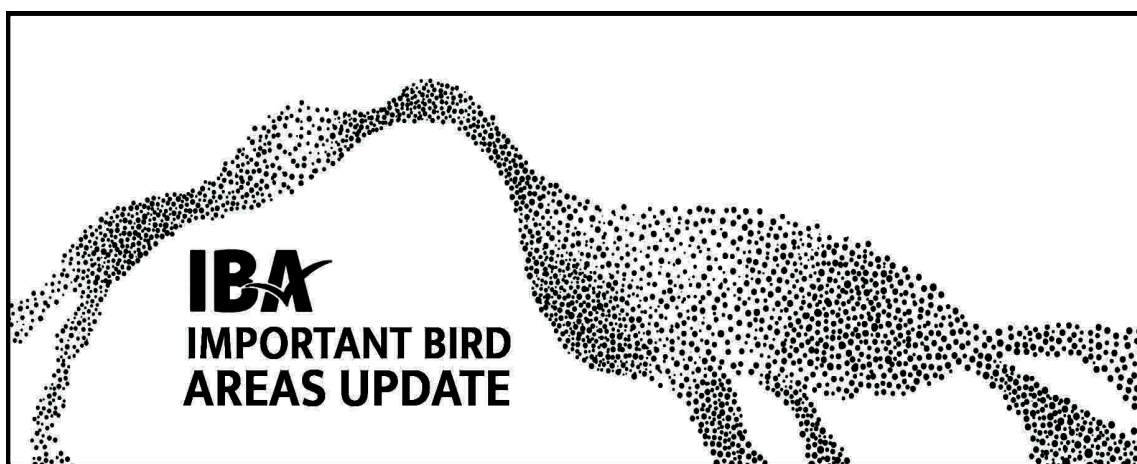
- **Protected Areas in Maharashtra – a brief introduction**

- **Section 1: News and Information from protected areas**

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





NATIONAL NEWS

World owl conference held in Pune

Pune based non-profit Ela Habitat, in association with Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) and Maharashtra forest department, organised the sixth World Owl Conference at the university campus from November 29 December 2.

The conference had research and scientific papers on owls from 16 countries where a total of 46 papers, each talking about conservation, and preservation of the bird were presented by the researchers.

Source: Prachi Bari. '17,000 owls killed in India in 2018 for black magic: World Owl Conference begins at SPPU on Nov 29'. www.hindustantimes.com, 28/11/19.

Migratory birds could be falling prey to powerlines and turbines in India: study

A joint study undertaken by Russian and Indian researchers has shown that migratory birds from Siberia and northern Eurasia could be falling prey to power lines and turbines in India. The possibility has emerged following a project for satellite monitoring project of two ospreys that have migrated from Russia to India.

The ospreys, one male named 'Serzhik' and a female, 'Usina', were satellite tagged in

Russia's Sayano-Shushensky State Nature Reserve, located near the border with Mongolia. The tracking revealed that both birds had independently travelled about 300-400 km per day for 15 days, approximately covering 5,000 km to reach their wintering ground. The female halted near Udaipur in Rajasthan and is still there, confined to an area where there are a few lakes.

Serzhik, however, met with a tragic fate. He went further south and reached Madhya Pradesh where he stayed for about 15 days. He then travelled even further south to Karnataka near the town of Ilkal and mysteriously died there. The Russian scientists visited the area to understand the reason for the death and found that the area had too many windmills. They have surmised that the bird fell into the turbine turbulence zone of the wind turbine, was shell-shocked and could not continue the flight, although it remained alive. He rose from the ground and sat on the support of the power transmission line, where he was killed by electric shock. This detail they recorded because of the satellite tag. The carcass was missing and could have been taken away and eaten by feral dogs, but its feathers were found under an electric pole which was unsafe for birds. The cause of death is assumed to be collision or electrocution.

The Russian and Indian scientists now suspect that several Siberian birds that flew to India did not return because they have collided with such infrastructure. Only those Siberian

raptors that migrate to the Middle East and Pakistan where wind power is poorly developed and there are fewer power lines, do they appear to survive, and return.

Source: 'Are Siberian migratory birds increasingly falling prey to India's power lines?'
www.downtoearth.org.in, 20/11/19.

MoEFCC sanctions 3-year study to map migratory bird pathways across India

The Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has approved a three-year study called the 'Bird Sensitivity Mapping Tool' to chart the pathways of migratory birds under the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) across India. The announcement was made on the sidelines of the International Conference on Wetlands and Migratory Waterbirds of the Asian Flyways held in Lonavla in the month of November. The study by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), which had made the proposal, will look at 77 locations (46 wetlands and 31 land sites including grasslands and forests) over 17 states.

