

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

No. 39

October 2002

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Lessons from the Ranthambore Crisis

It was probably an unprecedented crisis in Ranthambore in Rajasthan: 100s of people from surrounding villages with 1000s of heads of cattle stormed the park in August as a fourth successive

drought hit the region. With availability of water and fodder a severe problem, one can only imagine that people in a desperate need to survive may have had no option. It needed some real tough posturing and action by the authorities to finally get them out and prevent what could have possibly been much greater damage to the park itself.

This issue again brings the livelihoods - conservation conflict centre stage; albeit in a completely different way. Viewed in the larger context, it is strongly indicative of the failure of both conservation and rural development policies and programmes to harmonise with each other and to ensure the integration of ecological and livelihood security. This is also precisely the situation that is misused by vested political interests, as reported from Ranthambore too. There are many questions that need to be answered if the recurrence of a situation like this is to be prevented and if a more viable and long lasting solution has to be found.

The administration, the Forest Department and conservationists have to realise that management and protection of our protected areas cannot be successful if there is so much hostility. If the communities that live around these areas do not have a stake in its conservation and well being, it will be impossible to ensure that the Ranthambore kind of situation does not repeat itself, either here or elsewhere in the country. The failure to ensure the economic, social and livelihood security of villagers in the surrounds of protected areas, has clearly enhanced hostility towards wildlife conservation, with the parks often being seen as 'islands of luxury' in the midst of increasingly desperate situations of fuel/fodder shortage and livelihood insecurity. This needs to change and the local people need to be made equal partners and beneficiaries in the whole process. The situation has also highlighted the absence of any large scale, landscape level planning that would consider the needs of all constituencies. This too is necessary and its high time that planning for and around protected areas took a much more holistic view of the situation.

The other question however needs to be asked of the people themselves. Why did they, in their situation of crisis and scarcity, move towards the park and not away from it? The answer is as simple as it is obvious. Ranthambore's forests are not only critical for the survival of the tiger and myriad other species, but also for ensuring the ecological security in the area. If the forests of Ranthambore are to be destroyed today, where will they go when drought strikes again tomorrow? That Ranthambore

was conserved ensured that the surrounding villagers had somewhere to go in a situation of crisis.

Polarised positions in the debate will not help the situation at all. The mandate of conservation cannot be questioned. Its worth has been repeatedly proven, particularly in situations like the one we just saw in Ranthambore. At the same time however, there is a need to change conservation policies in the country, away from the present, 'off limits' and 'no interference' regime, so that the local communities seek, not to undermine conservation, but to become its important supporters.

It is a dual challenge that needs to be taken up earnestly. And urgently!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Blackbuck threat to Bustard in Rolapadu

The increasing population of the blackbuck in the grasslands of the Rolapadu WLS is threatening the Great Indian Bustards that are found here.

When the area was first declared a sanctuary in the 1980s, particularly for the conservation of the bustards, the population of the blackbuck was very small. Over the years this population has multiplied rapidly and the figure today is estimated to be around 700 animals.

Further details are not known of the exact impact that they are having on the bustard populations or the ecology of the park, but senior forest officials have expressed the opinion that the only way to deal with the situation is for the culling of some of the blackbuck.

Source: Mir Ayoob Ali Khan. 'Blackbuck threat to bustard', *Deccan Chronicle*, 11/07/02.

Over 2000 dead marine turtles found on Andhra coast this year

At least about 2000 marine turtles have been found dead on the Andhra Pradesh coast so far this year. The areas include the coast along East Godavari, Suryalanka in Guntur district, Hope Island near Kakinada, Manchineelapeta and the Orissa border near the mouth of River Nagavali.

This information was given by Mr. MV Venkateswara Rao, Fisheries Development Officer of

the State Institute of Fisheries Technology (Marine Turtle Excluder Device Wing). The main reason for these deaths is said to be the indiscriminate use of trawl and gill nets for fishing.

Source: 'Marine turtles found dead along AP coast', *Hindu Business Line*, 23/10/02.

ASSAM

Indian army nabs poachers in Kaziranga

The Indian army recently nabbed three poachers in Assam and recovered wildlife parts, valued at about Rs. 2 million in the international market. Troops disguised as wildlife traders caught the poachers near Kaziranga NP and recovered 3 kg. of tiger bones, 2 kg. of elephant tusks and bear gall bladder. The animals had been shot by firearms, speared, poisoned, electrocuted or trapped in pits. Poachers are believed to have killed at least 86 rhinos in the park in the last four years. This is the first time that the army has played a role in nabbing poachers within the park.

Source: 'Indian army nabs poachers in Kaziranga', www.sanctuaryasia.com, 27/10/02.

Contact: **Director**, Kaziranga National Park, PO Bokakhat, Dist. Golaghat – 785612, Assam

Central funds to state for Project Elephant and Project Tiger

The Centre has recently released Rs. 95 lakhs to Assam for schemes under Project Elephant and Project Tiger.

The Assam Government had submitted a proposal under Project Elephant to the Centre for a total amount of Rs. 1.65 crores, of which Rs. 1.08 crore were sanctioned. The funds are to be utilised on four inter-state elephant reserves - Manas-Baska-Joltapara, Kameng-Sonitpur, Dibru-Deomali and Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong-Ingthanhi. Rs. 70 lakhs of the sanctioned amount for Project Elephant has already been released to the state. Another proposal for Rs. 59.30 lakhs had been submitted for the Nameri Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger. Rs. 25 lakhs have been released by the Centre for this project as well.

Source: Surajit Khound. 'Rs. 95 lakh released for wildlife projects', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/09/02

Meet held to oppose sanctuary at Deepor beel

The *Deepor Beel Paspara Mas Maria Samabai Samity* (DBPMMSS) organised a public meeting on September 8 where a decision was taken to oppose the government move to declare Deepor Beel as a wildlife sanctuary.

Mr. Hemanta Talukdar, MLA and Chief Guest stated that the *beel* was not fit to be declared a sanctuary because of the chaotic situation and the pollution in the area. He also alleged that the State Forest Minister had no idea of *beels*. He further said that unless each of the 1000 fishermen were not allotted at least 10 bighas of land for agriculture, the decision to create a sanctuary would be opposed.

Others who addressed the meeting included the President of the Dakshin Kamrup Grahak Suraksha Samity, President of the All Assam Scheduled Caste Association, members of the district council, presidents of some village panchayats and some social workers. They were also of the opinion that the existence of the BG railway line, the LBG International Airport and the proposed national highway near the *beel*, meant that the area was not fit to be declared a sanctuary.

The meeting was attended by about 1000 fishermen of the area and representatives of panchayats and taluk committees of Azara, Dharapur, Garal, Majirgaon, Kahikuchi, Rani, and Mirzapur. It was also decided to form a *Deepor Beel Suraksha Samity* to fight for the rights of the fisherman to fish in the water body.

Later, in October, a memorandum was sent to the Kamrup DC demanding development of the *beel* as a fishery and not as a wildlife sanctuary. It has been suggested that if fisheries development is allowed here, the fish demands of the entire North Eastern region could be met from this water body. Copies of the memorandum have also been sent to the State Chief Minister, the Forest Minister, Fishery Minister, the local MLA, local and other MPs and the chairman of the Kamrup Zila Parishad. (Also see *PA Updates* 38, 36, 30, 26 & 25)

Source: 'Fishermen oppose bird sanctuary at Deepor beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 13/09/02.

'Develop Deepor Beel as a fishery: Azara fishermen', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/10/02

Kaziranga, Manas to be made model PAs

There is a proposal to declare four World Heritage sites in the country as model protected areas for

wildlife protection. These include Kaziranga and Manas NPs in Assam, Nandadevi NP in Uttaranchal and Keoladeo Ghana NP in Rajasthan.

