



Vol. XXVI, No. 2

April 2020 (No. 144)

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

What will this underpass lead to?

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Arunachal Pradesh

East-West Industrial Corridor to pass through Pakke TR

Goa

NTCA recommends TR status for Mhadei WLS
NGT approves one-year extension for identification of wetlands

Gujarat

261 lion, 340 leopard deaths in Gujarat in last two years

Jharkhand

Three sanctuaries mentioned in 1965 report of IBWL don't exist anymore

Himachal Pradesh

State spent Rs 85 lakhs in 2019-20 to deal with monkey menace

Karnataka

Restrict ESZ area of Bannerghatta NP: CM
MM Hills set to be sixth tiger reserve of Karnataka

Lakshadweep Islands

Three new conservation reserves in Lakshadweep Islands

Madhya Pradesh

ESZ declared for National Chambal Sanctuary
Madhya Pradesh is now a gharial state
Efforts for rewilding of orphaned tiger cubs in Bandhavgarh TR abandoned

Radio-tagged pangolins rehabilitated in Satpura TR

3 Maharashtra 8

BMC to purchase private land around Tadoba Andhari TR as compensation

4 FD seeks public opinion on declaring Kanhargaoon WLS

Maharashtra records 64.5% decrease in wetland area

4 Nearly 5,500 wild animals use highway underpasses in Pench TR in nine months

Odisha 10

NTCA asks Odisha to start melanistic tiger safari near Simlipal TR

Dolphin population down by half in Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary; increases in Chilika

5 Rajasthan 11

Chaupals to sensitize villagers about reintroduction of tigers to Kumbalgarh TR

5 Telangana 11

Villages in and around Kawal TR to be relocated soon

6 Uttar Pradesh 12

109-year-old railway line through Dudhwa NP to be shut down

UP to open five leopard rescue centres as part of 'Project Leopard'

Uttarakhand 12

7 Snow leopard pugmark found in Valley of Flowers National Park

FD seeks UNESCO heritage tag for Corbett TR, Nandhaur WLS

NBWL approval for road connecting Corbett and Rajaji TRs

West Bengal

Anthrax kills five rhinos at Jaldapara NP

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

510 elephants, 2,361 human deaths in human-elephant conflict in last four years

New species of snake eel discovered in Bay of Bengal

Survey proposed to map country's marine life

Six new gecko species found in Western Ghats

Ensure vehicles don't crowd around tigers: NTCA

Leopard population may have declined by 75-90% over last 120 - 200 years: Study

INTERNATIONAL

Almost 90% of dolphins in Indian Ocean wiped out by fishing industry: study

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE**Assam**

Deepor Beel area down by 35% in 29 years

13 Chandigarh/Punjab/Haryana

HC demands explanation on de-silting, deepening of Sukhna Lake

14 HC court declares Sukhna Lake a living entity; orders demolition of structures in catchment areas**Gujarat**

Female GIB dies in Kutch; garden lizard found stuck in its throat

Maharashtra

BNHS to use cellular technology to study migratory birds

Uttar Pradesh

115 species of birds recorded at Okhla Bird Sanctuary

OBITUARIES**21****18 FROM THE ARCHIVES****23****PERSPECTIVE****24**

Illustrating for conservation

Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

What will this underpass lead to?

One of the biggest threats to India's wildlife and wilderness areas, and one that the *PA Update* has commented upon regularly, is that of linear intrusions - roads and railway lines slicing through forests and other landscapes threatening ecosystems and killing thousands of creatures annually. This theme is now also one of the most regularly reported themes in this newsletter.

The December 2019 issue of the *PA Update* had one report, for instance, on possible tree-felling for road widening near the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary and another on the continued conflict over the night traffic ban in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR), both in Karnataka. The subsequent February 2020 issue, similarly, had one report on the demand for road widening in Telangana's Amrabad TR and another suggesting that a whopping 1/3rd of the nearly 500 leopard deaths in India in 2019 were in road and rail accidents.

This issue of the *PA Update* itself has five stories with roads and railway lines being the central subject. There is news of a new road proposed through the Pakke TR in Arunachal Pradesh and of the approval for another controversial one in the Corbett-Rajaji landscape in Uttarakhand. One report lists deaths of lions and leopards in road and rail accidents in Gujarat and another of the death of other animals such as elephants and tigers across the country. And there is news just as we go to press that the Karnataka government has approved the Hubli Ankola Railway line that will slice through dense forests of the Western Ghats as it passes through the Kali TR.

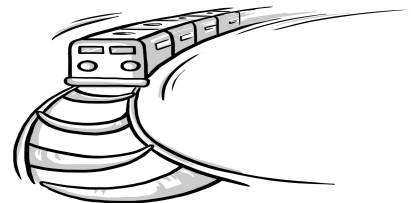
There is also another very important development that we report upon in this issue of the *PA Update*. In what is perhaps the first assessment of its kind, camera trapping by the Wildlife Institute of India, has recorded more than 5000 wild animals including tigers, leopards, spotted deer, wild boar and hare, using

passes constructed under roads slicing through the Pench forests in Maharashtra. On the one hand this has brought some relief that the animals have finally found a way around (under) a serious problem they would be facing. There is also a linked suggestion and line of thinking that this may finally be the solution to the problem of accelerating fragmentation of India's forests.

But there is another line of thinking and questioning that needs very careful consideration. First, whether this number of 5000 animals can be compared in any way to the numbers that were using the area before the road was built. Is it not an assumption that the underpasses allow adequate movement? What if their construction and use by some animals is only creating an illusion that a solution has been found, that the animals are now all safe?

What this could lead to in fact, is more rapid and wide-spread fragmentation of the forests. It will be argued that an adequate solution has been found in the underpasses and there is no reason why we can't have more roads and railway lines through forest areas now. This is how the logic is likely to be used and one already sees this reasoning in new proposals that are coming up regularly. The discussions we are seeing are more about how many underpasses should be constructed, what will be their optimum length and the budgets that need to be allocated. The deeper, long-term and more permanent impacts are being ignored. We are offered a win-win solution, where one does not really exist.

The effort should be to avoid irreversible injuries that linear intrusions essentially are. Underpasses are nothing more than band-aid solutions - temporary in time and space - and it would be a fatal mistake to look upon them as anything else.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

East-West Industrial Corridor to pass through Pakke TR

A part of the ambitious East-West Industrial Corridor that will connect Seijosa in Pakke-Kessang district with Bhalukpong in West Kameng, will pass through the Pakke Tiger Reserve (TR). The detailed project report (DPR) for the 692.7-km-long road that will run along the foothills of Arunachal-Assam border was approved in early February by a high-powered committee headed by state assembly speaker, PD Sona. The DPR has proposed a 40 km long elevated stretch through the TR at an estimated cost of Rs. 2,250 cr.

The elevated corridor in the TR has been proposed to ensure the free movement of wild animals, but conservationists have expressed concern of the serious impacts the construction process will have.

Documents related to the project were received recently in response to an RTI inquiry by Seijosa-based activist Tana Jorjo Tara. He said the proposed highway had been realigned to bisect PTR after the NHPC Limited turned down the original proposal to let the corridor pass near its hydroelectric project on the Subansiri River, east of Seijosa.

Source: Prasanta Mazumdar, 'Industrial corridor via tiger reserve enrages Arunachal activists', www.newindianexpress.com, 23/02/2020.
Rahul Karmakar, 'Highway threatens tiger territory in Arunachal Pradesh', www.thehindu.com, 23/02/2020.

GOA

NTCA recommends TR status for Mhadei WLS

A National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) report has recommended upgradation

of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to a tiger reserve (TR). The report states that "In view of the unfortunate death of tigers, the state government may take immediate steps for enhancing the legal status of the Mhadei WLS to that of a TR. Declaring the sanctuary as a TR will provide much-needed access to technical, financial and monitoring support from the NTCA for safeguarding the conservation values of the sanctuary".

The report has also recommended setting up of anti-poaching camps until the area is declared a TR, delineation of the sanctuary boundary, systematic survey of boundaries of the sanctuary, setting up of a state-level task force for management of protected areas and developing an informer network, among others.

