

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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EDITORIAL

Revisiting the tsunami

The 2nd anniversary of the tsunami of December 2004, one of the biggest disasters ever to hit this part of the world, is just around the corner. A lot has happened and continues to happen along those coasts that the tsunami struck. In this edition of the *PA Update* we have some interesting reports of some of the lesser known facets of this huge cataclysm.

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A study from the Yala National Park in Sri Lanka based on tracking of radio collared elephants reports that there was no behavioural reponse of the elephants there to the tsunami. Their activities and movements before, during and after the tsunami seemed to indicate no significant influence of the huge event unfolding close to where they were. This is significant, particularly in light of initial earlier reports from Tsunami affected areas like the Yala National Park and the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu that some wild animals did indeed sense the impending waves (see *PA Update* 53, February 2005). It might still be argued that this is not conclusive enough, but the point that needs to be underlined is that there can be no alternative to good science, and projects and studies of this kind need to be encouraged.



In the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, for instance, its now becoming clear that the earthquake caused as much damage as the tsunami it catalysed. Analysis by Dr. Roger Bilham of the University of Colarado in the United States of America (<http://www.andaman.org/mapstsunami/4local/4local.htm#anda>) shows us that the earthquake caused an average uplift of five feet in the Andaman Islands and caused extensive submergence of coastal lands in the Nicobars; ranging from five feet in Car Nicobar to fifteen feet in Great Nicobar Island, the closest to the epicenter of the earthquake.

The water that the huge waves brought in, therefore stayed back, permanently submerging settlements, horticultural plantations and hundreds of kilometers of low lying coastal forests. The implications and the consequences can only be imagined and surveys in the Nicobars, first by the Salim Ali

Centre for Ornithology and Nature and more recently by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) give us a sense of this. There has been a drastic fall in the population of coastal forest species like the endemic Nicobari Megapode, the Malayan Box Turtle and the Giant Robber Crab. The only one that we have some quantitative estimates of is the Nicobari Megapode. The WII study (see below) indicates that the population of the bird is now only about 30% of what it was a decade ago.

Such drastic changes are bound to have significant implications on the human communities as also the rehabilitation and reconstruction that is planned in the islands. It strikes as being particularly odd, then, that the island authorities have used the post tsunami opportunity to revive the old and repeatedly opposed proposal for a brand new transshipment port in the ecologically fragile island of Great Nicobar. A new Singapore or a Hong Kong is being dreamt of, when presently there isn't much clue on how to take the rehabilitation program to its complete and effective conclusion.

Existing priorities could certainly do with some tweaking!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Tsunami impact on wildlife, PAs in the Nicobars

A survey in the Nicobar Islands carried out by Dr. K Sivakumar of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the A&N Forest Department between March and May 2006 have revealed that the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004 has severely impacted the islands in general and protected areas here in particular. The report 'Wildlife and Tsunami – A rapid assessment on the impact of tsunami on the Nicobar megapode and other associated coastal species in the Nicobar group of Islands' was published recently.

The survey that was mainly undertaken to study the status of the endemic Nicobari Megapode covered 235 kms of the coastline of the Nicobars over the 15 islands of Great Nicobar, Little Nicobar, Kondul, Menchal, Pilo Milo, Treis,

Trax, Meroe, Nancowry, Camorta, Katchal, Tillangchang, Trinket, Teressa and Bompoka.

It was found out that the present megapode numbers were only 30% of the population reported in the earlier survey done more than a decade ago. Presently there are estimated to be 800 breeding pairs of the bird in the coastal zones of the Nicobar group of islands. The main cause of the fall in population is believed to be the huge loss of the bird's primary habitat of low lying coastal forest as it is now under water due to the subsidence caused by the earthquake. Other coastal forest dwelling species including the Giant Robber Crab, the Malayan Box Turtle and the Reticulated python too are reported to have been badly affected though there is no estimation of the numbers.

It was also reported that the small Megapode Island Sanctuary is now fully submerged under water.

The recommendations made by the study include: the need to rebuild the Forest Department infrastructure that was washed away in the tsunami; initiation of a conservation and awareness program in collaboration with the Tribal Captains and ensuring necessary steps to prevent new coconut plantations from coming up in the habitat of the megapodes as also the turtle nesting beaches.

The entire group of the Nicobar Islands is a Tribal Reserve under the provisions of the Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (ANPATR) - 1956.

Contact: **Dr. K Sivakumar**, WII, , PO Box 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun – 248001, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-2640111 – 15. Fax: 2640117 Email: ksivakumar@wii.gov.in

Port proposed adjoining Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve

The Andaman & Nicobar Administration is reported to be exploring the possibility of setting up a trans-shipment port in Great Nicobar Island as part of the post-tsunami port infrastructure building exercise.

Great Nicobar Island is the southern most in the Nicobar Group of islands. A substantial part of the island is included in the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve and there are two national parks, Galathea NP and the Campbell Bay NP located within it.