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment-Eastern Himalaya Program (ATREE-EHP) will be conducting a detailed study on the conservation aspects of the two NPs in Assam for the purpose. The report will be submitted to UNESCO for its approval and funding. The project will be coordinated by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

ATREE recently organised a workshop each, in Manas and Kaziranga, that were attended by forest officials, wildlife staff, NGOs working in the field and scientists from research and conservation institutions in the country.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be conducting a similar kind of process for the other two PAs.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Kaziranga, Manas to be models for wildlife protection', *The Assam Tribune*, 27/09/02.

Six elephant deaths in Oct. in Kameng-Sonitpur Elephant reserve

There have been reports of the death of at least six elephants in the Kameng-Sonitpur Elephant reserve in the month of October. Forest officials have said that at least three of the deaths seem to have occurred because of natural reasons as the bodies of the animals were found in deep gorges, indicating death due to fall. The other three bodies were found next to the Monobag Tea Estate.

Forest officials suspect that the death of these three animals could have been because of the consumption of the pesticide, Demecron, which was banned a few months ago. They feel that in spite of the ban (see *PA Update* 38), some of the tea gardens are continuing the use of the pesticide. Tea industry officials have however strongly refuted these allegations stating that none of the tea gardens were using the pesticide after it had been banned. They did not, however, rule out the use of the pesticide by some of the encroachers in the forest areas who were using the forest land for paddy cultivation.

According to villagers of Balipara, Ghoramari and Bihaguri, the migrating wild elephants from nearby forests damaged standing crops worth around Rs 8 lakh in September and October in the area. The villagers have reported that 250 to 300 wild elephants have been moving in

groups in the inhabited areas of Sonitpur and have created panic here.

It would be recollected that last year too, a large number of elephant deaths due to poisoning by Demecron were reported from Nameri National Park in Sonitpur District and the adjoining Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. While official sources had put the death of elephants in the district at 17, unofficial sources say that at least 31 elephants were killed here. (see *PA Update* 33)

Source: 'Villagers kill 4 wild tuskers in Sonitpur', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/10/02
'Elephant deaths baffle Assam officials, blame game begins', *The Times of India*, 22/10/02

Thrust on tourism in PAs

The Assam Apex Tourism Development Cooperative Society Ltd, TOURFED, has drawn up extensive plans for the promotion of tourism in the state. New segments that are proposed for development include train safaris, river cruises, wildlife adventure and cultural tours.

The rail tourism plan includes running a steam train with three renovated coaches from Guwahati to Bhalukpong, with two stopovers in Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP and Nameri NP, respectively. The project will be jointly financed by TOURFED, Tourism Finance Corporation of India (TFCI), North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi), and the National Cooperative Development Corporation Ltd. TOURFED has already submitted the proposal to the Railway Board for its approval.

TOURFED has also proposed the development of tourist resorts at Pobitara, Orang, Jatinga, Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Chandubi, Dudhnoi and Sri Surya Pahar. Many of these are to be managed and looked after by the primary cooperative societies that will be formed by local people under TOURFED.

Proposals for these various projects, amounting to a total of nearly Rs. 580 lakhs have been submitted by TOURFED to the TFCI, which has expressed willingness to clear any viable projects in the North East without much formality.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Steps afoot to promote tourism co-operatives', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/09/02

Encounter with NDFB in Sonai Rupai

Three militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and a military jawan were killed in an encounter in the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary in the first half of September. A huge cache of arms including a AK-47 rifle, 63 rounds of ammunition, two IEDs and wireless sets were recovered from the slain militants. It has been reported that the militants were staying in the wildlife sanctuary in a bid to cross over the Assam Arunachal border. It has been further reported that the forests and protected areas along the Assam-Arunachal border have become a hotbed of militant activity and security forces are taking special steps to deal with the situation.

Similar encounters have been reported in the past from the Manas National Park as well (see *PA Update* 30)

Source: Armymen, 3 NDFB militants killed in encounter', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/09/02.
'Operations against NDFB stepped up', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/09/02.

Chirang-Ripu Reserve Forests proposed for inclusion under Project Elephant

The Director, Project Elephant has suggested the inclusion of the Chirang-Ripu Reserve Forests in the Kokrajhar district of Assam under Project Elephant. These forests form an important corridor along the Indo-Bhutan border and as a migration route between Buxa and Manas Tiger Reserves.

The forests are also home to populations of rare animals like the Golden Langur, Pygmy Hog, tiger, the leopard cat and a number of bird and butterfly species. They also reportedly support the only viable population of the spotted deer within the entire north eastern region.

The Green Hearts Nature Club based in Kokrajhar has been conducting surveys in this forest and has welcomed and appreciated the efforts of Project Elephant authorities to have these forests included under Project Elephant.

Source: 'Chirang-Ripu reserve forest to elephant The Central Government has given its special approval to boost tourism', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/09/02
Contact: **Green Heart Nature Club**, W. No. 6, Kokrajhar-783370m, Assam. Tel: 03661 - 70970. Fax: 70694. E-mail: ghncne@yahoo.com; ghnc@rediffmail.com

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DELHI

Bird sanctuary proposed in Najafgarh

The Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation (DTTDC) has proposed the development of a bird sanctuary in the Najafgarh area of South-West Delhi. The sanctuary will cover an area of several kilometres along the Najafgarh drain and a large number of trees are to be planted to form a thick forest belt. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) had been appointed as a consultant for the project.

Source: Chetan Chauhan. 'Bird Sanctuary on the anvil', *Hindustan Times*, 16/09/02.

Ecological Task Force helps restore Bhatti mines

The 132 Infantry Battalion (Ecology) of the Territorial Army is presently working on the restoration of the mines in the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi. The forest that is being resurrected in the Bhatti mines is to be called the Kargil Martyrs' Memorial Forest. It has been reported that one lakh saplings have already been planted in the last one year and an additional one lakh saplings will be planted in the period upto March 2003. A corpus of Rs. 8.23 crores has been created which is to be disbursed in the next five years. The entire expenditure incurred by the battalion will be eventually reimbursed by the Delhi Government, which will also provide expertise and saplings.

Currently 141 retired personnel of the Rajput Regiment are planting between 3000 to 3500 saplings a day that have a survival rate of 67%. A team from Delhi University headed by Dr. CR Babu is also providing expertise for growing grass around the saplings to help retain moisture.

Source: Cecil Victor. 'No more haze over Bhatti mines', *Tribune*, 19/09/02.

GOA

Goa bans plastics on beaches and in sanctuaries

The Goa Government has issued a notice, under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, (EPA) 1986, imposing a ban on the use and sale of plastics at wildlife sanctuaries and beaches in the state. The

ban came into force on October 2, 2002.

Directions have been issued to the Chief Conservator of Forests to prohibit the use and sale of plastic bags and bottles within the notified boundaries of Cotigao, Mahavir and Bondla WLSs. The Director of Tourism and the Chief Officer of Panjim Municipal Council too have been directed to prohibit the carrying, use and sale of non-biodegradable PET bottles and plastic carry bags within the notified boundaries of Miramar and Caranzalem beaches. The Department of Tourism and the Secretary, Village Panchayat of Old Goa are to enforce the prohibition of use and sale of plastic bags and bottles within the Old Goa Complex of heritage monuments and churches.

All sub-divisional magistrates and police officials have been directed to extend full co-operation to ensure effective enforcement of the ban. Immediate action is to be taken against offenders under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code. The Department of Science, Technology and Environment is also working on involving companies selling products in non-biodegradable PET bottles to participate in collection, crushing and shredding of bottles at two identified sites.

Source: 'Goa government bans plastics in beaches and sanctuaries', www.sanctuaryasia.com, 16/09/02

State pursuing denotification of Madei WLS

The Goa Chief Minister, Mr. Manohar Parrikar has said the state government was strongly pursuing the denotification of the Madei Wildlife Sanctuary. A cabinet decision had been taken and the state had also moved the Supreme Court in the matter. The CM in the state legislature while replying to an opposition query regarding the recent 'agreement in principle' by the MoEF to the proposal for declaration of the Sahyadri Ecologically Sensitive Area (SESA) over 7350 sq. kms of the Western Ghats spread across Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa.