The report was prepared by a committee which was constituted by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change after the poisoning of four tigers in January earlier this year (*PA Update* Vol. XXVI, No. 1).

Source: 'Declare Mhadei sanctuary as tiger reserve, says NTCA', www.navhindtimes.in, 12/02/20.

NGT approves one-year extension for identification of wetlands

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Goa government to complete the process of identification of wetlands in the state by January 2021. It has also asked for a progress report to be submitted on a quarterly basis.

In an affidavit seeking a one-year extension, the state government told NGT that work towards implementing the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, has already commenced and that various committees have been constituted under the Goa State Wetland Authority. Further, the government said that the process of compiling information pertaining to pre-existing rights involved interaction with the local people which includes owners, tenants and other stakeholders.

The government also said that it is pertinent to note that unlike in other states, in

the dry season, most wetlands in the state are utilised for agriculture and are temporary wetlands which support the extant flora and fauna including migratory birds while the water is used for various purposes downstream. Hence, this system is unique to Goa and requires considerable amount of time for stakeholder consultations, enlisting ecosystem services and finding pre-existing rights in a definitive manner.

Source: 'Goa must identify wetlands by January 2021',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
26/01/20.

GUJARAT

261 lion, 340 leopard deaths in Gujarat in last two years

Over 260 lions including cubs died in different parts of Gujarat in the last two years, the state government told the legislative assembly recently. Of these, 11 lions and six cubs died due to 'unnatural' causes, such as getting hit by a train or falling into a well. The number of deaths for adults and cubs were 138 and 123 respectively.

A total of 340 leopards - 250 leopards and 90 cubs - were also reported dead in this period. Of these, 79 leopards and 16 cubs died of unnatural causes.

Source: '261 lions, cubs died in Gujarat in last two years', www.thehindu.com, 05/03/2020.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

State spent Rs 85 lakhs in 2019-20 to deal with monkey menace

The Himachal Pradesh government has spent Rs. 85.06 lakh on measures to control the monkey menace in the state during the financial year 2019-20. The information was provided in the state assembly in a written reply by the state forest minister, Govind Singh Thakur.

A sum of Rs 25.95 lakh was spent for habitat enrichment on 20 ha, Rs. 34.28 lakh on capturing monkeys, Rs. 11.79 lakh on sterilisation medicines and Rs. 13.03 lakh on awareness activities. The state government also got monkeys declared as 'vermin' in 91 most affected tehsils and sub-tehsils and the Shimla municipal corporation area. Notifications for the same were issued on February 14 and July 11, last year.

Public awareness and education programmes using mass media were conducted to educate people to desist from feeding monkeys and awareness workshops on human-monkey conflict were also conducted in Shimla, Dharamshala and other urban local bodies. An estimate of the simian population was also carried out in the state by specialists from the Wildlife Institute of India and the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History. The final report and figures are currently awaited.

Further, no objection certificates for a gun license within a 10 km radius of protected areas are being issued to farmers by the chief wildlife warden for protecting their crops from primates. The state government has also declared nine animals, including monkey, wild boar, blue bull, porcupine, jackal, chital, sambar and hare, as crop damaging species. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXVI, No. 1)

Source: 'This fiscal, HP govt spent Rs 85L to curb monkey menace',
www.hindustantimes.com, 05/03/2020.

JHARKHAND

Three sanctuaries mentioned in 1965 report of IBWL don't exist anymore

Three wildlife sanctuaries, all in the iron ore-rich West Singhbhum district in present day Jharkhand that were mentioned in a report prepared by the now defunct Indian Board for Wild Life (IBWL) in 1965 for a delegation of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, don't exist anymore.

The three sanctuaries are Sasangdaburu in Saranda forest division, Bamiaburu in Kolhan

forest division and Songra or Tebo in Porahat division. They also feature in the 'Indian Forest Records: Glossary of terms used in nature conservation and wild life management', published by the Forest Research Institute (FRI) in 1970. The book, authored by P Venkataramany, says that while Songra sanctuary was created in 1932, the remaining two were created in 1936. The sanctuaries, however, vanished from the day the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, was enacted. None of the government documents published after 1972 mention Bamiaburu and Songra sanctuaries. Information about the two sanctuaries is so sketchy that experts today are not even able to pinpoint their exact locations.

The third sanctuary, Sasangdaburu, was last mentioned in the working plan of the Saranda forest division for 1976-77 to 1995-96. It was named Saranda, or Sasangda Game Sanctuary, and said to be spread over 314 sq km. It adds that the sanctuary was notified in February 1968 and covers forest areas of Tholkabad (10,244 ha), Karampada (4,444 ha), Kodalibad (2,224 ha), Tagooda (56 ha), Karujagdaburu (34 ha), Samta (4,907 ha) and Tirilposi (9,586 ha).

The principal chief conservator of forests, Jharkhand, said that they tried locating the notification documents for the three sanctuaries three to four years ago, but could not find them.

Source: Ishan Kukreti. 'Jharkhand wipes 3 wildlife sanctuaries off records for iron ore mining', www.downtoearth.org.in, 03/03/2020.

KARNATAKA

Restrict ESZ area of Bannerghatta NP: CM

In a February 1 letter written to the Centre, the Karnataka Chief Minister (CM), BS Yediyurappa, has reiterated his government's stand to limit the ESZ around the Bannerghatta National Park (NP). He was reported saying that development activities were being hampered and hence a reduction was needed.

The letter notes that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had published a draft notification of an ESZ of 168.84 sq km, with distances varying from 100 metres to one km around the boundary of the park. This had been recommended for finalisation during the 33rd ESZ expert committee meeting held in February last year. The MoEFCC, in its letter dated August 20, 2019, had then requested the state government to examine the possibility of retaining the original proposal of 268.96 sq km keeping in mind the likely impact of a reduced ESZ on the overall ecology of the region.

The three BJP MPs from Bengaluru - PC Mohan, Tejasvi Surya and Rajeev Chandrasekhar - too had earlier opposed the proposal for the reduction of the ESZ. This opposition and also that from environmentalists and activists, notwithstanding, the state has maintained its stand and has in the most recent communication asked the Centre to issue a final notification that will free up 100 sq km of land. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 1 and Vol. XXIV, Nos. 4 & 3).

Source: Nolan Pinto. 'BS Yediyurappa-led govt seeks reduction of Bannerghatta's eco-sensitive zone near Bengaluru', www.indiatoday.in, 19/02/2020.

MM Hills set to be sixth TR of Karnataka



The Male Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), which has 20-odd tigers, is expected to be a tiger reserve (TR) soon. Authorities said a presentation of the final proposal was made last month and the National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) approval is awaited. If approved this will be the sixth TR in Karnataka; the other five being the Bandipur, Biligiri

Rangaswamy Temple, Nagarahole, Bhadra and Dandeli TRs.

Following the submission of a proposal by the state forest department (FD) in January 2019, the NTCA had sought clarifications in July on the boundary of the proposed core, extent of settlements, religious tourism zone and delineation of core and buffer zones. The sanctuary authorities sent their responses on January 18, 2020.

The TR proposal has already been approved by the state wildlife board a year ago.

Source: Lakshmikantha BK. 'MM Hills set to be sixth tiger reserve of Karnataka', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 27/02/2020.

LAKSHADWEEP ISLANDS

Three new conservation reserves in Lakshadweep Islands

Three new conservation reserves spread over a total area of 685 sq km have been created recently in the Lakshadweep Islands. This includes the 239 sq km Dr KK Mohammed Koya Sea Cucumber Conservation Reserve at Cheriyaipani, the Attakoya Thangal Marine Conservation Reserve spread over an area of 344 sq km between Amini and Pitti archipelago and the PM Sayeed Marine Birds Conservation Reserve that is spread over 62 sq km and home to four species of pelagic seabirds — the Greater crested tern, Lesser crested tern, Sooty tern, and the Brown noddy. This takes the tally of PAs in these islands to four, with the declaration of the Pitti Bird Sanctuary in January 2019, now named the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary

The marine conservation areas were first proposed by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in 2004. Subsequently, BNHS had, along with the endorsement of Agatti Panchayat and Agatti Island community submitted a proposal for the protection of these areas to the Lakshadweep Forest Department (FD) in 2008.