Proposals for this port have been made in the past on account of the strategic location of the island close to an important east-west international sea trade corridor. Concerns have however been expressed on the impact this will have on the endangered tropical flora and fauna that Great Nicobar is well known for. There are doubts on the economic feasibility of the project as well.

Nearly 48 port sites in the islands were ravaged by earthquake and tsunami of December 2004. The total loss incurred on account of damage to shipping and port infrastructure has been estimated at Rs 450 crore. The Central Government is reported to have approved a total grant of Rs 1,606 crore for repair and upgradation of ports in the next three years in the islands.

Currently, five port infrastructure projects are being undertaken in the islands on a turnkey basis. They include a dry dock in Port Blair and port extension work in Car Nicobar. The Dutch company Haskoning India Pvt Ltd has secured the contract to construct harbours in Teresa Island (Rs 36 crore) and Katchal Island (Rs 100 crore)

Source: Maitreyee Handique. 'India plans port at Great Nicobar', *Indian Express*, 06/09/06.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Papikonda proposed to become largest national park

Following the clearance granted by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), the matter of the Polavaram Dam was referred to the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) (*PA Update* Vol. XII, No. 4).

An estimated 1700 hectares of forests in the Papikonda Wildlife Sanctuary are to be submerged by the project and 24 of the 27 villages based in the sanctuary will have to be relocated. The CEC is reported to have suggested in its report that the remaining three villages should also be moved and an additional 200 – 300 sq. kms of forest that will become available be added to the Papikonda WLS and upgrade it to a national park.

The 591-sq km sanctuary is presently spread over three districts — Khammam, East Godavari and West Godavari and is located 50 km from Rajahmundry. It is known as one of the finest representative forests of the Eastern Ghats. If the proposals of the CEC are implemented it could become one of the largest national parks.

(Ed: There are two points that need clarification in this context.

- i) There are varying figures of the land of the Papikonda WLS to be submerged by the project. Figures reported range from 85 hectares (*PA Update* Vol XII, No. 1) to 1700 hectares as reported this time.
- ii) Details of the report and the CEC recommendations are also not available and it has not been possible to verify fully the contents of this report from the *Deccan Chronicle*)

Source: 'Papikonda to become largest national park', *Deccan Chronicle*, 08/08/06.

Contact: **Divisional Forest Officer**, Wildlife, Papikonda Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 0883-2478643. Fax: 0883-2476289

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ARUNACHAL PRADESH

New bird species discovered in Eaglenest WLS

A new species of bird, The Bugun Liocichla has been discovered in the Eaglenest WLS, by Dr. Ramana Athreya in partnership with Mr. Indi Glow of the Bugun tribe that lives on the periphery of the sanctuary.

A series of observations in 2005 and 2006 confirmed its taxonomic status as a species new to science. The last new species discovered in mainland India was in 1948, also in Arunachal Pradesh (Rusty-throated "Mishmi" Wren-Babbler). For more details check <http://www.indianbirds.in>

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ASSAM

18,640 hectares encroached in PAs in state

Statistics with the Forest Department in Assam indicate that a total of 18,640 hectares of forests in protected areas in the state is presently under encroachment. The details are as follows.

Name of PA	Total Area of PA(ha)	Area under encroachment(ha)
Burhachapori	4406	2850
Laokhowa	7013	400
Sonai Rupai	22000	1900
Nameri	21000	2100
Additions to Kaziranga	42900	7790
Manas	50000	1700
Barnadi	2622	600
Dibru Saikhowa	34000	300
Orang	7881	800
Pabitora	3880	200

Source: Prabal Das. 'Illegal encroachment on 18,640 hectares', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/09/06.

Elephants electrocuted in Sonai Rupai WLS

Two elephants, one male and one female, were electrocuted near Missamari Lama camp of the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary in the month of August. The pair was moving out from the sanctuary and electrocuted while trying to cross the fencing.

The electric wire fencing was erected by Sonitpur western wildlife division itself to protect wildlife habitat.

Source: 'Elephants killed by lightning', *The Telegraph*, 11/08/06.

Contact: **DFO, Sonai-Rupai WLS**, Sonitpur
West Division, P.O. Tezpur, Dist.
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220093(O), 220091®

Gibbon conservation day observed

The third Gibbon Conservation Day was observed on August 30. It was organized at the Nakachari College in Jorhat by the Education Forum of Nakachari College with the support of US Fish and Wildlife Service, Aaranyak, Hoolongapar Natures' Society, Primate Research Centre, the Zoology Department of Gauhati University, Gibbon Conservation Centre and the Assam Forest Department.

The first Gibbon Conservation Day had been observed at the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Jorhat in the year 2004.

Source: Gibbon Conservation Day observed',
The Assam Tribune, 12/09/06.