The opposition leader, Mr. Pratapsingh Rane said that this proposal (for SESA), if accepted, will make matters worse for those who had been already adversely affected by the notification of the Madei Sanctuary. Political parties in the state are unanimous in their opposition to the Netravali and Madei WLSs that were declared a couple of years ago. The stand has been that the process of notification of the sanctuaries had been faulty and irrational and a number of villages will be affected because of this. The CM has further elaborated that no public notice

was issued for the notification and neither were objections sought from the public as in mandated by the law (See *PA Updates* 30 & 33).

Meanwhile, the *Sattari Nagrik Suraksha Manch* too has taken up the matter of the SESA with the CM. They have expressed their apprehension that the declaration of the SESA would complicate the matter of the denotification of the Madei WLS and would directly affect the growth and development of the taluka.

Source: 'Govt. pursuing denotification of Madei sanctuary areas: CM', *Herald*, 21/08/02.
Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Wildlife Wing, Junta House, Panaji - 403001, Goa.
Claude Alvares. Tel: 0832-263305 / 6.
Email: oib@goatelecom.com

GUJARAT

Forest staff to be trained to manage leopard-human conflict

A special effort is being made to train forest staff from the forest circles of Vadodara, Godhra, Chhota Udepur and Baria to deal with the leopard -human conflict in these regions. These areas have a very high density of leopard population, with the Vadodara range alone having 330 leopards of the total population of 900 animals in the state.

Forest staff from these circles will be sent to the Gir National Park for the purpose. The first batch selected for the training included two foresters and a forest guard from the Baria Range. The training imparted will include providing of special training in tackling confrontation, creating a map of the circle territory to identify pockets where the concentration of leopards is high and devise a plan of action. An orientation will also be given as to how the Maldhari - lion conflict situation was tackled in Gir and how that can be adopted for the conflict with leopards. Additionally an attempt will also be made to hone the tranquilising skills of the staff.

Like in other parts of the country (see Maharashtra below), the problem of conflict has arisen due to the twin factors of loss of habitat and a decreasing prey base for the carnivores.

Source: Sajid Shaikh. 'Forest staff to be trained to tackle man-leopard conflict', *The Times of India*, 17/08/02.

Contact: **Dr. H.S. Singh**, C F, Vadodara, Kothi Annexe, Raopura, Vadodara - 390001,

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HIMACHAL PRADESH

Siltation adversely impacting Renuka lake

Large scale siltation over the past two decades has adversely affected the Renuka Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Sirmour District. The surface area of the lake has reportedly shrunk by 25% and the eastern side of the lake has turned marshy. An increase in the human population in the area and large scale construction of roads in the surrounding hills have led to a decrease in the vegetative cover in the catchment area of the lake, substantially increasing the rate of erosion and triggering landslides.

Over the last 10 years an estimated Rs. One Crore have already been spent to deal with the problem. Last year the Forest Department (FD) constructed a 75 m high and about 2800 m long toe wall along the edge of the lake with silt retaining structures to prevent siltation. Another 200 m long wall has also been constructed on the hillside to check erosion. To check biotic interference the entire lake that is spread over 500 hectares has also been fenced off at the cost of Rs. 60 lakhs. All these measures, have however not resulted in any successful solution for the siltation problem.

The State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (SCSTE) has now decided to shift the focus to rehabilitation of the ecologically fragile hills and a five year action plan has been prepared to stabilise the slopes through a combination of civil and bio-engineering works. Under the plan fast growing shrubs like agave and opunita will be planted on the sliding hills. Other trees will be grown later to spread the vegetative cover further.

Source: Rakesh Lohumi. 'Silt eating up Renuka lake', *Tribune*, 21/07/02,

Expert panel set up for management of zoos, PAs

The Himachal Pradesh Government has constituted an advisory committee under the Chairmanship of the Principal Secretary (Forests) for the management of zoos, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.

Other members of the Committee are the PCCF (Wildlife), Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), North; Member Secretary, Central Zoo Authority; Director, National Zoological Park; Dr. Ravi Chellam, Wildlife Institute of India and Dr. Rahul Kaul, World Pheasant Association. The Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), South will be the member secretary of the committee. The Additional Director-General (Wildlife), Union Ministry of Environment and Forests will be the special invitee.

Source: 'HP panel for management of zoos, sanctuaries', *Tribune*, 27/08/02.

Major push for eco-tourism in the state

The Himachal Pradesh Government has formulated a policy for promoting eco-tourism in the interior, unexplored areas of the state. The State Forest Department has been made the nodal agency for the purpose and the eco-tourism sites are to be managed through autonomous registered societies that have adequate representation of local stakeholders.

Such societies have so far been formed for the Great Himalayan National Park in Kulu, the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary and the Potter's Hill Van Vihar. In the next phase societies are proposed for the Khajjiar WLS in Chamba district and the area of Chansil in Shimla district.

Source: 'HP to develop nature parks', *Tribune*, 29/07/02.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

High Court order to preserve lakes

A division bench of the J&K High Court has issued orders in July to all departments linked directly or indirectly with lakes and waterways to take effective steps for their preservation. The directions were issued in a Public Interest Litigation that was filed by a student.

The various authorities that have been issued directions include the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA), Srinagar Development Authority (SDA), Srinagar Municipal Council (SMA), Pollution Control Board (PCB), Directorate of Tourism, and the Housing and Urban Development Department.

The Division bench of the Court has banned the use of polythene bags in and around lakes, the washing of vehicles and all kinds of construction

within the water bodies. It has also asked for the identification of all constructions that have come up in contravention of the Srinagar master plan and the PCB has been asked to collect water samples for necessary tests and identification of pollutants.

Source: 'HC directive in PIL to govt. departments for preserving lakes', *Kashmir Times*, 28/07/02.

JHARKHAND

Solar shock fences to reduce human-elephant conflict

Jharkhand proposes to set up solar shock fences to keep elephants out of human habitations in a move to reduce human-elephant conflict in the state, especially in the districts of Dumka and Pakur and on the outskirts of Ranchi.

The State Forest Department is said to be studying a proposal put forth by a Kolkata-based private firm, which has devised the solar-powered electric fencing in collaboration with an Austrian firm. About 9,000 volts of electricity will run through the fence wire, but the company claims that the 'mild shock' will not harm humans or elephants. The FD has sent a team to inspect the gadget and evaluate its efficacy and safety.

Source: 'Jharkhand proposes Solar shock fences to reduce human-elephant conflict' www.sanctuaryasia.com, 07/10/02

KARNATAKA

Sandalwood smuggling from Nagarhole

Large scale felling and smuggling of sandalwood and teak trees has been reported from the Nagarhole National Park. The incident first came to light in July earlier this year when 100s of tree stumps were seen in the Veeranahosalli range of the park.

In its first reaction, the Forest Department booked some tribals from the Hemmige settlement for colluding with the smugglers. The *Budakattu Krishikara Sangha* (BKS) however opposed the action of the FD and charged them with filing false cases against the tribals. It was also alleged that the FD was trying to underplay the magnitude of the tree felling that had occurred. It was only after the Forest Minister, Mr. KH Ranganath was approached by some NGOS and tribal individuals that a fact finding mission comprising Chief Conservator of Forests

(CCF), Mr. Vedanth; Conservator of Forests, Mr. MN Jayakumar; and DCF, Mobile Squad, Mr. Ananda Gowda visited the park on August 23 and confirmed the incidents of tree felling and smuggling.

Similar incidents of felling and smuggling of timber from Nagarhole were also reported earlier (*PA Update* 25 and 24) and fears have been expressed that the scale of this felling this time is much larger than has been already reported.

The NGO, Living Inspiration for Tribals (LIFT) has also alleged that the Rs. 38 crores World Bank funded eco-development programme in the park has actually served to distract forest officials from their basic duty of protection of the forests. A couple of years ago, the Project Tiger Steering Committee too had reported that protection and vigilance work in Nagarhole was being carried out by only 25% of the required staff strength, making the park vulnerable to activities like poaching and illicit felling of trees (See *PA Update* 24).