The islands have also witnessed large seizures of sea cucumbers in recent weeks. The

largest global seizure of the species as a consignment of 1,716 sea cucumbers worth Rs 4.26 crore and weighing 852 kg was reported from Suheli on February 13. On January 15, 172 sea cucumbers weighing 234 kg and valued at Rs 1.17 crore were seized, and four persons arrested as part of an international marine animal trafficking syndicate, 80 nautical miles off Kavaratti Island. On January 23, the FD arrested an international trade kingpin and seized a consignment of 52 dead sea cucumbers weighing 10 kg worth Rs five lakh.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'World's first sea cucumber conservation area in Lakshadweep', www.hindustantimes.com, 29/02/2020.

MADHYA PRADESH

ESZ declared for National Chambal Sanctuary

A notification was issued recently for an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) ranging from zero to two kms from the boundary of the National Chambal Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh (MP). The Centre has also directed the state government to prepare a zonal master plan, which shall provide for restoration of denuded areas, conservation of existing water bodies, management of catchment areas, watershed management, groundwater management, soil and moisture conservation, needs of local community and other such aspects.

The notification prohibits any new construction of hotels and resorts within one km from the boundary of the sanctuary or up to the extent of the ESZ, whichever is nearer. The establishment of new hotels and resorts shall now be allowed only in pre-defined and designated areas for ecotourism facilities as per the tourism master plan. It notes further that forests, horticulture areas, agricultural areas, parks and open spaces earmarked for recreational purposes in the ESZ shall not be used or converted into areas for commercial or residential or industrial activities.

Spread over 435 sq km, the National Chambal Sanctuary lies across Sheopur, Morena

and Bhind districts of Madhya Pradesh with a length of more than 400 kilometers.

Source: 'Centre declares National Chambal Sanctuary in MP as eco-sensitive zone', www.outlookindia.com, 02/03/2020.

Madhya Pradesh is now a gharial state

Six months after being declared India's tiger state, Madhya Pradesh (MP) has now secured the tag of being the country's gharial state. According to the findings of a survey conducted by the Wildlife Trust of India, the state is home to a maximum 1,255 gharials followed by 255 in Bihar.

However, forest department (FD) officials in Morena district have said that the number would be higher at 1,876 as 200 gharials are released every year in the Chambal River. The FD has said that the Deori Eco Centre in Morena is the prime contributor to boosting the gharial population in MP, as it is at this centre where gharial eggs are hatched and hatchlings are reared up to three years before they are released into the wild.

Source: 'After tiger, Madhya Pradesh is now India's gharial state', www.newindianexpress.com, 05/02/2020.

Efforts for rewilding of orphaned tiger cubs in Bandhavgarh TR abandoned

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has abandoned its efforts to put two orphaned tiger cubs back in the wild and shifted them now to the Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal.

The cubs had been abandoned by their mother in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve when they were one and a half months old in 2017. She didn't return for two days while the management kept a watch on the cubs. The reserve management then started a 'rewilding experiment', but this has now been abandoned as the cubs were unable to develop the instincts to survive in the wild.

While officials said they had followed all protocols to ensure the success of the

rewilding, former foresters expressed surprise that the effort had failed. They have asked for a comprehensive study to be conducted of the entire project to find out what went wrong and ensure that such instances don't recur.

Source: Ranjan. 'Rewilding experiment fails in MP, orphaned tigers relocated to zoo', www.hindustantimes.com, 28/02/2020.

Radio-tagged pangolins rehabilitated in Satpura TR

Two rescued pangolins were radio-tagged and released in the Satpura Tiger Reserve six months ago. The information was provided recently by the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) on the occasion of World Pangolin Day, which is celebrated on the 3rd Saturday of February. This is the first case of the successful rehabilitation of the species where the released individuals are monitored in the wild using telemetry.

The exercise was part of a joint project initiated by the FD and the NGO, Wildlife Conservation Trust to understand the ecology of the Indian Pangolin and develop an effective conservation plan.

Pangolins are the among most trafficked wildlife species in the world with projected population declines ranging from 50% to 80% across the genus.

Source: 'In a first, Madhya Pradesh radio-tags rescued pangolins', www.indianexpress.com, 15/02/2020.

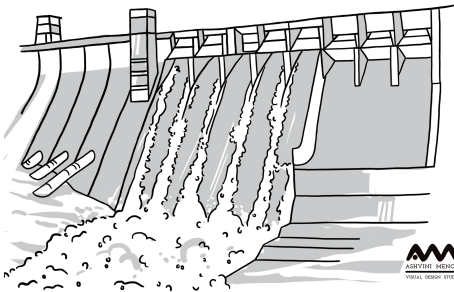
MAHARASHTRA

BMC to purchase private land around Tadoba Andhari TR as compensation

The Maharashtra government has approved a proposal by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to purchase private land around Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) to help expand the sanctuary (*PA Updates* Vol. XXV, Nos. 5 & 4). BMC will purchase nearly 750 ha around TATR at market prices and hand

it over to the state government, which will categorise it as forest land. While private parties who own some of the land will be compensated in cash, some of the land is owned by the government itself. Some tribal hamlets are also here.

The purchase of this land is in lieu of the 700 ha of forests that will be submerged by the Gargai dam being constructed by the BMC in Thane district. Under the Forest Conservation Act, the civic body has procured non-forest land and will pay for its afforestation as compensation. Apart from land in lieu of the dam, the BMC is acquiring another 100 acres around TATR for an underground road it is constructing beneath the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (*PA Updates* Vol. XXV, Nos. 5, 4 & 1 and Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3 & 2).



Source: Shiv Kumar. 'Private land to be purchased for Maha tiger sanctuary', www.tribuneindia.com, 10/02/20.

FD seeks public opinion on declaring Kanhargaon WLS

Over a year after the state board for wildlife (SBWL) gave its in-principle approval to declare Kanhargaon in Gondpipri tehsil a wildlife sanctuary (WLS), the first process has been initiated by taking locals' views on the proposal. Officials of the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) and the forest department (FD) have been asked to hold joint meetings with locals to seek their views on the issue.

The sanctuary proposal has been hanging fire due to political differences and opposition from the FDCM, which has large-

scale logging operations here. The corporation is in possession of 280 sq km of forests and generates a revenue of at least Rs 20-22 crore annually from commercial extraction of timber from the Kanhargaon forests.

The proposed sanctuary area of 265 sq km includes 248.62 sq km area of the FDCM and 16.38 sq km area of territorial forest under the Central Chanda division. The FDCM, which was earlier opposed to the proposal, is said to be willing now to part with the Kanhargaon area provided it is compensated with an equal amount of forest in the Allapalli division in Gadchiroli Circle. The corporation had earlier been compensated similarly with forest land in Allapalli for handing over its area for the Koka WLS in Bhandara.

The Kanhargaon forests are, according to a 2015 survey by the Wildlife Conservation Trust, home to 10 tigers and 23 leopards. They also constitute a corridor for tigers moving to the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) in Telangana and Indravati TR in Chhattisgarh through the Chaprala and Pranhita WLSs in Gadchiroli.

The proposal for the Kanhargaon WLS was first made while de-notifying the GIB sanctuary in Solapur. The state had committed to the Supreme Court then to bring other land under the PA network in lieu of the land removed because of the denotification.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Forest dept to take public opinion on Kanhargaon reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 25/02/2020.

Maharashtra records 64.5% decrease in wetland area



Maharashtra has recorded a 64.5% decrease in wetland area as compared to that documented in the National Wetland Atlas 2011. The Atlas, mapped under the 2010 wetland

rules, had marked 44,714 wetlands across the state, which covered an area of 10 lakh ha. However, in January earlier this year, the state submitted a list of only 15,865 verified potential wetland zones to the Bombay High Court (HC).

The reasons for this sharp drop, according to officials were three fold: one, the amended 2017 Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules that do not incorporate wetlands in coastal regulation zones (CRZ) and de-recognised salt pans as wetlands; two, wrong mapping in 2010 which did not stand up to the scrutiny of 'ground proofing'; and three, encroachments on wetlands.