Contact: **Dr. Dilip Chetry**, Gibbon
Conservation Centre, Meleng, Mariani,
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Bodoland Forest Protection Force raised

The Department of Forests in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) has recently created the Bodoland Forest Protection Force (BFPF) involving local youths with initiatives of NGOs. During the 57th Vanmahotsava week celebrated at the Kachugaon forest inspection bungalow recently in the Kokrajhar district, 100 BFPF personnel were ceremonially given identity cards.

A total of 200 youth are to be recruited as part of the force, 100 of which have been recruited in Kokrajhar while 50 have already been posted at Manas National Park (MNP) to protect forest and wildlife and for taking up conservation activities.

A monthly remuneration of Rs 1500 will be given to each of these men along with an uniform, vehicles and other logistic support. The BTC authority is also going to

approach the Ministry of Home Affairs for the personnel to be used for the forest protection while on duty throughout the forest territory in BTAD. The recruited personnel have already received some training with AFPP of the Department of Forest.

It has also been reported that the newly formed force has already been effective. In one instance 2000 cft of forest wood was seized from illegal traders in the area. Additionally hundreds of bicycles of woodcutters and sellers of illegal forest timber and two Tata Mobile vans used by forest smugglers have been caught by this group

Source: 'Bodoland Forest Protection Force raised', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/08/06.

Contact Rajen Islary, Green Forest Conservation, Kachugaon, Kokrajhar – 783350, Assam. Email: rajenislari@yahoo.co.uk

Spurt in human-wild cat conflict in Upper Assam

Surveys conducted by Asif Ahmed Hazarika under the initiative of the Wild Survey North East in the seven districts of Upper Assam has revealed a significant spurt in case of conflict between humans and wild cats, both leopards and tigers.

The survey that was conducted across the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, North Lakhimpur and Sonitpur reported 22 such incidents in the three month period from November 2005 to January 2006.

15 of the 22 incidents involved leopards and a maximum of eight of these were from the Sivasagar district, including one in the Rajmai – Khoraghat Tea Estate near the Panidihing Bird Sanctuary. Of the others, three were reported from Dibrugarh district while there were two incidents in Jorhat district including one in the Sonowal Tea Estate in the vicinity of the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary.

The conflicts resulted in four leopard deaths – one was knocked down by a speeding vehicle at Kohora just outside the Kaziranga NP, one was crushed to death under a train at Mautgaon, the third was poisoned at Bonkumarpethar while the fourth was killed by villagers at Karunasagar Pathar. One person was killed at Khoraghat TE and humans were injured in four other incidents.

Seven incidents of tigers straying and resultant conflict were also reported as part of the survey. Four such incidents took place in Tinsukia district, two were reported from Sonitpur and one from North Lakhimpur. The incidents in Sonitpur were on the outskirts of the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park.

One of the major reasons increased conflict is said to be habitat shrinkage.

Source: 'Sivashish Thakur', Spurt in man-animal conflict in state, *The Assam Tribune*, 22/07/06.

Contact: **Asif Ahmed Hazarika**, WWF-India, Seujpur, 4th Bylane, PO Dibrugarh – 786001. Email: asifhaz@rediffmail.com

Fears over impact of drought on Kaziranga

Fears have been expressed that the drought like situation in Assam could lead to a food crisis for wild animals in the Kaziranga National Park. Animals could be forced out of the park in search of fodder making them susceptible to a range of threats and also an increase in human – animal conflict.

Park authorities are reported to have sought advice from the Assam government to find a way to avert the possible crisis. Measures being thought of include artificial irrigation to help the growth of short grass and clearing of the ponds that now have only dirty stagnant water and have also been choked by water hyacinth.

The Assam Government recently issued a notification declaring 22 of the state's 27 districts as undergoing a drought-like situation. The region has received only 787.5 mm of rain between June 1 and Aug 23 this year as against the expected average rainfall of 1,172.2 mm - a deficit of about 33 percent.

Source: Syed Zarir Hussain. 'Kaziranga animals in danger due to drought', <http://mail.yahoo.com> <http://www.dailyindia.com/show/55460.php>, 29/08/06.

Contact: **Director**, Kaziranga NP, PO Bokakhat, Dist. Golaghat – 785612, Assam. Tel: 03776-268095(O), 268086(R)

Workshop to inform Kaziranga fringe villages of compensation schemes

The NGO Nature's Beckon organized a workshop in the month of July to inform those in the fringe villages of the Kaziranga National Park of the Government Scheme for compensation to be paid for human tragedies caused by wild animals.

The State government had issued a circular in early 2004 (No. FRW.63/2003/10 of January 19, 2004) which provides the details. None of the villagers in the vicinity of Kaziranga however have benefited though there have been a number of cases of injury and loss of life.

Wild buffaloes, for instance, have maimed scores of people in villages like Sildubi, Kohora No. 2, Baghmari, Inglepathar, Haldhiguri, Moudhua, Dagaon, Bezgaon, Gukhanibor, Panbari, Bamungaon, Dhua-ati, and Sarugaon. There are also many cases of domestic livestock being attacked and killed by leopards and tigers.