Apart from mapping and safeguarding bird pathways, the study will help policy development for proposed infrastructure projects and civil aviation bird alert issues. The study will be part of India's National Action Plan for Conservation of Migratory Birds and their Habitats along Central Asian Flyway (2018-2023), released last year by the Centre.

The Rs. 3.9 crore project will collate preliminary data related to bird ringing, satellite studies, bird collaring and flagging already available with BNHS and geo-code it in an organised manner on one portal. BNHS plans to

further use augmented reality to develop three-dimensional profiling of migratory paths used by waterbirds in CAF with help from a Bengaluru-based technology company.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'MoEFCC sanctions 3-year study to map migratory bird pathways across India',
www.hindustantimes.com, 19/11/19.

HARYANA - NCR

Himalayan griffon vulture seen in NCR after five years

The Himalayan griffon vulture was recently spotted in the Aravali Biodiversity Park in Haryana, making it the first sighting in the national capital region (NCR) in five years. The flock of 15 was spotted by naturalists Vijay Dhasmana, Ram Veer and Pankaj Gupta in the month of November.

The last time it was sighted in this region was in Okhla in 2014.

Source: Shilpy Arora. 'Delhi-NCR: Rare vulture spotted in Aravalis after five years',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
18/11/19.

KARNATAKA

Road construction threat to Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary

Construction of a six-lane highway connecting Bengaluru to Mysuru is posing a serious threat to the Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary. Particular concern has been expressed over the use of explosives to cut the rock very close to the reserve.

A count in 2017-18 had revealed the presence of seven Long-billed vultures and five Himalayan griffons among others. In 2018-19, there were five Long-billed vultures and, four Himalayan griffons.

Forest officials allayed fears over the impact saying that the road was between 300-500 metres away and the cutting (not blasting) of rocks was not being done inside the reserve. They also claimed that they had the necessary documentation and approval from the eco-sensitive zone monitoring committee. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6).

Source: Rohini Swamy. 'Sholay's iconic rocks are being blasted for a highway, endangered vultures also threatened',
www.theprint.in, 11/11/19.

PUNJAB

State proposes five wetlands for Ramsar tag; Centre selects another five for conservation scheme

Punjab has proposed five wetlands in the state as Ramsar sites while the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has selected five wetlands—Harike, Kanjli, Ropar, Nangal and Keshopur Miani—under the 100-day action plan on conservation and rejuvenation. These wetlands are among 130 wetlands located in different states of India, which will be covered under the scheme.

The next step under the scheme would be formation of groups of individuals called 'wetland mitras', who will form an informal network providing information on aquatic species and habitat, practice and promote sustainable agricultural practices to reduce the threat to key freshwater habitats and species. They will be imparted training for acting as agents of change for conservation of freshwater and its biodiversity in the state. The state forest department will regularly take up the wetland health assessment of these wetlands.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India is the NGO partner for the implementation of the program.

The sites proposed by the state government for a Ramsar site tag include a 185 km stretch of the Beas Conservation Reserve (CR), Ranjit Sagar CR, Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary, Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve and the Hussainiwala wetland.

Source: Vinod Kumar. 'Five more wetlands in Punjab set to get Ramsar site tag', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/10/19.

RAJASTHAN

Nine GIBs artificially hatched in Desert NP

In what is being considered a big success for the joint effort of the Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) and the Wildlife Institute of India, nine Great Indian bustard (GIB) chicks have been

artificially hatched in the Desert National Park (NP) in Jaisalmer district.

The team had recently collected 10 GIB eggs from the DNP. The initiative for the artificial hatching follows serious concerns regarding the future of the bird on account of predation by other animals, loss of habitat and intrusions such as canal networks, windmills and high voltage power lines.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 2)

Source: Dinesh Bothra. '9 GIBs artificially hatched in Desert National Park in Rajasthan', www.hindustantimes.com, 18/11/19.

UTTARAKHAND/HIMACHAL PRADESH

Uttarakhand seeks help from HP for Himalayan Monal

In a bid to safeguard the numbers of the state bird of Uttarakhand, the Himalayan Monal the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) has procured two male monals from the Nehru Pheasantry at Manali in Himachal Pradesh (HP). The birds will be used for conservation and breeding at the GB Pant High Altitude Zoo in Nainital. The move was taken after Central Zoo Authority (CZA) gave clearance to both the states to exchange the wild birds for ex-situ conservation.

The bird faces a series of threats on account of the degradation and disturbance of its habitat, poaching and also because the feathers of the male are in demand as a symbol of authority in the traditional Pahari caps. Excessive tourism has also emerged as a more recent threat.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'U'khand's state bird monal to be conserved with help from Himachal', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 18/11/19.

FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago

PA Update 82, December 2009

MAHARASHTRA

Conservation Reserve status proposed for Mahendri Reserve Forest

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) is considering a 'conservation reserve' status for the Mahendri Reserve Forest in the Warud tehsil of Amravati district. The forest links the Melghat and Pench Tiger Reserves and is particularly known for the large number and species of spiders found here.