Of the nearly 16,000 sites in the recent list submitted to the HC, 759 sites across the state are still pending verification through ground inspection. The list will now be scrutinised and a final list notified.

According to an earlier affidavit by the state government, there were no wetlands in Nandurbar, Parbhani and Nagpur districts, based on reports from the respective district collectors. The latest list, however, includes 164 wetlands sites in Nandurbar, 78 in Parbhani and 561 in Nagpur.

Source: Sanjana Bhalerao. 'Maharashtra: records 64.5 pc decrease in wetland area', www.indianexpress.com, 04/02/2020.

Nearly 5,500 wild animals use highway underpasses in Pench TR in nine months

Over 5,450 wild animals, including 11 tigers, have been captured on camera using six highway underpasses in the forests of the Pench Tiger Reserve (TR). The information is part of a Wildlife Institute of India (WII) report that put together camera trap survey data for the period March to December 2019.

18 wild animal species, including the tiger, leopard, spotted deer, wild boar and wild dogs, were found using the underpasses most frequently. The other animals recorded include jungle cat, mongoose, common palm civet, small Indian civet, Indian hare, rusty spotted cat, and porcupine. 89 tiger crossings were recorded

corresponding to 11 individual tigers that use the underpasses regularly.

The underpasses have been constructed along a 16.1 km length of national highway (NH) -7 passing through forests adjoining Pench TR and intersecting the Pench-Navegaon-Nagzira tiger corridor. Nine wildlife mitigation structures were constructed as proposed in the WII-National Tiger Conservation Authority joint report of May 2015.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. '5,450 wild animals used safe highway underpasses', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/02/2020.

ODISHA

Dolphin population down by half in Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary; increases in Chilika

The annual census conducted in January 2020 has counted only 62 dolphins in the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. This is half the number of 126 found in the census last year.

Forest officials sighted 60 Irrawaddy dolphins and only two bottle-nose dolphins in Gahirmatha during the count carried out on January 19. In 2019 the numbers were 14 Irrawaddy dolphins, 14 bottle-nose dolphins and 98 humpback dolphins. The total dolphin count in the state has been pegged at 233, down from 259 in 2019. The first such census had been carried out in 2015

Officials conducted a dolphin census for the first time in Gahirmatha in 2015 when the count included 58 Irrawaddy dolphins, 23 bottle-nose dolphins, 123 *S chinensis*, 50 *S plumbea* dolphins, 15 Pantropical spotted dolphins and one Finless porpoise. The 2016 and 2017 census were cancelled due to bad weather.

The count in Chilika lake reported 146 Irrawaddy dolphins and 17 Bottle-nose dolphins. In 2019 only 130 Irrawaddy dolphins were counted here. Two Irrawaddy dolphins and five Bottle-nose dolphins were also spotted near

Puri and one Bottle-nose dolphin was spotted in Baleswar district.

Source: Ashis Senapati. ' Dolphin population in Odisha's Gahirmatha halves: Annual census', www.downtoearth.org.in, 25/02/2020.

NTCA asks Odisha to start melanistic tiger safari near Simlipal TR

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has asked the Odisha government to start a melanistic tiger safari on the fringe of the Simlipal Tiger Reserve (TR) to create awareness about such big cats and generate revenue for their conservation. Simlipal TR is the only tiger habitat in the world with melanistic tigers. These animals have broad black stripes running across their bodies and are thicker than those seen on normal tigers, so much so that their tawny skin colour is barely visible. The reserve first reported the melanistic tigers in 2007 and a census carried out in 2016 by the Odisha Forest Department found six melanistic tigers here.

In a recent letter to Odisha's chief wildlife warden, the NTCA said the tiger safari should be established on the fringe of the reserve to reduce tourism pressure on the core and buffer area. It has suggested the location of the safari at Jashipur, which is beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the Simlipal TR.

NTCA has also made it clear that no melanistic tiger from the wild can be put in the safari and only those animals already present in zoos like Nandankanan zoo can be brought here.

Source: Debabrata Mohanty. ' Tiger conservation authority asks Odisha to start India's first melanistic tiger safari', www.hindustantimes.com, 09/02/2020.

RAJASTHAN

Chaupals to sensitize villagers about reintroduction of tigers to Kumbalgarh TR

Experts from the forest department (FD) and wildlife activists have launched a series of

chaupals in villages in and around the Kumbalgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) to deal with the dissent over the move to introduce tigers here. This follows the recent declaration of the forests here as a TR (*PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 6)

In meetings already held, experts have sought to address the concerns of the local community and pointed to the numerous benefits they would get after rehabilitation of the wild cats in their area. Volunteers explained about the compensation given by the government for animal-induced damage on livestock and human beings as well.

There are around 51 villages inside Kumbalgarh and Todgarh Raoli Wildlife Sanctuaries while 206 villages are situated within a five km periphery.

Source: Chaupals to sensitize villagers before reintroducing tigers in Kumbalgarh sanctuary, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17.02.20.

TELANGANA

Villages in and around Kawal TR to be relocated soon

A resolution for the relocation of villages in and around the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) was passed recently at a meeting of the state wildlife board presided over by state forest minister, A Indrakaran Reddy. The forest department (FD) has, in fact, already been in the process of convincing villagers to move and are finding land for their rehabilitation.

In the first phase of the relocation, Maisampet and Rampur villages located near the reserve, will be relocated to Peddur village in Kaddem mandal. According to FD officials, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has released Rs 8.52 crore for the purpose.

The process for the same had been initiated in March 2019 when the FD and district administration had organised a meeting with the villagers to convince them to vacate

their lands. The 142 families residing in Maisampet and Rampur were presented with two options: they could either take Rs 10 lakh each to vacate their lands or get rehabilitated in other villages. The rehabilitation in Kaddem mandal would include the provision of houses and agricultural land across 116 ha.

The residents of the two villages are reported to have agreed to move.

Source: Raja Reddy, 'Villages near Kawal Tiger Reserve to be relocated soon', www.newindianexpress.com, 03/02/2020.

UTTAR PRADESH

109-year-old railway line through Dudhwa NP to be shut down

The 109-year-old railway line that passes through the Dudhwa National Park (NP) is going to be shut down soon. The decision comes in the wake of a high court order on the conservation of wild animals and the forests. In the past 20 years, more than 100 animals including spotted deer, tigers, elephants, crocodiles, rhinos and sloth bear have been killed in train accidents here.

The 171-km rail route connecting Nanpara and Mailani will be closed after the Lakhimpur-Mailani broad gauge route is opened. The railways are now planning to conserve the meter gauge line as a heritage one. More than 30 lakh people living in hundreds of cluster villages between Nanpara and Mailani will be affected by the closure. For them the railway line is the only lifeline that connects them to the outside world.

Source: '109-year-old railway line in UP to shut down', www.livemint.com, 12/02/2020.

UP to open five leopard rescue centres as part of 'Project Leopard'

The Uttar Pradesh government has initiated 'Project Leopard' to deal with the growing population of the big cat and the increasing incidents of human-animal conflict within the

state. Five leopard rescue centres will be created as part of this initiative in Meerut, Pilibhit, Chitrakoot, Etawah, and Gorakhpur. The first of these five centres will be opened in the Etawah Lion Safari, permission for which has already been obtained from the Central Zoo Authority.

The leopard population in Uttar Pradesh was 415 according to the 2018 census. Experts say that it may have now crossed the 600 mark. There is also a concern with growing incidents of conflict - in western UP alone, there have been six leopard attacks in the recent past, and three big cats have been beaten to death by the local people. Leopard attacks have even caused a law-and-order situation in the region.

Source: Uttar Pradesh Government to Open Five Leopard Rescue Centres to Curb Leopard-Human Conflict', www.outlookindia.com. 06/02/2020.

UTTARAKHAND

Snow leopard pugmark found in Valley of Flowers NP

A forest staff team patrolling the Valley of Flowers National Park (NP), reported two Snow leopard pugmarks near Ghangaria.