It has been suggested that the prompt payment of compensation will ensure that villagers continue to remain tolerant to depredation by wildlife. The compensation money comes from the centrally sponsored Project Elephant program.

Source: 'Kaziranga fringe villagers live in fright of animals', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/08/06.

Encroachment fears around Kaziranga

There are reports of encroachments by suspected illegal immigrants from Bangladesh on government lands bordering the Kaziranga National Park (KNP). The issue has been taken up by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) who recently staged demonstrations demanding immediate eviction.

Forest Department and the KNP authorities maintain that the 430-sq km national park, together with the three subsequent additions (where settlement procedures have been completed), is free from encroachments. They have, however, expressed concern that population of unauthorized settlers of suspected origin is indeed growing in the proximity of the park. Occasionally these people have been caught fishing and collecting firewood inside the national park's precincts. They are also known to harbour poachers

Officials have also said that they were often unwilling to take 'tough action' even when they encountered the encroachers inside the national park because of the fear of reprisal, as they were a hostile and well-organized lot.

The KNP has so far had six additions to its original area of 430 sq km. However, only in the first addition (43.79 sq km - notification on May 28, 1997), the fourth addition (0.89 sq km - notification on January 1, 1985), and the sixth addition (3.76 sq km - notification on August 7, 1999), the land settlement procedure has been completed.

The other three additions - the second addition (6.47 sq km - notification on July 10, 1985), the third addition (0.69 sq km - notification on May 31, 1985), and the fifth addition (1.15 sq km - notification on June 13, 1985) - continue to be dogged by pending court cases relating to land dispute with the result that people have settled down in some of these areas.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Kaziranga encroachment creates concern', *The Assam Tribune*, 04/09/06.

Contact: **Director**, Kaziranga NP, see above.

Centre contradicts State claim of airport proposal near Kaziranga

The Union Civil Aviation Minister, Mr. Praful Patel has contradicted the proposal of the Assam State Government for the construction of an international airport near Kaziranga. The Assam CM and Forest and Tourism Minister had announced earlier that a Thai International Airline was keen to build the airport to promote tourism in the region (see *PA Update* Vol XII, No. 4).

Mr. Patel said that the Central Government had not heard of the international air operator's plan to set up an airport in the State, as his ministry had not been approached so far. He was responding to a question raised in the matter in the Rajya Sabha by the Congress MP, Syeda Anowara Taimur

Source: Centre contradicts state govt. claim', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/08/06.

Burachapori WLS placed under the Nagaon district

The Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary has been put under the authority of the Nagaon District administration. Earlier it was in the Sonitpur district. The decision was taken recently by the Forest Department at the initiative of Forest and Tourism Minister Rockybul Hussain, for the better management of the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary which is also in the Nagaon District.

It is hoped that the change will help deal with the poachers from Sonitpur district who come to Laokhowa by crossing the Brahmaputra through Burachapori for their poaching activities.

Source: 'Burhachapori GS to come under Nagaon dist.', *The Sentinel*, 15/08/06.

White winged wood duck sighted in Manas

In what is believed to be a significant sighting, five white winged wood ducks were recently spotted in the Manas National Park. This is the first time in many decades that the bird, which is the State Bird of Assam, has been seen outside of the Upper Assam region.

The bird was seen by noted conservationist Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury who was also able to photograph the bird.

Source: 'Rare duck species spotted at Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/08/06.

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Reports of timber smuggling from Manas TR

There are reports that organized gangs are indulging in large-scale tree felling in the forests of the Manas Tiger Reserve and ferrying them out

to nearby trading posts. Trees with a good market value such *bonsum*, *khokan*, *sida* and *titasopa* are in good demand. Illegal sawmills are also reported to have cropped up in parts of Barpeta district to process this timber.

The banks of the Beki River and the eastern side of the Panbari Range are said to be the most affected. Other reports also suggest that Indian nationals were entering Bhutan for felling of trees inside the Royal Manas National Park as well. The Bhutanese authorities have even written to their Indian counterparts referring to the problem.

Forest officials have suggested that they need to be given jurisdiction over adjoining regions where the timber is sawed to effectively deal with the problem. They also cite a shortage of field staff to undertake effective patrolling. At the field level the Manas National Park presently suffers from a shortage of about 129 personnel.

Source: Prabal Das. 'Field day for timber smugglers', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/08/06.

Chief Wildlife Warden – Assam, Rehabari, Guwahati – 781008, Assam. Tel: 0361-2566064. Fax 2547386

CHATTISGARH

Three new tiger reserves for state

The Central Government is reported to have accepted 'in principle' a Chhattisgarh government proposal to include three tiger habitats in the state under the aegis of Project Tiger conservation plan. These habitats are Achanakmar in Bilaspur district spread over 550 sq km, Sitanadi in Dhamtari district over 553 sq km and Udanti in Raipur district that stretches for 237 sq km.