Details of the sandalwood smuggling can also be seen on the following website: <http://incert.tripod.com/nagarholenationalpark/>

Source: 'Row over sandalwood smuggling in Nagarhole', *The New Indian Express*, 24/07/02.

Alladi Jayasri. 'Tree felling in Nagarhole riles wildlife groups', *The Hindu*, 29/08/02.

Joseph Hoover. 'Nagarhole in news for wrong reasons', *Deccan Herald*, 30/08/02.

Contact: **Wildlife First!**, No. 1235, 1st Floor, 26th A Main, IVth, T Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560041. Tel: 080-6535763. Fax: 6535811. Email: pbsolus@vsnl.com

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DCF (WL), Hunsur, Forest Department, Hunsur PO, Mysore - 571 105, Karnataka

Seven tuskers poached in Nagarhole

An investigation team of the Institute for Natural Resources, Conservation, Education, Research and Training (INCERT) has reported that at least seven tuskers have been killed in the Nagarhole National Park in the last couple of months. The first killing was reported from the Kallahalla range of the park on August 24. The other killings have been reported from Banare Kere, Segadi Katte Kere, Eechur Kadu, Anegallu pare, Moorkal, and Parthada Kada.

In a related development, newspapers also reported the seizure of at least four large tusks from Bangalore, Shimoga and Mangalore in September. More details can be seen of the following website: <http://incert.tripod.com/nagarholenationalpark/>

Source: Joseph Hoover. 'Second tusker falls prey to poaching in Nagarhole', *Deccan Herald*, 07/09/02.

S Sridhar. Email dated 12/10/02.

Contact: **INCERT**. No. 10, Sirur Park, B Street, Seshadripuram, Bangalore - 560020, Karnataka. Tel: 080-3364142 / 682. Email: navbarat@blr.vsnl.net.in
Chief Wildlife Warden - Karnataka, 2nd Floor, 18th Cross, Malleshwaram, Bangalore - 560003, Karnataka. Tel: 080-3341993 / 3345846. Email: pccfwl@vsnl.com

KERALA

Committee expresses concern over ecological crisis in Sabrimala, Periyar

The Environment Committee of the Kerala State Assembly has called for urgent steps to contain the deteriorating ecological status of the hill shrine of Sabrimala located within the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR). In a report placed in the Assembly recently, a nine member panel of MLAs said that the menace posed by pollutants and stress caused to the fragile environment posed a grave threat to the very sanctity of the shrine.

An estimated three crore pilgrims visit the temple every year. The biggest impact is on the Pamba river, the sole source of drinking water in the area. The river gets choked with solid waste every year in the pilgrimage season. A sample test of the Pamba water last year showed that the level of coliform bacteria in 100 ml of water was more than 1.5 lakhs, far above the permissible limit.

Another point of concern was the excessive use of plastic and its disposal. Though the sale of plastic is supposed to be banned here, there was no effective mechanism to check their coming in from the outside and their disposal here. An incinerator set up is yet to get the approval of the Pollution Control Board as it was technically flawed (Eds. Note: *The use of incinerators to dispose of plastic wastes has now been strongly opposed from all quarters as it leads to the release of a lot of dioxins that are carcinogenic and harmful to health.*)

A study conducted about an year ago by the School of Social Sciences too had revealed that the Sabrimala Enclave was in grave crisis (Also see *PA Updates* 34, 30, 27, 24, 23 & 21)

Source: 'Anti-pollution steps for Sabrimala urged', *Business Line*, 29/07/02.

Chief Wildlife Warden – Kerala,
Vazhudaud, Trivandrum – 695014,
Kerala. Tel: 0471-322217 / 204896. Fax:
325804.

MADHYA PRADESH

Results of Wildlife census 2001

The Wildlife Census for 2001 has revealed that there are 710 tigers and 1066 leopards in Madhya Pradesh.

Following are the number of tigers counted in the respective forest circles: Jabalpur Forest Circle (including Kanha Tiger Reserve): 192; Shahdol Forest Circle (including Bandavgarh National Park): 86; Seoni Forest Circle with Pench Tiger Reserve: 97; Rewa Forest Circle: 26; Ujjain: three, Gwalior: seven Khandwa: nine, Betul: 12, Hoshangabad: 61; Balaghat: 53; Chhindwara: 23; Sagar: 29; Bhopal: 65; Indore: 10; Shivpuri: three; and Chhatarpur: 54.

A maximum of 192 leopards were counted in the Rewa Forest Circle followed by 80 in Ujjain.

Source: 'MP remains the "Tiger State"', *The Hindu*, 01/07/02

Action plan for Pench National Park

The MP Forest Department has prepared an action plan for Rs. 85 lakhs for developing the infrastructural facilities in the Pench National Park. This information was provided by the state Forest Minister, Mr. Harvansh Singh during a meeting held to review the tourist facilities in the park. The main stress of the action plan is oriented towards putting the park on the international tourism map.

Further details are however not available.

Source: 'Action plan for park in MP', *The Times of India*, 22/09/02.

Contact: **CWLW**, MP, Van Bhawan, Tulsi Nagar, Bhopal 462003, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 0755-557371/ 550391. Fax: 011- 761102.

MAHARASHTRA

Plan for the rehabilitation of encroachers in Sanjay Gandhi NP

A joint proposal for the rehabilitation of the encroachers evicted from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park has been mooted by the Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti (NHSS) and Sumer Corporation, a developer.

The proposal is for the rehabilitation of the 20,000 families from the park at an alternate plot in Chandivli near Powai. It will make use of the opportunity created by the government's declaration of these families as 'project affected'. A builder undertaking a rehabilitation project to re-house project-affected slum dwellers is entitled to additional benefits, particularly getting a huge Floor Space Index (FSI) of 4.5 as transfer of development rights (TDR) for every 2.5 FSI consumed on site for rehabilitation. This facility is unavailable under normal slum rehabilitation projects.

In the proposed Chandivli Scheme, Sumer Corporation will re-house the national park slum dwellers free of cost on the 3.60 lakh sq. m. of land. In return the developer will get a crore square feet of TDR, worth several hundred crore rupees. This TDR can either be sold in the market or used by the builder to develop real estate anywhere north of Chandivli.

Senior officials have questioned the decision of the government to treat these slum dwellers as project affected and also said that the government has no power to unilaterally sanction the proposal. The NHSS will have to present the proposal to the slum redevelopment authority (SRA). If the SRA approves the scheme it will be then placed before the high court for clearance.

Former Prime Minister, Mr. VP Singh who has supported the fight against these evictions, has reportedly said that he had nothing to do with this proposal that involves the Sumer Corporation.

Source: Nauzer Bharucha. 'VP Singh distances himself from slum rehab project', *The Times of India*, 11/05/02.

Nauzer Bharucha. 'HC will decide on rehab plan for park encroachers'. *The Times of India*, 26/08/02.

Contact: **DFO, SGNP**, Borivali (E), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra
NHSS, Sankalp Bldg., 5th Floor, Plot 1040, Off Sayani Rd. Prabhadevi, Mumbai - 400025. Tel: 022-4227690.

Leopard - human conflict around Sanjay Gandhi NP

The conflict between leopards from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and human settlements around the park is intensifying. There have been reports of at least 12 attacks on humans since July, earlier this year. Seven leopards were also captured in the same time period. The park authorities too are not very sure of how to handle the situation. A combination of a depleting prey base and increasing human intervention along the forests is said to be the main reason behind the escalation of this problem (Also see *PA Update* 36).

As a solution to the problem, the park authorities have proposed a captive breeding programme for wild boar and hare inside the forest in an attempt to augment the food supply for the leopards. They are reported to be scouting around for sponsors to fund this project which is expected to cost Rs. Five lakhs.

Forest Department staff helped along by the SGNP veterinarian will rear the animals, who will then be released into the wild at an appropriate time. The proposal, perhaps the first for a national park, is awaiting state clearance.