The park management is said to be anxiously waiting for the summer to start when they will collect output of camera traps that were fixed in the park in November in the beginning of the winter season to ascertain what further evidence they may have got.

Source: 'Forest staff excited after finding pugmark of rare snow leopards at Valley of Flowers', www.thestatesman.com, 26/02/2020.

NBWL approval for road connecting Corbett and Rajaji TRs

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is reported to have given its go-ahead for the construction of a road connecting the Corbett and Rajaji Tiger Reserves (TRs). The 11.5 km road meant to reduce the travel time between

Garhwal and Kumaon, will cut through the Rajaji TR and includes a 4.5 km stretch from Chamaria Bend to Siggadi Sot, an important corridor connecting the two TRs.

The project had been put on hold in June last year by the Supreme Court which had directed the state government to first get clearance from National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the NBWL. The NTCA then asked the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to submit its observations on the project. The WII had recommended a “status quo” on the stretch between Chamaria Bend and Siggadi Sot noting that, “Black topping should be avoided in this route considering wildlife movement in the area. However, the forest department may maintain this portion regularly by using ‘murrum’ so as to allow passage of vehicles.”

Notwithstanding the WII comments, NTCA approved the project stating that a 100 metre-long underpass can be constructed after every one km road on the stretch. The NBWL also gave its nod to the project and asked for the underpass length to be increased from 100 metres to 150 metres after every km. The total length of the underpasses on the entire Laldhang-Chillarkhal stretch would now be a mere 705 metres which wildlife experts say will be too less for smooth movement of animals.

Notably, a forest department committee headed by current WII director Dhananjai Mohan had in 2014 suggested that the construction of a 7.5 km-long flyover should take place in a phase-wise manner so that movement of animals is not obstructed.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'National Board for Wildlife approves road connecting Corbett & Rajaji reserves', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 04/02/2020.

FD seeks UNESCO heritage tag for Corbett TR, Nandhaur WLS

The Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) has written to the state government requesting it to consider Corbett Tiger Reserve and Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary for the UNESCO world

heritage site status. FD officials said the status of world heritage will help the wildlife conservation projects here get global attention.

There are 37 world heritages in India, seven of which are natural habitats including Valley of Flowers and Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve — both in Uttarakhand.

Source: Vineet Upadhyay. 'Heritage tag push for Corbett Tiger Reserve and Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary', www.newindianexpress.com, 25/02/2020.

WEST BENGAL

Anthrax kills five rhinos at Jaldapara NP

Five rhinos were reported killed by anthrax within 72 hours in the last week of February in the Jaldapara National Park (NP). All the five animals were adult females and four of them died in the Sisamara beat of the park in Alipurduar district. The fifth carcass was found in the Malangi beat. Forest staff also rescued a rhino calf, which had been found near a carcass in the Sisamara beat. The calf was said to be doing surprisingly well and was put under observation. The authorities suspended elephant safaris to allow them to carry out a vaccination drive in a seven sq km area in the core of the park that is home to about 13 rhinos.

The vaccination drive was started after the blood and tissue samples of the dead rhinos tested positive for anthrax. Officials were using captive elephants to reach the affected area and vaccinate the rhinos from a distance with the help of dart guns. They have also deployed drones to find out if other animals have died or taken ill.

Residents of villages adjacent to the park were asked to avoid grazing their cattle in the Sisamara area as a precaution and officials said they would also ensure that no other wild herbivores enter the area.

Source: 'Rhino toll reaches five in Jaldapara National Park', www.telegraphindia.com, 22/02/2020.

Joydeep Thakur & Pramod Giri. 'Anthrax kills five one-horned rhinos at Jaldapara Nat'l Park', www.hindustantimes.com, 23/02/2020.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Marginal increase for the environment in budget

The overall budget for the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) was increased to Rs. 3,100 crore for 2020-21 from Rs. 2,657.94 crore in the revised estimate of 2019-20.

While presenting the budget on February 1, 2020, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an increase in the budgetary allocation for the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) from Rs. 493.57 crore last year to Rs. 532 crore. The fund for Project Tiger has also increased from the revised 2019-20 figure of Rs. 282.57 crore to Rs. 300 crore this year. However, the fund for Project Tiger in 2018-19 was higher at Rs. 323.44 crore. For Project Elephant, the allocation has been increased from Rs. 35 crore from Rs. 31 crore.

The allocation for the Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) scheme has however been reduced from Rs. 175 crore to Rs. 148.41 crore now.

Source: Ishan Kukreti. 'Union Budget 2020-21: Big chunk goes to tigers and elephants', www.downtoearth.org.in, 01/02/20.

510 elephants, 2,361 human deaths in human-elephant conflict in last four years

Information tabled recently in parliament by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shows that 2,361 humans were killed as a result of conflict with elephants, while 510 elephants were killed in incidents of electrocution, train accidents, poaching and poisoning in the last four years.

West Bengal reported the highest number of human deaths - 403 and 74 respectively - in conflict situations involving elephants and tigers during this period. West Bengal was followed by Odisha in the number of human deaths caused by elephants (397) and by Maharashtra in the number of deaths caused by tigers (74).

Where elephant deaths are concerned, electrocution was reported to be the primary cause, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all the deaths - 333 out of 510.

The total number of human deaths caused by tigers between 2014 and 2019 was 275.

Source: 'Telling Numbers: 2,361 humans, 510 elephants killed in conflict in five years', www.indianexpress.com, 13/02/20.

New species of snake eel discovered in Bay of Bengal

A new species of snake eel has been described recently from the Bay of Bengal by scientists of the Estuarine Biology Regional Centre (EBRC) of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) at Gopalpur-on-sea. It has been named *Ophichthus kailashchandrai* to honour the vast contributions to Indian animal taxonomy by Dr. Kailash Chandra, Director ZSI.

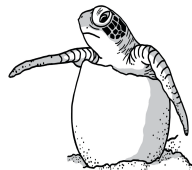
The team credited with the discovery includes Dr. Anil Mohapatra and Swarup Ranjan Mohanty of Gopalpur ZSI, Dipanjan Ray of the Bajkul Milani Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, and Subhendu Sekhar Mishra of the marine fish section of ZSI Kolkata. The description is based on three specimens that were collected from the Shankarpur fishing harbour in the northern region of the Bay of Bengal on the West Bengal coast in 2015.

This is the eighth species of the *Ophichthus* genus found on the Indian coast and the fifth new species discovered by the Gopalpur ZSI in the last two years. In 2019, two new species of marine eel, *Gymnothorax andamanensis* and *G. smithi* had been discovered by this ZSI centre.

Source: Sib Kumar Das. 'ZSI documents another new snake eel species in Odisha', www.thehindu.com, 23/01/20.

Survey proposed to map country's marine life

The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change has announced that a marine will be taken up as a part of the resource mapping of the marine life across the coast in the country. This was announced at the plenary session of the recently concluded 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals that was held in Gandhinagar in Gujarat.



A fund of Rs 5 cr has been allocated for the survey that will be carried out by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. The government also announced that a Marine Turtle Policy and also a Marine Stranding Management Policy will be put in place soon.

Source: 'Marine, mammal survey to map country's marine life', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/02/2020.

Six new gecko species found in Western Ghats

Scientists have found six new species of the endemic genus of *Dravidogecko* in the Western Ghats. These have been named *Dravidogecko septentrionalis*, *D. janakiae* (in honour of Janaki Ammal, a botanist from Kerala), *D. tholpalli*, *D. meghamalaiensis*, *D. douglasadamsi* (in honour of British author and satirist, Douglas Noel Adams) and *D. smithi* (in honour of British herpetologist Malcolm Arthur Smith). The findings were recently published in the international taxonomic journal *Zootaxa*.

The findings are significant as only one species *Dravidogecko anamallensis* was known

thus far. It had been described in 1875 by Albert Günther, a British-German herpetologist.

The team that has made the new discoveries was constituted of independent researcher R Chaitanya, Pune based herpetologist Varad Giri, Deepak Veerappan of the Natural History Museum, London, Aniruddha Datta-Roy, National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar, BHCK Murthy, Zoological Survey of India, Kozhikode and Praveen Karanth from the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

Source: Manjula Nair. 'Six new gecko species found in Western Ghats', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 24/02/2020.