State Forest Minister Mr. Brijmohan Agrawal said that the formalities would be completed soon following which the state government will issue a notification for inclusion of the three areas as Tiger Reserves.

The Minister also said that presently Achanakmar has over 12 tigers, Sitanadi has three while Udanti has eleven.



Source: 'Chattisgarh to get three Project Tiger Parks', IANS,
<http://www.teluguportal.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=12426>, 05/09/06.

HARYANA

Elephant breeding reported in Kalesar WLS

A herd of nine elephants, including two baby elephants, one of them newly born, was recently spotted in the Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary adjoining the Rajaji National Park. This is the first report of wild elephants breeding in Haryana.

The elephant herd is reported to have moved to Kalesar from Rajaji in the month of July and has continued to stay here.

A couple of elephants from the Rajaji National Park have been frequently visiting the Kalesar forests every year, but this is the first time of a long stay of a herd and of the birth as reported.

Source: Bipin Bhardwaj. 'Elephants breed in Kalesar park', *The Tribune*, 16/08/06.

Contact: **Inspector Wildlife**, Vill. Kalesar, Dist. Yamuna Nagar, C/o DFO (Terr.) Yamuna Nagar 01732 – 236214, Haryana.

Haryana SEZ threatens Sultanpur NP

The Reliance Industries (Mukesh Ambani group) Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Gurgaon-Jhajjar district being proposed jointly with the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) is expected to seriously impact the Sultanpur National Park.

This SEZ spread over 25,000 acres is billed to be the largest in India and includes plans to build a whole township with industries, an international cargo airport, residential areas, shopping malls, a power plant, a water treatment plant, entertainment parks and other areas which will be clearly marked out for floriculture and horticulture too.

The land to come under the SEZ is adjoining the Sultanpur NP. The map of the project shows a warehouse right behind the national park and the location of the cargo airport and entertainment park very close to it. Meanwhile the little railway station in Garhi village, has been expanded and a gauge conversion has also been

done. The Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway to be built by the HSIIDC to facilitate the movement of industrial goods is also coming up within two-three kilometres of the National Park.

Source: Nikhil Devasar. Email dated 22/08/06.
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HIMACHAL PRADESH

Notification to add 17.55 sq. kms to Majathal WLS withdrawn; NGO appeals to SC body

The Himachal Pradesh State Government has recently withdrawn a 2002 initial notification for the addition of 17.55 sq. kms of forest to the Majathal Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

The matter is related to the 1991 move when a significant part of the Darlaghat WLS was denotified to allow for a cement plant. The denotification had been allowed by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) on the condition that a new sanctuary would be set up in the state and an area of 20 sq. kms will be added to the Majathal WLS.

Accordingly, the state government had issued in 2002 an initial notification under Section 18 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA) for inclusion of 17.55 sq. kms in Majathal WLS. This notification was however withdrawn in December 2005.

This matter has recently been taken to the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust of India (BCTI). The BCTI has alleged that the notification was withdrawn to allow for another cement plant to come up in the area and action has been demanded against the officials concerned. They have also pointed out that the habitat of

a number of species of birds and animals including cheer pheasants, koklas, red jungle fowl, khaleej, Himalayan black bear, ghoral, and the leopard would be lost if the proposed area is not included within the sanctuary.

The trust has sought a reply as to why the 20 square kilometres were not added to the said sanctuary. Submission of an action taken report about the compliance of laid conditions and the area of forest land diverted to user agencies in the past along with the number of trees felled in the area have been sought.

Forest officials have said that the notification was withdrawn following a report submitted by the Deputy Commissioner, Solan, that local villagers had objected to the proposed expansion of the sanctuary.

The Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee is now reported to have sought clarifications from the state government in the matter.

Source: Ambika Sharma. 'Notification withdrawl by Forest Dept. 'illegal'', The Tribune, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060808/himachal.htm>

Contact: **DFO (Wildlife)** In Charge, Majathal WLS, Shimla Division, Talland, Shimla – 171001, Himachal Pradesh. Tel: 0177-223993

JAMMU & KASHMIR

'Project Snow Leopard' workshop in Leh

A two day national workshop on the implementation of Project Snow Leopard was held in Leh on July 11 & 12. The workshop was inaugurated by the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr A Raja and attended by forest experts from many mountainous states and representatives of the Nature Conservation Foundation and International Snow Leopard Trust.

The workshop came up with 13 recommendations for the project. These included a focus on creating a participatory process to involve local communities and the armed forces in conservation efforts. It also stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of state forest and wildlife departments to manage high altitude wildlife areas. Other recommendations were related to issues of research, monitoring,

conservation education and management of human-wildlife conflicts.