Source: Reshma Patil. 'Captive leopard starves to death', *Indian Express*, 03/09/02.

Contact: **DFO SGNP**, see above.

Leopards from Junnar being relocated to Melghat, Koyna

There have been an increasing number of reports of leopards turning man-eater and/or attacking livestock in the Junnar area near Pune. This has resulted in a huge public outcry and many reports of retaliation killings of the animals by local people.

Some of the reasons for the problem include the large scale destruction of forests and their conversion to agricultural land in the Junnar Forest Circle. The leopard population which is reported to be 90 here, has been left with a decreasing natural habitat and prey base. The leopards have now taken to living in the sugarcane fields that have proliferated after the coming in of irrigation. They have also started to regularly prey on dogs and goats.

In the last year at least seven human beings have also been killed by these leopards. The District authorities have reportedly allowed killing of the problem leopards, and have also made efforts to relocate the ones that have been captured to other

forested areas like Rajepur, Ratnagiri. Koyna, Bhimasankar and Melghat.

Recently twelve of these leopards were relocated, four of which were released in the Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR). The Tiger Reserve authorities are however not in favour of this move as it could cause similar problems here, endangering the lives of villagers and livestock of the 61 villages that are part of the Melghat Tiger Reserve.

Source: Prerna Singh Bindra. 'Endangered leopards face crisis of numbers' *The Pioneer*, 04/08/02.

Contact: **Field Director**, Melghat Tiger Reserve
Amravati- 444602, Maharashtra.
Dist. Collector, Pune District, Pune-411001
Kishore Rithe, Pratishtha, Bharat Nagar,
Akoli Road, Near Sai Nagar, Amravati,
Maharashtra. Tel: 0721-672359. Fax:
670308. Email: ncsa@bom3.vsnl.net.in

BNHS calls for renotification of denotified parts of Melghat Tiger Reserve

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has called for the renotification of the 500 odd sq. kms of the Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary that was denotified a few years ago. This demand was made at a one day workshop that was held in Mumbai recently on the 'Implementation of the National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) of western India'.

It was pointed out that the Chikhaldara Pumped Water Storage project on the boundary of the Melghat Tiger Reserve would submerge at least 100 hectares of prime tiger and leopard habitat. Though the River Valley Committee of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has rejected the project three times in the last six years, there is a strong political lobby that is pressing ahead with the demand for the implementation of the project.

In addition to this, suggestions were also made for declaring the Mehandri Reserve Forests (in the Satpura ranges) a wildlife sanctuary and forests in the Gadchiroli district as the Kopela Kolamarka Wild Buffalo Sanctuary. It was also pointed out that the Taloda and Chaurakund forests were home to the endangered Forest Spotted Owllet and therefore efforts had to be made to protect these forests too.

Source: 'BNHS want renotification of sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 18/09/02.

'Renotify parts of Melghat: BNHS', *Indian Express*, 18/09/02.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden** – Maharashtra,
Jaika Building, Civil Lines, Nagpur –
440001, Maharashtra. Tel: 0712 – 526758 /
530126.

MANIPUR

Loktak Development Authority to get funds for another two years

The Indo Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) has agreed to extend funding for the work of the Loktak Development Authority (LDA) for another two years. ICEF funding to the project had been suspended last year. The 10th and 11th Finance Commissions of India too had recently suspended funding of the LDA programs. The ICEF decision was made recently following the visit of an eight member team to the state. The team was headed by the First Secretary of the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. It has appealed to the LDA to speed up work of clearing of weeds, purification of the water and for the proper demarcation of the lake boundary.

The LDA Minister, W Leima Devi is also reported to have told the Canadian delegation that her ministry is trying to put up a bill in the State Assembly for the conservation of the lake and its development. (Also see *PA Update* 25)

Source: 'Tenure of Loktak Development to be extended by 2 more years', *The Poknapam Daily*, 20/09/02.

Contact: **ICEF**, D-1/56, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi - 110057. Tel: 011-6144051 / 6074 / 6653. Fax: 6147827 / 6236 / 6078.

Mr. Manihar, Project Director, LDA,
Email: lda@neline.com

Chief Wildlife Warden - Manipur,
Sanjenthong, Imphal - 795001, Manipur.
Tel: 03852 - 220854 / 285385.

MEGHALAYA

Suggestion for national park in Jaintia hills for rare primates

The American Society for Primatologists (ASP) has indicated a need for the creation of a national park in the Jaintia hills for the preservation and conservation of rare primate species found here. A recent survey conducted by the society has reported that seven primate species: slow loris, Assamese Macaque, Rhesus Macaque, Pig-tailed Macaque, Stump-tailed

Macaque, Capped Langur and the Hollock Gibbon are found here. The survey stated that a viable population of all these primates was confined to the Narpuh Reserve Forest. The report also said that jhum cultivation, alteration of the tropical forest habitat and large scale hunting by the local populace was the main reason for the decline in the primate populations.

The survey was conducted by Dr. Anwarudin Chowdhury on behalf of the ASP.

Source: Manasij Bhattacharjee. 'Park to be set up for primates in Meghalaya', *The Asian Age*, 08/08/02.

Contact: **Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury**, Hon. Chief Executive C/o The Assam Company Ltd., G Bordoloi Path, Bamuni Maidan, Guwahati 781021 Assam. Tel: 0361-663339. Email: badru1@sancharnet.in

MIZORAM

Myanmarese poachers in Mizoram

There are reports that Myanmarese poachers regularly enter the forests of Mizoram for poaching of elephants, leopards, tigers and also other forest wealth like orchids which are abundant here. Forest officials have said that it is very difficult to apprehend them as they use the thick forests as a convenient cover to easily cross over the international boundary to their country.

The areas visited by the poachers include the Ngenpui Wildlife Sanctuary and the newly proposed Palak Lake Sanctuary in the southern most part of the state (see *PA Update* 34).

Source: 'Myanmarese poachers cross over to Mizoram frequently', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/08/02.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Forest Department, Govt. of Mizoram, Aizwal - 796001, Mizoram.

ORISSA

Human-elephant conflict intensifies

There have been a number of reports from various parts of Orissa of the intensification of the human-elephant conflict. More than 42 people have been killed by wild elephants all over the state in the last one year. Tribal dominated Keonjhar district in north

Orissa tops the list as far as attacks by elephants are concerned. An estimated 75 people here have killed and about 1000 families have been rendered homeless in the last two years by rampaging herds of wild elephants. The people here have now formed an organisation, '*Banyajantu Prapidita Suraksha Parishad*', to pressurise the government to take steps to deal with the situation. (Also see *PA Update* 34).

Elephants from the Chandka Wildlife Sanctuary too have caused a lot of problem to the city of Bhubaneswar and its residents (See *PA Updates* 32 & 29). People in the 12 villages on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar who are prone to elephant attacks have formed a '*Nagarika Pratikshya Mancha*' to try and deal with the situation and reduce damage.

There are also reports of wild elephants entering villages and destroying life and property from the Bhanjanagar area of Southern Orissa's Ganjam district and Sambalpur in Western Orissa.

Ironically, the problem has gone up in the state though the total number of elephants has seen a decline in the last two decades. 1827 elephants were counted in the state in the census in 1999, while their number was 200 more in the census in 1979. The main reason for the intensification of the conflict is said to be the destruction of the forests by the timber mafia and the villagers in connivance with the revenue and forest department officials. Another important reason is said to be the increasing settlements with the elephant habitats themselves

Source: ST Beuria. 'An elephantine problem', *Deccan Herald*, 12/04/02

Sea turtle interpretation centre in Bhubaneswar

A sea turtle interpretation centre has been opened in Bhubaneswar to provide information, particularly about Olive Ridley Sea Turtles. The Centre has been set up by Operation Kachhapa, the sea turtle conservation project jointly run by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) and the Wildlife Society of Orissa with financial assistance from Ford Motor Company. The Centre has a series of photographs, posters, models, books and reference material on turtles. It has also video screening facilities and an artificial beach that depicts dangers that the sea turtles face from mechanised trawlers operating along the Orissa coast.