Ensure vehicles don't crowd around tigers: NTCA

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has directed all tiger reserves (TR) to strictly adhere to its 2012 guidelines, according to which they are not to allow vehicles to crowd around tigers and need to maintain a distance of 500 m between vehicles. The advisory comes in the wake of violations in TRs across the country.

As per NTCA statistics, the 10 most-visited tiger reserves receive nearly two lakh visitors per year on an average. Further, social media has been replete with images of a trail of jeeps/other vehicles at one given spot where a tiger has been sighted.

The NTCA has calculated the carrying capacity at TRs as per the Normative Standards of Tourism Activities and Project Tiger guidelines issued in 2012. It takes into account the average tourist footfall and carrying capacity for a reserve. The capacity is determined with the presumption that the gap between two vehicles is 500m.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Ensure vehicles don't crowd around tigers: NCTA', www.newindianexpress.com, 22/02/2020.

Leopard population may have declined by 75-90% over last 120 - 200 years: Study

A study based on genetic data conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS) has suggested a possible human-induced population decline of 75 to 90% among leopards in India in the past 120 to 200 years. The study that reports four distinct sub-populations of leopards in India with high genetic variations — leopards of the Western Ghats, the Deccan Plateau semi-arid region, the Shivalik mountains, and the Terai region in North India - was published recently in the journal PeerJ.

The research used faecal samples to study genetic markers that revealed genetic variations and the demographic history of leopards. It also used historical records to obtain a set of locations where leopards were known to have been present at some time in the last 200 years, and then used occupancy estimation models to estimate the current presence in the same locations.

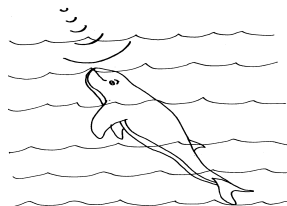
The reasons proposed for the decline in the leopard numbers include large scale trophy hunting for the period 1850s to 1950s, and large-scale degradation of habitats such as grasslands and scrublands post the 1900s.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Leopard population may have declined by 75-90%: Study', www.hindustantimes.com, 08/02/2020.

INTERNATIONAL

Almost 90% of dolphins in Indian Ocean wiped out by fishing industry: study

A new report by an international group of scientists has suggested that the dolphin population of the Indian Ocean has been decimated, with



almost 90% of the animals being wiped out by industrial fishing since 1980. The study suggests this extraordinary extermination is due to the widespread use of huge gillnets used to catch tuna.

Though the nets are designed to target specific species — smaller fish can slip through the holes and larger fish are supposedly repelled — in practice the nets, particularly drift gillnets, are deadly to an array of species, including sharks, turtles, sea lions, whales and dolphins.

The study combined results from 10 bycatch sampling programmes between 1981 and 2016 in Australia, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan to estimate bycatch rates for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) across all Indian Ocean tuna gillnet fisheries. The vast majority of the cetacean bycatch is said to be dolphins.

Estimated cetacean bycatch peaked at almost 100,000 a year during 2004–2006, but has declined to 80,000 animals a year, despite an increase in the tuna gillnet fishing effort. It is estimated by the report that gillnets deployed in the Indian Ocean have killed about 4.1 million small cetaceans between 1950 and 2018 as fishers pursued tuna. The true figures could be substantially higher as available records take little or no account of factors such as delayed mortality of the animals that escape from the nets or mortality associated with ghost nets.

The study estimates that the current cetacean bycatch rate may be in the order of 175 cetaceans per 1,000 tonnes of tuna, down from an estimate of 600 in the late 1970s. The countries with the largest current gillnet catches of tuna and likely to have the largest cetacean bycatch are (in order): Iran, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Oman, Yemen, UAE and Tanzania. The research team that published the report was led by Dr Charles Anderson of the Manta Marine Organisation in the Maldives and included among others Dr Putu Mustika, from James Cook University, Australia.

Source: Harry Cockburn. 'Almost 90% of dolphins in Indian Ocean wiped out by fishing industry, study suggests', www.independent.co.uk, 06/03/2020.

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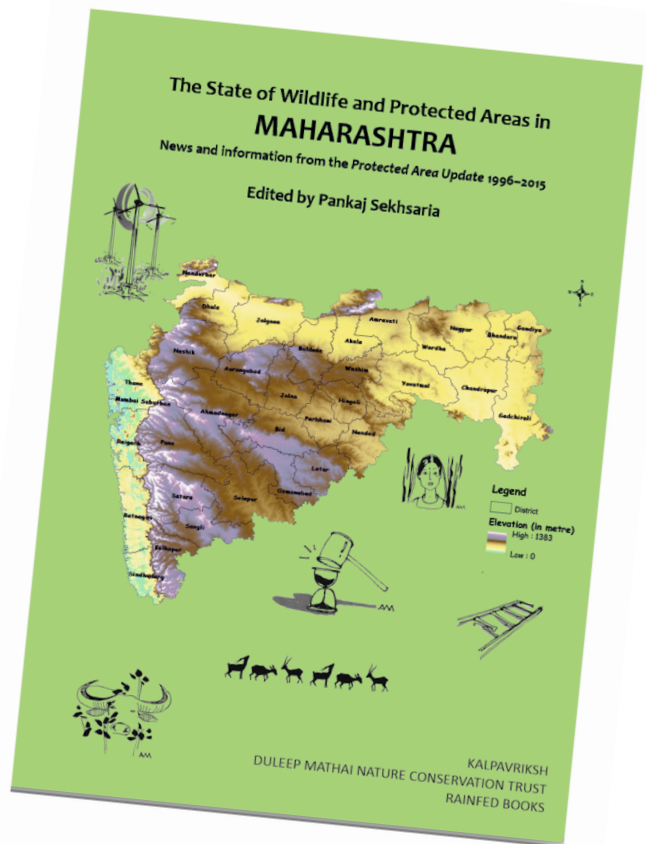
- **Section 1:** *News and Information from protected areas:* Bhimashankar WLS, Bhorgad CR, Bor WLS, Gautala Autramghat WLS, Kolamarka CR, Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Gyanganga WLS Jaikwadi Bird Sanctuary, Kalsubai-Harishchandragad WLS, Karnala WLS, Lonar WLS, Mahabaleshwar ESZ, Mahendri Reserve Forest, Mansingdeo WLS, Matheran ESZ, Muniya CR, Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Radhanagari WLS, Rehekuri Blackbuck Sanctuary, Sanjay Gandhi NP, Sewri Wetlands, Tansa WLS, Thane Creek WLS, Tipeswar WLS, Tungreshwar WLS, Umred-Karhandla WLS, Yawal WLS, Melghat TR, Nawegaon-Nagzira TR, Pench TR, Sahyadri TR, Tadoba-Andhari TR, Tigers, General News from Maharashtra

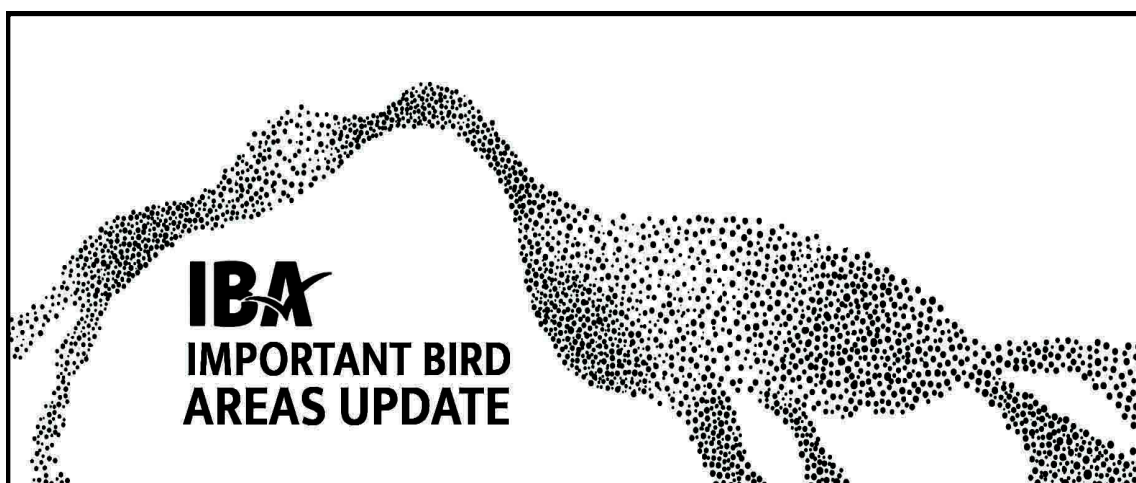
- **Section 2:** *Analysis and Perspective:*

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 Gutgutia, Shruti Mokashi, Kavya Chowdhry, Sarosh Ali and Rupesh Patil)

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ASSAM

Deepor Beel area down by 35% in 29 years

Deepor Beel has shrunk by at least 35% since 1991. Its official spread now is 4,014 ha, against 6,000 ha in the late 1980s. The latest assessment is based on analysis of satellite imagery.