Source: 'Project Snow Leopard Workshop', *Ladags Melong*, August 2006

KARNATAKA

BJP opposes Greater Talacauvery NP

The Kodagu unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recently announced that it will oppose any move for the creation of the Greater Talacauvery National Park that is proposed to include the wildlife sanctuaries of Brahmagiri, Talacauvery and Pushpagiri.

They have expressed concern over the fact that the creation of the national park will lead to the displacement of the people presently living here. The party has also threatened to agitate and take to the streets if the plan was not withdrawn.

(Also See *PA Updates* 46 & 45)

Source: 'BJP opposes idea of Greater Talacauvery National Park', *The Hindu*, 11/07/06.

Karnataka 'Palace on Wheels' to include PAs



The Karnataka State Tourism Department is in the process of initiating its own 'Palace of Wheels' on lines similar to the very successful venture in Rajasthan. Manufacturing of the train is presently going on in the Indian Railway's Integral Coach Factory in Chennai. Work is expected to be completed by September 2007. The project cost has been pegged at Rs 32 crore.

The route will cover wildlife, heritage and beach tourism destinations. The seven-

day, 1,637-km round trip will commence at Bangalore and include Mysore, Hassan, Hospet, Hubli, Dandeli and Goa.

The 18 coach train will have a bar, ayurvedic massage parlour, gymnasium and a library. The wildlife destinations to be visited include Kabini, Dandeli and Devbagh.

Source: 'Train lure for tour', *The Telegraph*, 01/08/06.

750 acres of Bannerghata NP encroached by industrialists

The Joint Legislature Committee on Encroachments on Government Land of the Karnataka State Government has said that FD records indicate that nearly 750 acres of the Bannerghata National Park have been encroached upon by well known industrialists.

It was also noted that the encroachers had even been issued 'hakku patras' (possession certificates) and this made it evident that officials of both Forest and Revenue departments had facilitated the encroachments.

Source: '750 acres in their hands', *Deccan Herald*, 10/08/06.

Contact: **ACF (WL)**, Bannerghatta NP, Bangalore – 560083, Karnataka

Naxal strike in Kudremukh NP

A group of Naxals struck at the Lakebund Wildlife Unit office of the Kudremukh National Park in the last week of August and destroyed records and furniture and also set fire to a jeep. The total estimated loss was Rs. Two lakhs.

A group of 20 people were reported to have arrived at 1:30 am and destroyed the computer, wireless set, telephone and records in three cupboards, after sending out the staffers in the office. They also pasted bills spelling out their demands and ideology on the walls.

One of the reasons for the attack is said to be the fact that the forest unit had not given permission for Mescom to install electricity lines inside the forest. Forest officials had uprooted the installed poles.

Police have booked cases against 12 men and five women for obstructing work of government staff and destroying office equipment.

A total of six squads have been formed to trace the culprits.

Source: 'Naxals strike in Chikmagalur', *Deccan Herald*, 24/08/06.

Contact: **DCF**, Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka. Tel: 08258-221183(O), 221004(R). Fax: 08258-221183

Chief Wildlife Warden - Karnataka, 2nd Floor, 18th Cross, Malleshwaram, Bangalore – 560003, Karnataka. Tel: 080-3341993 / 3345846. Email: pccfwl@vsnl.com

KERALA

148 sq. kms buffer zone proposed for Silent Valley NP

The Kerala Forest Department has proposed the creation of a 148 sq. kms buffer zone around the Silent Valley National Park. The matter is under consideration of the State Government and a decision is expected soon.

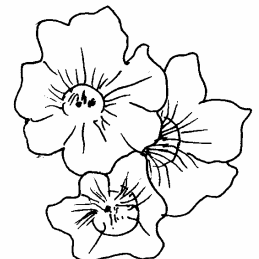
The buffer includes 107 sq km of forest of the Mannarkad forest division and 40 sq km of the Nilambur south division. (Also see *PA Update* 60)

Source: G Prabhakaran. '148 sq. kms buffer zone for Silent Valley soon', *The Hindu*, 24/07/06.

Proposal for Kurinji sanctuary

The Kerala Forest Department has proposed the setting up of a Kurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*) Sanctuary over 8000 hectares adjoining the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. The FD has said that this will be possible only if the State Revenue Department handed over the relevant lands. It was also pointed out that plantations and other legal holdings will not be included.

The areas proposed for inclusion in the sanctuary include Kambakallu and Kadavari which



are also notorious for ganja cultivation.

A *Kurinji* festival is also being organized at Munnar from October 2 to celebrate the flowering of the *Kurinji*.

Source: Roy Mathew. 'Kurinji festival to be held at Munnar from October 2', *The Hindu*

Sanction for tourism project adjoining Parambikulam WLS

The Kerala State Government has finally sanctioned a new tourism project at Mangalam dam adjoining the Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary. On the basis of the Government Order, the Irrigation Wing has give permissions to the District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) to implement the project in the reservoir and its surrounding areas.

The project had been proposed in the year 2000. The original estimated project cost of Rs.54.6 lakh is expected to escalate now on account of the delay that has occurred.