Source: 'Sea turtle interpretation centre in Orissa', *The Hindu*, 29/09/02.

Contact: **Biswajit Mohanty**, Wildlife Society of Orissa, Shantikunj, Link Road, Cuttack - 753012, Orissa. Tel: 0671-334625. Fax: 610980. Email: biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in
Chief Wildlife Warden – Orissa, Plot No. 8, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751007, Orissa. Tel: 0674-513134 / 515840. Fax: 512502

RAJASTHAN

Multi-Storey building inside Keoladeo NP opposed

The Ghana Keoladeo Natural History Society (GHNHS) has served a legal notice to the Rajasthan State Government through the PCCF of the state to stop the construction of the multi-storeyed Visitor Interpretation Centre inside the national park in Bharatpur. It has been alleged that the construction violated the orders of the Supreme Court and would disturb the ecology of the park.

The building is being constructed by an Austrian binocular and camera manufacturing company in collaboration with the WWF.

The legal notice has also alleged that in the last few years, 40 new constructions had been carried out in the park in the name of providing facilities to visitors. Besides, many old buildings had also been repaired and extended.

The Bombay Natural History Society has however welcomed the construction of the interpretation centre, suggesting that it would be a welcome addition here.

Source: 'Greens object to construction inside Keoladeo National Park', *Business Line*, 17/08/02

Contact: **Director, Keoladeo Ghana NP**, Forest Department, Bharatpur- 321 001 Rajasthan, **Krishankumar Sharma**, GHNHS. Email: krishankumar_advocate@yahoo.com

Drought affects breeding of birds in Keoladeo Ghana NP

The severe drought that affected Rajasthan and other parts of the country has adversely affected the breeding of birds in the Keoladeo Ghana National Park in Bharatpur. Only about 300 nests were counted in the month of July in the famous heronary of the park that attracts more than 10,000 breeding birds like storks, egrets and herons in a normal year.

The park went dry in February itself and the complete failure of the monsoons only compounded the problem.

Source: Vijay Thakur. 'Drought hurdle to feathered honeymoon', *Statesman*, 29/07/02.

Crisis in Ranthambore as villagers and cattle invade park

The drought in Rajasthan resulted in an extremely confrontational situation in the Ranthambore National Park. Suffering from an acute shortage of water and fodder, 50 villagers living in the vicinity of the park made a forced entry into the park with hundreds of heads of cattle on August 21.

In response, a contingent of 200 police personnel and the Special Task Force (STF) laid siege to the hills around the park. 11 *naka bandis* were set up and the police conducted flag marches and raids in many of the 96 villages that surround the park. 15 people who had entered the park were also arrested.

Villagers complained that they were facing the fourth consecutive year of drought and with no water and fodder, they had no where else to go but inside the park. It was reported that the District Collector had promised to set up 16 fodder camps in the area, but nothing had materialised.

On August 24, a band of villagers attacked 16 personnel of the STF and snatched their rifles. These were recovered after about a week. By the middle of September it was reported that the number of villagers who had entered the park had risen to 400 and the heads of cattle to a few thousand. The villagers, armed with scythes and sticks had also driven out the 160 forest guards. The Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee also issued a contempt notice to the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan in the matter. This development along with a lot of pressure that was brought in from other sides forced the Rajasthan government to send in a larger police party and a communication to the villagers that there was nothing to negotiate and that they had to move out. This finally resulted in the removal by September 20 of the people and a large portion of the cattle that had invaded the national park.

Source: Sukhmani Singh. 'Tempers run wild in Ranthambore', *Indian Express*, 24/08/02. 'Villagers park at Ranthambore, graze cattle, scare guards away', *Indian Express*, 18/09/02.

Bittu Sahgal. Email communications dated September 18, 19, and 22, 2002.

Contact: **GV Reddy**, DCF and Dy. Field Director (Core Area), Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, Sawai Madhopur - 322 001, Rajasthan.

Drought affects Bassi, Bhensrodgarh and Sitamata WLSs

The fourth consecutive drought has adversely affected the Bassi, Bhensrodgarh and Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuaries in the Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. It has been reported that the shortage of water and food has forced the wild animals, particularly *neelgais*, from these protected areas to neighbouring fields and villages. This has added to the woes of the villagers who are having a tough time themselves dealing with the drought. They are now forced to guard their fields all the time and this has left them with no option but to forgo the state government's food-for-work drought relief schemes.

Source: PJ Joychen / Ayodhya Prasad Gaur. 'It's man versus animal, with nature as referee', *Hindustan Times*, 07/09/02.

PIL in HC regarding road through Sariska TR

The Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) has filed a Writ Petition on the issue of the National Highway (NH) 13 that runs through the core area of the Sariska Tiger Reserve. The petition has asked for the stoppage of unnecessary traffic on this road as it causes large scale disturbance to the wild animals here.

In 1997, a substantial amount of money had been allocated for the construction of an alternative route to NH 13 that would by pass the tiger reserve. The road is ready but remains unused. An average of 2500 vehicles in a period of 24 hours continue to use the old highway through the reserve. A number of animals (including tigers and leopards) over the years have been killed in accidents and the road also makes it easier for poachers to enter and exit the forests.

While admitting the petition, the Division bench of the Rajasthan High Court, issued orders to all the respondents including the State of Rajasthan, the State Transport Department and the Dept. of Forests, Environment and Wildlife.

The matter had been listed for hearing on September 16. A reply was filed by the Secretary, Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife. On the last date of hearing which was October 22,

WPSI's lawyer requested the Court to grant further time for filing a rejoinder. This was granted and the next date of hearing was fixed for 15.11.02.

Source: 'WPSI's Sariska PIL admitted in Rajasthan HC', Email sent by WPSI, 24/08/02
Contact: **WPSI**, M - 52, GK Part I, New Delhi - 110048. Tel: 011- 6213864 / 6292492.
Fax: 6464918. Email: wpsi@vsnl.com
Website: www.wpsi.india.org

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,
Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur - 302001,
Rajasthan.

TAMIL NADU

Conflict over Krusadai island in Gulf of Mannar

The dispute between the Forest and Fisheries Departments of the state government has intensified over the ownership of the Krusadai island in the Gulf of Mannar. This island is one of the 21 that forms the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. All 20 islands, except Krusadai were handed over to the Forest Department when the park was established in 1992.

The conflict took an ugly turn recently when the Forest Department, reportedly destroyed cages, floating rafts and pearls worth Rs. 10 lakhs in a private pearl oyster farm set up at the island.

Pearl oyster culture is the monopoly of the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd (TNFDCL) and it can lease the rights to pearl oysters. A private firm had established the farm after a lease agreement with the TNFDCL for a period of five years starting December 2001. The lease deed covered the pearl culture project at Mandapam and Tuticorin, the pearl oyster hatchery at Mandapam and the farming areas at Krusadai.

Source: PS Suresh Kumar. 'Forest, Fisheries departments fight over Krusadai island', *The Hindu*, 16/09/02

UTTAR PRADESH

District authorities in Kanpur allow killing of *neelgai*

Kanpur District authorities have allowed the killing of *neelgai* in light of the fact that they are causing large scale damage to agriculture. Licenses for the

purpose will be granted based on resolutions passed by village *gram sabhas*.

Licences will be issued for a period of one year. The license holders can only kill *neelgai* and that too only in the period between dusk and dawn. The report of the killing of the *neelgai* should be made to the nearest police station, Asst. District Collector or Divisional Forest Office within 48 hours. No part of the animal can be used either for personal use or for trading.

Source: '*Neelgaion ko marne ki hari zhandi*', *Dainik Jagran*, 01/08/02.

WEST BENGAL

ADB to study investment needs for conservation and livelihood programmes in Sunderbans

The West Bengal State Government has signed an agreement for an Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded study of investment needs in conservation and livelihood programmes in the Sunderbans. The study will be conducted by two New Zealand based consultancy agencies: Groome Poyry Ltd. and Anzdec Ltd. and an Indian firm: Wetland International, New Delhi. ADB will provide Rs. Two crores for the study and an equal amount will be put in by the state.