One main reason for this decline is the loss of connectivity with small rivers like Kalmoni, Khonajan and Basistha that used to flow into the lake via the Mora Bharalu channel. The other reasons include the expansion of the city of Guwahati, encroachment upon the natural channels through the city and from the hills around and a municipal waste dump at Boragaon located on the edge of the wetland.

Efforts to move the garbage dump to elsewhere has not been possible despite identification of four alternative site because of the opposition of local people there. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXV, No. 5).



Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Conservationists concerned over Assam's shrinking Ramsar site', www.thehindu.com, 03/02/20.

CHANDIGARH/PUNJAB

HC demands explanation on de-silting, deepening of Sukhna Lake

After 11 years and 120 hearings by 30 different benches, the Punjab and Haryana High Court recently reserved its judgment on the conservation of the Sukhna Lake catchment area. It has also asked the Chandigarh Union Territory (UT) to explain why it had not yet taken the Rs. 73 crore that the central government had offered for the de-silting and deepening of the lake. It gave two weeks time to the UT to re-open talks with the environment ministry for the de-siltation and catchment area treatment project and also asked the central ministry to look into the matter and consider sanctioning the money.

The court challenged the UT counsel's explanation that the dredging had not been taken up because experts from the National Institute of Hydrology had stated it was unviable. It pointed to successful dredging in Pong Dam, river Ganga and the lakes of Nainital.

Source: Neha Sharma. '11 years on, Rs 73 crore not sought for Sukhna, high court asks why', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/01/2020.

HC court declares Sukhna lake a living entity; orders demolition of structures in catchment areas

The Punjab and Haryana High Court (HC) has declared the Sukhna Lake to be a living entity and fined the Punjab and Haryana governments Rs 100 crore each for causing damage to its catchment area. It also ordered the demolition of all commercial, residential and other structures in the catchment area.

The orders came in a *suo moto* petition of 2009 initiated over problems of silt in the lake which has resulted in its drying up. "All commercial/residential and/or other structures constructed in the catchment area of Sukhna in Punjab, Haryana and UT Chandigarh as delineated in map of Survey of India on Sept 21, 2004, are declared illegal/unauthorised," the HC order says. Those buildings that will need to be demolished include more than 600 houses located in Kaimbwala village in addition to two temples, a gurdwara and a dharamshala.

Residents of Kaimbwala village say that the lake was constructed on their village land acquired by the government and they feared eviction now. The affected residents of Kansal, Khuda Alisher and Kaimbwala village have also decided to come together to deal with the implications of the order.

Source: 'Punjab and Haryana High Court orders demolition of structures in catchment areas of Chandigarh's Sukhna Lake', www.thehindu.com, 03/03/2020.
Dushyant Singh Pundir. 'UT differs with Punjab, Haryana on Sukhna order', www.tribuneindia.com

GUJARAT

Female GIB dies in Kutch; garden lizard found stuck in its throat

A female Great Indian bustard (GIB), one of estimated seven in Kutch, died recently with a lizard found stuck in its throat. The bird died while foraging near Bhanada, around 15 km south of the GIB Sanctuary located near Naliya, the headquarters of Nakhatrana taluka of Kutch

district. A garden lizard was found stuck in the trachea of the bird, leading officials to believe that choking could have been the cause of its death. The exact cause will be determined following a formal post mortem.

This bird was one of two GIBs that the Wildlife Institute of India had tagged for further research. One of them had died in June 2017 after colliding with a power line. The last transmission from this particular bird was eight-10 days before its death. The tag had helped the researchers learn that the bird had laid two eggs a few months ago. However, one of these was damaged and the other was found to be infertile.



Source: 'Female Great Indian Bustard, one of estimated 7, dies in Kutch', www.indianexpress.com, 27/02/2020.

KARNATAKA

Protected area for GIB proposed in Siraguppa taluk

An area spread over 20 villages and an additional 1,000 acres of grasslands is proposed to be declared a protected area for conservation of the Great Indian bustard (GIB) in the Siraguppa taluk of Karnataka. The area had reported in the range of 26-28 GIBs a few years earlier; this number is now reported to 8-10 now.

Editor's Note: It is not clear what category of PA is proposed here. While the news report itself says 'community conservation reserve', such a category does not exist under the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act. It has to either be a 'community reserve' or a 'conservation reserve'.

Source: Amit S Upadhye & Kiran Balannanavar. 'Karnataka's Siraguppa taluk to be sanctuary for bustards', www.newindianexpress.com, 01/02/2020.

MAHARASHTRA

BNHS to use cellular technology to study migratory birds

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) will use cellular technology to study the movement patterns of migratory birds. 10 migratory birds — six flamingos, two curlews and ibises — found in wetlands between November and March, will be fitted with cellular and satellite devices to track their movement. The birds will be tagged with GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) and GPS (Global Positioning System)-based tracking devices that will map details such as altitude, location, trajectory and speed. While GSM tags will be used in areas where cellular network is available, GPS tags will be used for satellite mapping in other areas. The tracking devices will help researchers in better data collection of breeding spots, changes in routes used over the years, stopovers and final destination.

The study was proposed as early as 2013, but was put on hold as the Centre had banned the import of satellite transmitters citing national security concerns.

The BNHS recently received an approval from the state forest department for the project, estimated to cost Rs. 15 lakh. It is now awaiting a reply from the Union environment ministry.

Source: Sanjana Bhalerao. 'In a first, BNHS to use cellular tech for studying bird migration', www.indianexpress.com, 10/02/20.

UTTAR PRADESH

115 species of birds recorded at Okhla Bird Sanctuary

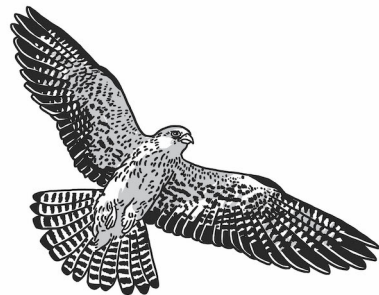
115 species of birds including 65 species of waterfowl were recorded at the Okhla Bird

Sanctuary during a day-long census conducted recently by the forest department (FD) in the last week of February. The total number of individual birds counted was 21,061

The most common migratory species spotted included Greylag geese, Bar-headed geese, Common teal, Northern shoveler, Northern pintail, Eurasian coot, Marsh harrier and the Barn swallow.

Two different one-day censuses had also been conducted here in January. While the Asian Waterbird Census (AWS), 2020 held by Wetlands International South Asia recorded a total of 8,776 water birds of 62 species (28 resident including local migratory species and 34 long-distance migratory species), a total of 86 species (all species) were recorded on the Big Bird Day organised by Delhi Bird Foundation.

Source: Kushagra Dixit. 'Forest dept spots 65 species of waterbirds at Okhla Bird Sanctuary', www.hindustantimes.com, 27/02/2020.