The project will come up over 13 acres of land under the irrigation wing at Kizhakkencherry village. The garden has an area of 10,3000 sq. m. The major attraction will be the introduction of houseboats and fibre boats in the reservoir. It will have a children's park, fountains, watch tower, Mandapam, and rain shelters.

Source: 'Tourism project at Mangalam Dam', *The Hindu*, 15/09/06.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Parambikulam Division, P.O. Thunacadavu (Via) Pollachi Dist. Palakkad-678661. Tel: 04253-267233

Plans for eco-tourism circuit including PAs

The Kerala Directorate of Eco-tourism has chalked out a tourism circuit linking Neyyar in the capital district with Nelliampathy in Palakkad. Straddling the southern stretch of the Western Ghats, the circuit is expected to cover at least 10 tourism spots in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Idukki and Palakkad districts. They include Neyyar, Ponnudi, Thenmala, Konni, Gavi, Thekkady, Munnar, Chinnar, Parambikulam and Nelliampathy.

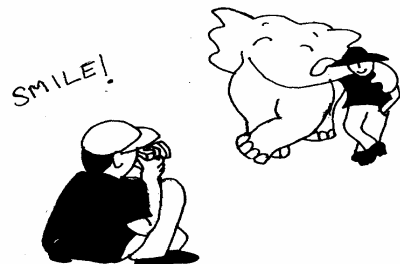
The Union Government is reported to have already given an initial approval for the project, which is estimated to cost Rs.10 crores. A

detailed project report too has been submitted. The circuit will be developed over a period of 18 months.

In the Neyyar wildlife sanctuary, facilities will be provided for education, foreign language interpretation and trekking. At Ponnudi, an eco-friendly tourism zone and a canopy walkway have been planned. An interpretation centre, fresh water aquarium and camping facilities will be set up at Thenmala and an elephant museum and other facilities are to come up at Konni.

Jungle camping will come up at Gavi in Pathanamthitta district and boating facilities, trekking programmes and a Kalagramam will come up in the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. Facilities for tourists along the Munnar-Top Station tourism road will be spruced up and the Lakkom falls too will be developed. Trekking trails will be introduced at the Chinnar WLS while there will be wildlife safari facilities at Parambikulam and jungle camping at the Chullannur peacock center.

Forest Development Agencies (FDA), a consortium of Eco Development Committees or Vana Samarakshana Samithies (VSS), will implement the project. The VSS will manage the facilities at these spots while Kerala Tourism will market the proposed circuit in fairs and festivals in the country and abroad. Packages ranging from seven to 21 days are being drawn to link up the spots that will be part of the circuit.



Source: S Anil Radhakrishnan. 'Southern eco-tourism circuit coming up', *The Hindu*

Anthrax scare in Periyar Tiger Reserve

The Periyar Tiger Reserve has been hit by an anthrax scare after preliminary tests on a dead elephant in September showed it had the

disease. Samples of the animal's blood were sent to the Centre for Infectious Diseases in Thiruvananthapuram for testing.

As a precautionary measure, the authorities have decided to vaccinate all cattle in the fringe areas of the reserve in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Checkposts had also been informed to stop any cattle without ear-tags from entering the reserve and a crisis management team had been formed.

Source: 'Anthrax scare in Periyar Tiger Reserve', *The Hindu*, 16/09/06.

Contact: Contact: **Field Director**, Periyar Tiger Reserve, Aranya Bhavan, Forest Complex, S.H. Mount P.O. Kottayam - 686006. Kerala. Tel: 0481-2562940(O) / 2560297(R). Fax: 2569217 / 2565740

Appeal to President in Mullaperiyar issue

A group of environmentalists has urged President Kalam to intervene in the issue of the Mullaperiyar Dam and persuade the Tamil Nadu Government to refrain from raising the water level. They have pointed out that the rise in the water level will endanger important habitats like grasslands in the Periyar Tiger Reserve and pose a grave threat to human life and property because the dam had surpassed its life span. They also expressed concern that the project was going ahead without undertaking of a comprehensive Environment Impact Assessment Study

The signatories of the appeal are: Dhrubajyothi Ghosh, Regional Vice-Chairman, IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management; Ashish Kothari, Co-Chairperson, IUCN Theme on Indigenous/Local Communities, Equity and Protected Areas; D.P.S. Verma, former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat; A.K. Ghosh, former Director, Zoological Survey of India; Varsha Mehta, Forestry Consultant; Arun Mani Dixit, Biodiversity Specialist, Centre for Environment and Social Concerns; R.S. Pathan, former Conservator of Forests, Gujarat; and S. Faizi, ecologist. (Also see *PA Updates* 60, 47, 40, 36, 34 & 30)

Source: 'Ecologists seek Kalam's intervention', *The Hindu*, 17/09/06.