The survey will initially identify investment needs in all the 19 blocks of the Sunderbans and list the priorities. It will also fix component costs for various projects. The State government is then likely to apply to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for nearly Rs. 300 crores for the project after receiving the report done with ADB funding (Also see *PA Update* 30).

Source: Soma Mookherjee. 'State eco tie-up with ADB' *Statesman*, 12/08/02,

Contact: **Director**, Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve, Bikash Bhavan, 3rd Floor, North Block, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700091, West Bengal.
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Climate change affecting Sunderbans

Experts have warned that global climate change was adversely affecting the ecosystem of the Sunderbans. This was stated by Prof. AP Mitra head of the Indian Team in the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change during a seminar held recently on the 'vulnerability of

the Sunderban mangrove ecosystem in the perspective of global climate change'. India is to soon moot a proposal to the Inter-Governmental Network for a joint Indo-Bangladesh-United Kingdom project on land use and land cover study to assess the magnitude of the harm already done.

Speaking at the same seminar, Prof. Sugata Hazra, Director, School of Oceanographic studies said that analysis of surface data near Sagar Island in the Sunderbans had revealed a temperature increase of 0.9 degree celcius per year and that vulnerability is concerned with such parameters as sea level rise, coastal erosion and accretion, land use patterns, storm surges and cyclones.

Source: 'Climate change affecting fragile ecosystem of Sunderbans', *Press Trust of India*, 14/06/02

Pollution threat to Olive Ridleys in Bay of Bengal

A pilot survey conducted by the West Bengal Forest Department (FD) and the UNDP has revealed that increasing pollution in the Bay of Bengal is threatening the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles that nest along the West Bengal and Orissa coast. The main culprits are oil and tar spilt by industries

Though the main nesting grounds of these turtles are off the Orissa coast, nesting in small numbers is also reported from the coasts of West Bengal. A large number of turtles are also found near the Digha beach and the islands of Bijeara, Kalash, Jambudwip, Marichjhanpi, Kedurdeep and Hansaraj in the Sunderbans area.

The FD survey has revealed that at least half the turtles that come to the West Bengal coasts to nest are killed due to pollution and illegal fishing. Carcasses collected from Digha beach in 2000 revealed that the turtles had died of asphyxiation.

Source: Kaushik Ghosh. 'Olive Ridleys in Bay of Bengal face pollution threat', *Statesman*, 13/08/02.

(Eds note: *Following is a response received from Kartik Shanker of Operation Kachappa to the story above. It highlights the problem of inaccurate reporting by journalists, something that has been pointed out in the past by the PA Update too*):

'How do we save environmentalism from journalists? I have with me a copy of the report that this article quotes. It was a preliminary survey funded by the GOI UNDP Project through Wildlife Institute of

India, and carried out by the West Bengal Fisheries Department. My first objection is that the article attempts to give legitimacy to the results by portraying it as a UNDP study.

A bigger problem is that nowhere in the report does it say that ridleys are being affected by pollution. It documents various sources and levels of pollution and points out that turtles might be affected by it. At the end of the article, it says that x number of turtles died of asphyxiation, implying that this supports the pollution theory. Rather, it clearly indicates that the turtles died in trawl or gill net fisheries. Which is the point. In Orissa, fisheries agencies, trawler associations and NGOs supporting them have been suggesting all kinds of reasons that turtles might be dying (migration fatigue, labour pain, disease, pollution etc) so that they do not have to accept the blame. This is of course to avoid using TEDs. So this kind of misinformation does not help.

One mustn't, of course, blame the authors of the study for publicising their results. I have found over many years, that the general competence of the environmental journalist is far below their political or sports counterparts, maybe because the field itself is new, and maybe because some are doing this in their spare time. Having been the victim of poor reporting on many occasions, I feel that the responsibility lies with us in giving simple and accurate information to journalists and insisting on cross checking their articles, though they hate it. All this of course is not to say that pollution is not a problem. That just needs to be dealt with in a different context.'

Contact: **Kartik Shankar**, H-VI/2, Habib Complex, Durgabai Deshmukh Road, RA Puram, Chennai - 600028, Tamil Nadu. Tel: 044 - 4405407. Fax: 4934862. Email: kartikshanker@vsnl.net

Govt. to hand over land to Sahara for tourism project in Sundarbans

The West Bengal State government is reported to have agreed to hand over 750 acres of land at Sagar Islands, Fraserganj, L Plot and some other islands in the 24 Parganas to the Sahara Group for developing their 'eco-tourism' project in the Sundarbans. A MoU to this effect was recently signed between the Sahara group and the state tourism department.

The project is midway into the planning stage and is expected to be ready for its first batch of tourists in 2004. The Sahara Chairperson, did

however clarify, that this will depend on the government's ability to hand over the land along with the statutory approvals like those related to the coasts, forests and the environment.

It was further stated that the Sundarbans project will be part of the integrated tourism circuit that is being developed by Sahara. Tourists arriving in Mumbai will be taken to the Sahara project in Amby Valley near Lonavla and then flown to Kolkata for a trip to the Sunderbans before moving on North Bengal to the Teesta Valley. (Also see *PA Updates* 38, 33 and 30).

Source: 'Sahara to promote eco-tourism in the Sundarbans' *Times News Network*, 31/10/02

Court orders solar lighting for railway line through PAs in North Bengal

The Kolkata High Court has ordered the railways to install a solar lighting system along the railway track that runs from Siliguri to Alipurdoar in North Bengal and passes through the forests of the Buxa Tiger Reserve, Gorumara National Park and the Mahananda and Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuaries. In the last couple of years at least eight wild elephants have been killed in these forests by speeding trains (See *PA Updates* 36, 34, 32, & 29). This line, which is presently meter gauge, is being converted to broad gauge and there are fears this will lead to a greater number of accidents and deaths of wild animals, particularly elephants.

The WWF-I, West Bengal State Office had filed a writ petition in the Calcutta High Court in the matter. The court has suggested that solar-powered lights be installed at every bend. Elephants and other wild animals crossing the tracks at night are often run over by trains. It is believed that if the stretch is illuminated, drivers could see the animals on the track and halt in time. The court has further directed that the railway authorities should instruct drivers not to exceed the speed limit of 40 km. per hour while driving through the forest. While such measures, if enforced, might help, it has been suggested by experts that the ideal solution is to re-route the track to skirt the forests.

Source: Debasis Sarkar. 'WWF loses case against killer track conversion', *The Times of India*, 15/07/02
'Railroad through Mahananda to have solar lighting', www.sanctuaryaasia.com, 24/07/02

Contact: **WWF -I**, West Bengal State Office, 5th Floor, Tata Centre, 43, Jawaharlal Nehru Rd. Kolkata-700071, West Bengal. Tel: 033-2889530. Fax: 2883761.

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CWLW, Government of West Bengal, Vikas Bhawan, North Block, Salt Lake, Calcutta 700 091, West Bengal. Tel: 033-3346900/3583208. Fax: 3345946. Email: wildlife@cal.vsnl.net.in

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Status of wildlife cases handled by the CBI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which was appointed the nodal agency for handling wildlife cases in the country in January 2001 (see *PA Update* 30), has since 1997, booked only 13 wildlife cases, which were handed over to it by various agencies. All of these are still pending trial.

The CBI is faced with a lack of specialised manpower for tracking poachers and for intelligence work around the country. The reason for this is the fact that the wildlife unit is manned by a staff of 20 from the narcotics cell. In the absence of technical expertise, the CBI is forced to depend on advice from various NGOs and the Ministry of Environment on every issue. Specialised personnel with sensitivity to wildlife issues need to be recruited to take charge of the CBI's wildlife unit.