OBITUARIES

Parubai

Parubai one of the enthusiast marchers of 1987 Save the Western Ghats March and treasure trove of medicinal plants passed away recently. Way back in 1985 when late Jagdish Godbole (whom she called bhau) founded Jeevan Sanstha, Parubai joined the health workers programme as she was a skilled midwife. She also participated in a study visits to the Chipko Movement in the Himalayas and Tarun Bharat Sangh in Rajasthan along with few other rural women workers of the Sanstha. I still remember the twinkle in her eyes after spotting a ganja plant in Garhwal. She had a very good sense of humour and also a sharp tongue. I received her verbal gems when she had had a few drinks and when I tried to take her to a hospital, even the doctor wasn't spared.

Like many other Katkari (one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Maharashtra) her family is landless and Parubai used to brew liquor for sale and home consumption. Her husband Devu who is now quite frail with age, still grazes a few goats. The situation of the Katkari in Maval and Mulshi tehsils of Pune is quite appalling. Landlessness, lack of habitation rights, low literacy level, alcohol addiction, child marriage, exploitation by the brick kiln owners and landed villagers have led to their abysmal existence. Earlier cultivation on *nachni* (*Eleusine coracana*) on slopes (usually on forest land) was common among Katkari for home consumption. But now with strict rules this option is no more available. Working as labour in brick kilns, agricultural field or on construction sites are the main livelihood choices.

Many Katkari have good knowledge of flora and fauna around them. Parubai and Devu helped quite a few ethno botanists in their research. Collection and sale of seasonal fruits and medicinal plants is often a source of extra income for the Katkari. With commodification of land, access to non-cultivated land for such

collection is getting harder. There is an urgent need to preserve their knowledge, which may otherwise die out with the passing of the older generation.

To get the Katkari out of the bottom rung of the social hierarchy and help them get economic stability, it is crucial to build their capacities. As a small beginning we at Jeevan Sanstha are running *khelghar*- educational support centres with Nari Samta Manch Pune for school going Katkari children. We have managed to get caste certificates (a document essential to access governmental welfare schemes) for about 200 Katkari individuals. We also hope to start some livelihood programmes especially the women. Helping at least a few Katkari youth to get inspired to change their lives for better will be a modest tribute to Parubai.

- Girija Godbole

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Shobhana Bijoor

I first met Mrs. Shobhana Bijoor in 1996 on nature education camp to Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary near Mumbai. She was then the Head Mistress of Parle Tilak Vidyalaya English Medium Secondary School and I was a volunteer for this camp organized by the Bombay Natural History Society. Eventually, I joined WWF-India in Mumbai as the Education Officer and had the opportunity to meet Mrs. Bijoor on several occasions in connection to WWF's nature education programmes.

Her leadership skills and passion and love for nature ensured that her school always had one of the most active nature clubs not only in Mumbai but also in the entire country. Be it nature trails or camps, competitions or seminars, the students she lovingly nurtured stood out with distinction as 'nature-lovers'. My association with Mrs. Bijoor continued even after she retired from her school. She was an active member of WWF-India's Education Sub-committee in developing environment

education resource materials or coordinating Nature Clubs of India activities.

Not only was she an extremely knowledgeable person on the subject of nature and wildlife but she was also a good human being - very kind hearted person and soft spoken. I was always amazed to see her excellent rapport with her fellow teachers and students, which is why she was highly respected by all. Her contribution in creating hundreds of her students into nature loving citizens is immense. She was truly a role model of how a 'Green Teacher' should be.

It's a great loss that she is no more with us and I extend my deepest condolences to her family and friends. May her soul rest in peace.

- Kedar Gore

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

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

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

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

EDITORIAL

The Western Ghats in focus

The Western Ghats are, without doubt, one of the richest eco-regional systems in the entire subcontinent. Straddling six states from Gujarat in the North to Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south, the 1600 odd kms long mountain range is home to a wide diversity of life just as it supports innumerable human communities and cultures. The beauty of the landscapes here is unmatched, endemism in the forests is high and many rivers that nourish large parts of peninsular India originate here. Not surprisingly a large number of protected areas dot the entire length of the ghats.

It is only to expected then that the Western Ghats have appeared regularly in the pages of the *Protected Area Update* over the years; something of interest and importance is always happening here. Nothing however matches the presence they have in this particular issue – it is almost like it's become a Western Ghats special.

There has been a lot of very localized activity along the length of the mountain range that you will see reports of: children in schools in the vicinity of the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra demanding that plastic be banned from within sanctuary limits, the creation of 12 new Important Bird Areas in Kerala or the ongoing controversy over the ban on night traffic on national highways inside the Bandipur National Park.

A lot is also happening that has an appeal and relevance cutting across state and political boundaries. A large conservation research and action initiative has been going on under the aegis of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), the well known Save Western Ghats movement is on the way to being revived, a new Nilgiri Natural History Society has been formed and the Ministry of Environment and Forests has also

set up an 'Expert panel on the Western Ghats' to 'assist in the preservation, conservation and rejuvenation of this environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant region.'

In another commendable development the Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr Jairam Ramesh, recently organized a special meeting of 43 Members of Parliament from the 51 districts which have the Western Ghats running through them. It is one of those rare political initiatives where politics is not bound by political boundaries.

It has been argued often that if political constituencies had been carved out on ecological or eco-regional criteria, politics would have been different. Ecological systems, be they mountain ranges, river systems or the coast often get looked at in a piecemeal manner. The integrity of what is a single unit is completely overtaken by other considerations and the consequences have only been adverse. The Minister's initiative could well be the starting point of some kind of a more holistic approach and other eco-regional systems too might try and pick up from what is being attempted here.

The Western Ghats have also been lucky in that there have always been vibrant local communities, NGOs, researchers and officials who have continued to engage with the complexities and work with the challenges of this unique mountain range. To say, however, that things will now be different in the Western Ghats would be putting the cart much ahead of the horse. We have to wait and watch to see how the present initiatives unfold. There is no denying that they look very promising and one hopes that some of the promise will indeed be realized in the future

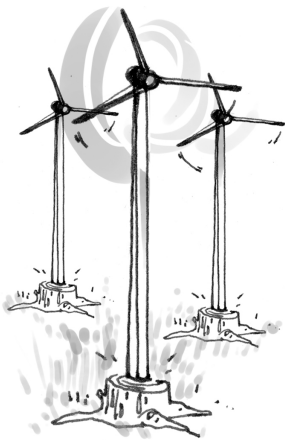


PERSPECTIVE

Illustrating for conservation

Over the years, my childhood inclination towards wildlife evolved into a keen interest in sustainable development. Having understood the potential of visual design, I now wanted to lend sustainable development a helping hand using visuals.

The fact that the *Protected Area Update* (PAU) was open to submission of artworks was indeed like a stroke of luck. I had always been an admirer of the linear illustration style of this newsletter and it was an honour to contribute to it. The line drawings fit very well with the simplistic layout of the newsletter – not too subtle, neither too bold. It also helped maintain consistency among the issues. As many illustrators, each having their own drawing styles, contributed their works to the PAU, the black and white line drawings made them look like they belonged to a family.



We have been illustrating the *Update* for a couple of years now and each illustration is a challenging exercise for the team as we force ourselves to look for an unconventional and interesting way to depict the story. How to represent an

article that has a wind energy project coming at the cost of forests? Show the windmills? Depict the trees felled? How about, depicting windmills, each standing on stumps of fallen trees?

It is not always possible to come up with an unconventional idea and sometimes

direct depiction is the best way forward. Once the idea of the illustration is thought of, what follows is the manner in which it is executed. Size of the illustration is one, thickness of our pen strokes another. Make the lines too thin or detailed and you will find them lost in print. Thicker lines might look like distracting blotches of black ink. It is a constant creative challenge.

Though creating visuals might not be something we all enjoy doing, paying attention to them and decoding their messages can certainly be a refreshing right-brain exercise! You could start by seeing if you understand all illustrations in the issue or if you don't find illustrations, try scribbling your own unconventional ideas about illustrating those news articles. Either way it will be fun and time well spent.

- **Ashvini Menon** is a graphic designer, who with her team at the Ashvini Menon Visual Design Studio (AMVDS) regularly illustrates for the *PA Update*.
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For private circulation/Printed Matter

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