The matter gained importance recently when around 40 researchers from across the country gathered at the Mahatma Phule Arts, Commerce & Sitaramaji Choudhari Science Mahavidyalaya, Warud, to discuss the spider-richness of the area. It was an initiative of Amravati territorial circle of the FD and the Nature Conservation Society (NCS), Amravati.

An existing proposal for declaring the forest a wildlife sanctuary has been reportedly opposed by locals and this is the reason why the conservation reserve idea has been mooted now. The deputy conservator of forests has been asked to submit a report that will include information about Mahendri's role as a corridor connecting Pench and Melghat and the density of the forests here.

Mahendri Reserve Forest is spread over an area of about 70 sq km and is rich in flora and fauna. Wildlife reported from the forests includes the tiger, leopard, *cheetal*, *sambar*, bluebull, barking deer and many bird species. It was a shooting block in the past and is mainly made up of 'A' class forests. The forest beats here include Shekdari, Wai, Linga, Pimpalgarh and Mahendri.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Mahendri spiders may help tigers, humans', *The Times of India*, 12/10/09.

MEGHALAYA

Community reserve set up for pitcher plant conservation in South Garo Hills

Residents of the Baghmara Aking in the South Garo District of Meghalaya have recently set

up a community reserve for the conservation of the pitcher plant *Nepenthes khasiana*. The Matcha Nokpante Community Conserved Pitcher Plant Reserve (MNCCPPR) has been established in an area called Matcha Nokpante, which in Garo translates to 'Bachelor Hut of Tigers'. The area has traditionally been rich in wildlife and tigers have also been seen here.

The reserve is spread over an area of 1.5 sq. kms where the pitcher plant is found in abundance. It was set up after several meetings and discussions by hamlets located in the vicinity of the area.

The Samrakshan Trust that works in the region helped the communities in creating the reserve, setting up an institutional mechanism and in formulation of the rules for its management. Samrakshan's team had surveyed and mapped the area and has now initiated a biodiversity survey of the reserve.

Source: 'About Matcha Nokpante Community Conserve Pitcher Plant Reserve (MNCCPPR)', *Green Footprint*, Newsletter of the Samrakshan Trust Meghalaya Office, September 2009.

NAGALAND

Singphan RF declared as Singphan WLS

The Singphan Reserve Forest in Nagaland's Mon District has been declared as the Singphan Wildlife Sanctuary. The deputy commissioner (DC) of Mon District recently issued a notification under Section 26A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 creating the sanctuary over an area of 2,357 hectares.

The boundary description of the sanctuary is as follows: 'South – Shenmen Nallah and Upper Tiru village, North – PWD Border Road Assam, East – Sufrai/Tiru River up to the junction and West – Churaideo Tea estate on the Assam side'.

Source: 'Mon DC declares Reserved Forest as Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Morung Express*, 08/10/09.

PERSPECTIVE

Last refuges for conservation?

Over the past two years I have been part of the Monitoring Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of Protected Areas exercise carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India and supported by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. As part of the team, I have assessed a total of 21 wildlife sanctuaries across the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Most of them are little known sanctuaries of relatively moderate size. We spent an average of three days in each one of these places traversing the landscapes and having intense discussions with the forest staff.

It was indeed heartening to see healthy habitats and thriving wildlife in many of these smaller protected areas. Take the example of the truly hidden gem that is the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra. This small sanctuary of approximately 150 sq km is a home to about 12 tigers that are quite easy to view near or in water bodies. The forest department (FD) has to be complimented on its wonderful work on establishing waterholes throughout the area that represent true innovation and technology. Each waterhole has a solar panel that derives enough power to pump water into the waterhole. The sanctuary gets a lot of day visitors from Nagpur as well as Adilabad in Telangana. However, Tipeswar still remains relatively unknown for the other tourists who flock to larger protected areas such as the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.

Another jewel that lies hidden within the bustling metropolis of Mumbai is the Thane Creek WLS. Who would imagine that just a stone's throw away from the extremely busy and congested Mumbai-Thane highway is a world that flows with the tides. These are the

mudflats and mangroves of Thane creek where one can see a majestic display of birds. Credit would once again go to the FD for having successfully conserved this area against all odds. The jewel in the crown of this sanctuary is the interpretation centre that has been supported with GIZ funding and so creatively designed it is indeed one of a kind.

Perhaps it is these hidden gems that will help nurture and conserve wildlife populations in the country as the larger known PAs gets inundated with tourists along with resorts choking their peripheries and other developmental pressures loom large. An extra effort is certainly needed to understand them better and take measures to ensure their conservation and security.

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For private circulation/Printed Matter

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