Further, a look at the New Delhi's Tis Hazari Court indicates the status of wildlife cases in the courts in the country. In Tis Hazari alone, 250 wildlife cases are pending before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tej Singh Kashyap, with judgements only once or twice a year.

Source: Ritu Sarin, 'Status of wildlife cases handled by the CBI', *Indian Express*, 13/07/02

Elephant sex ratio 'stable' in southern India

Preliminary data from an elephant census conducted in May in southern India (see *PA Update* 36) indicates a fairly stable sex ratio. Researchers from the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre (AERCC) of the Indian Institute of Science,

have said that a "stable population" of male Asiatic elephants has been recorded, especially in Karnataka.

The census covered Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and a complete analysis of the data is still pending. Researchers found male-female ratios varying from area to area, between 1:3, 1:26 and 1:45. Among the southern states, Karnataka has the highest population of elephants, followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Though the sex ratio data sounds encouraging, researchers caution that a census cannot predict just how close the elephant population is to the point of no return. They acknowledge that serious enforcement activity is required to guard against poaching coupled with measures to ensure the establishment of corridors to facilitate the natural movement of animals and help maintain stable populations.

Source: 'Elephant sex ratio 'stable' in southern India', www.sanctuaryasia.com, 08/08/02.

Contact: **AERCC**, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore-560012, Karnataka. Email: aercc@ces.iisc.ernet.in

SOUTH ASIA

Nepal, India to cooperate on transborder conservation

Nepal and India have initiated a joint effort towards transborder conservation, particularly in protected areas that straddle the international boundary. A consultative meeting of experts, government officials, park managers and foresters from the two countries was held in September in Kathmandu to establish a permanent network for this purpose. The three day meeting was facilitated by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and was a follow up to the preliminary discussions that were held in 1997 in Kathmandu and in 1999 in New Delhi.

Decisions taken at this meeting include among others, the setting up of a joint-transborder consultative committee to discuss the issues related to landscape conservation; a plan to hold quarterly field level meetings to ensure effective implementation of conservation plans and programs; and the creation of a database and a mechanism for information sharing.

The Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) has been identified by the WWF for a large tiger, rhino and elephant conservation initiative. This project will link

11 protected areas along the base of the Himalayas from Nepal's Royal Chitwan NP to the Corbett National Park in India. (Also see *PA Update* 34).

Source: Deepak Gajurel. 'Nepal, India cooperate on Transborder conservation', *Indian Express*, 11/10/02.

SRI LANKA

Elephant routes in Sri Lanka to be digitally mapped

The Sri Lanka Wildlife Department (SLWD) has initiated a project to digitally map elephant routes and areas recording high incidence of human-elephant conflicts. The maps will give instant information to elephant monitoring teams while furnishing valuable data for long-term strategies to curb recurrent conflicts. The Director, SLWD has said that given the 12 to 13 elephant deaths recorded per month (over 120 a year) in the country, it was essential to landscape areas frequented by elephants

The input for the maps have been obtained through research studies and surveys conducted by Dr. Devaka Weerakoon, Wildlife Department field staff, divisional secretariats and villages living in areas prone to human-elephant conflicts. The North Central region, Southern and Mahaweli areas which normally record a large number of conflicts will be mapped first. The first regional workshop to ascertain data on areas frequented by wild elephants and the problems posed to villages was held in April this year and several others will be held in the coming months to update the data.

The scheme is funded under the Asian Development Bank's Protected Area Management and Wildlife Conservation Project. An estimated 3,500 to 4,000 elephants live in the wild in Sri Lanka.

Source: Tharika Goonathilake. 'Sri Lanka Wildlife Dept to put elephants on the map', *Daily News*, 13/08/02.

OPPORTUNITIES

Field researchers needed for human-elephant conflict study in Nagarhole

Two field researchers are needed for a one year project to study the human-elephant conflict in

Nagarhole NP, in Karnataka. One researcher would study elephant movement and food availability in the forests. Candidates with an aptitude for wildlife research and some experience in wildlife studies would be preferred. The second researcher is needed to do a socio-economic study around the villages and understand the causes of the conflict. This researcher should have good knowledge of Kanadda Language.

Contact: **Prachi Mehta**, Envirosearch, B1\102, Nikash Lawns, 140/3, Sus Road, Pashan, Pune 411021, Maharashtra. Tel: 020-4007895 / 5897570. Fax: 5897570. Email: prachim@vsnl.com

UPCOMING

International Conference on Himalayan Biodiversity

An 'International Conference on Himalayan Biodiversity' is being organised in Nepal from December 10-13, 2002 in Kathmandu. Major topics that will be discussed include Himalayan Flora and Fauna, Biodiversity Conservation, Indigenous knowledge, Trade Related Property Rights and Ecotourism.

Contact: Email: hirinepal@yahoo.com
Website: <http://hirinepal.com>

Training course on Ecotourism in India

A training course on Ecotourism Planning, Development & Management in India is being held from November 25 to 29, 2002 at the Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun.

The topics to be covered include: Defining ecotourism for the Indian context, Defining an ecotourist, their motivations and expectations; Ecotourism Industry in India. Market and demand; International Conventions, Policies and Legislation; Status of ecotourism in different states and Innovations; Community Participation in Ecotourism; Technological advances and Sustainability; reducing the environmental and cultural impacts; Vision for the future and Strategies for the promotion of ecotourism.

The course fee per candidate is Rs 7,500 (including boarding and lodging charges) for Indian

Nationals, Rs. 15,000 for participants from SAARC countries and Rs 30000 for other foreign nationals.

Contact: **Shruti Sharma**, DCF, Non Wood Forest Products Division, Forest Research Institute P.O. New Forest, Dehradun - 248006, Uttarakhand Tel: 0135- 756847. Email: shruti@icfre.org;

Conservation Biology Course for senior undergraduate and postgraduate students

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment - Eastern Himalayan Programme (ATREE-EHP) is organising a Conservation Biology course for senior undergraduate and post graduate students from January 21 to February 4, 2003. The course will be held in Darjeeling and Guwahati for a period of one week each. It will provide students an opportunity to learn the basics of conservation science along with rigorous training in conservation biology as a separate discipline. Socio-economic issues will also be integrated into the training curricula to help young biologists to develop their skill in tackling practical issues related to conservation of biodiversity. It will focus on conservation issues at the regional level but with a global perspective.

The course fee is subsidized at Rs. 1000/ and includes boarding, lodging and course materials. Travel expenses of participants from their place of origin to Darjeeling and from Guwahati to their place of origin will have to be borne by the participants.

Contact: **Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar**, ATREE - EHP, Bungalow No. 2, Near Air Force Officers Enclave Bhujiapani, PO: Bagdogra, Darjeeling - 734422, West Bengal. Tel: 0353-550093 / Fax: 0353-551110. E-mail: atree@sancharnet.in

PA UPDATE MATTERS

PA Update now available on CD

All issues of the Protected Area Update, are now available on CD, priced at Rs. 150 (Please add Rs. 50 for postage and outstation cheque charges. Hard copy versions from Issue No 20 onwards are also available in a hardbound format for Rs. 150.

Contact: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**, at the editorial address

READERS RESPONSES

Zafar Futehally...

I read the latest issue of the *Protected Area Update* (No. 38, August 2002) with special interest because of the information it contains on eco-tourism in so many States. The emphasis seems to be on creating

facilities for the wealthy, and the natural environment is unlikely to be protected or enhanced through this strategy.

Contact: **Zafar Futehally**, Newsletter for Birdwatchers, No. 2205, Oakwood Apts, Jakasandra Layout, 3rd Bl, 8th Mainm Koramangala, Bangalore 560034, Karnataka. Email: zafarally@eth.net

Protected Area (PA) Update is produced every two months as a follow-up to the workshop on Exploring the Possibilities of Joint Protected Area Management (JPAM), organised at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi, in September 1994. We acknowledge the support of the **Foundation for Ecological Security** in the compiling and production of
PA Update 39

The issue has been prepared and edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria.

Ideas, comments, news and information may please be sent to the editorial address:

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