MADHYA PRADESH

Kanha declared India's best tiger reserve



The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has declared the Kanha Tiger Reserve to be India's best tiger reserve. The Madhya Pradesh Minister Himmat Kothari also announced that the

Panna and Pench Tiger Reserves of the state had been adjudged as very good while the Bandhavgarh and Satpura Tiger Reserves have been categorised as good in the evaluation.

An evaluation of 28 tiger reserves of the country was carried out by the Central Government through the IUCN and was done on the basis of 45 international norms set by the World Commission on Protected Areas. Independent experts first undertook elaborate inspection and analysis of all the tiger reserves and this was then reviewed by the international experts of the IUCN. The report was tabled in the recently concluded monsoon session of Parliament

Out of total 185 points possible, Kanha secured the of 163 followed by Pench Tiger Reserve - 144, Panna - 135, Bori-Satpura - 128 and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve - 127. Kanha scored 100% marks on certain points like statutory status, arrangement of necessary staff, scientific management, tourist management, staff training, employees welfare activities, wildlife assessment, arrangement of patrolling camps, daily patrolling for security, arms registration, tourist facilities, ecological development, vaccination of the animals, participation of local communities in tourism and coordination between local people and the staff of tiger reserve.

Source: 'Kanha declared India's best tiger reserve', *Hindustan Times*, 05/09/06.

Contact: **Director**, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Mandla - 481661, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07642-250760(O), 250761(R). Fax: 251266, 250830

Eco-tourism bus to Sailana Sanctuary

The MP Forest Department launched an eco-tourism bus service from September 3 for tourists to visit the Sailana Florican Sanctuary and nearby tourists' spots in Ratlam district like the Sailana Cactus Garden and Kedareshwar Temple.

Fare for the 20-seat bus trip has been fixed at Rs 25 per passenger. Tourists would also be extended advance reservation facility at Divisional Forest Office, Sagod Road, Ratlam. A telescope was to be made available at Shikarwadi for the visitors to view the lesser florican in the grasslands here.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol XII, No. 4)

Source: 'Eco-tourism bus at Sailana sanctuary', *Central Chronicle*, 04/09/06.

Contact: **DFO**, Forest Department, Sagod Road Ratlam. Tel: 07412-235179

CWLW, MP, Van Bhawan, Tulsi Nagar, Bhopal 462003, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 0755-2557371/ 2550391.

ORISSA

Tiger population up in state

According to results of the latest census, the number of tigers in Orissa has gone up from 173 in 2002 to 192 tigers at the present. The PA wise number is as follows: Simlipal TR - 94, Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary - 32, Satkosia WLS - 11, Ghumsur area (including both north and south divisions) - 10, and Baliguda Reserve Forest under Kotagarh WLS - six.

Four tigers were also reported from the Kharia Reserve Forest, three from Rayagada and Boudh Reserve Forests, and five from the Hirakud Forests. Additionally, the Baripada, Jeypore, and Koraput areas reported two tigers each, three were found in Rairangpur, one in Balasore and seven in the Mahanadi area.

Of the total tigers counted, 57 were males, 75 females and 60 were cubs.

NGOs like the Orissa Wildlife Society have, however, expressed serious reservations about these numbers. It was pointed out, for instance, that Simlipal had 62 villages and yet there were no reports of killing of cattle or humans

by tigers and this was an indication that tiger numbers could not be as high as reported.

Park authorities, have in response, rejected the apprehensions saying that the forests of Simlipal had enough wild prey for the animals and there was no reason for tigers to attack either humans or cattle.

Source: 'Increase in tiger population in State, says survey', *The Pioneer*, 26/08/06.

Contact: **Director**, Simlipal Tiger Reserve, P.O. Baripada, Dist. Mayurbhanj - 757002, Orissa. Tel: 06792-252593(O), 252773(R) Fax: 256705

Biswajit Mohanty, Wildlife Society of Orissa, Shantikunj, Link Road, Cuttack - 753012, Orissa. Tel: 0671 - 334625.

Fax: 610980. Email:

biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in

Elephant population continues to decline

A recent survey of elephant populations in Orissa has revealed that there has been a significant decline in numbers if one looks at the last two decades. The elephant population that was 2044 in 1979 is now down to 1,639. Regular killings of the animal continue for the ivory trade. In the one year period from March 2005 to March 2006 at least 14 elephants were killed, the latest two being in the Chandaka and Satkosia forests.

The unchecked operation of elephant poachers and ivory traders is apparent from the recent seizure of 64 kgs of ivory at Jashpur in the Mayurbhanj district in December 2005 followed by a seizure of another 10 kgs in Jharsuguda in January 2006.

Significantly, most of the recent killings have occurred in protected areas. The selected targeting for ivory is also reported to be distorting the sex ratio. Records also indicate that poachers have managed to kill 214 adult elephants over the last 16 years by shooting or electrocuting them.

Professional elephant poaching gangs are active in almost all elephant habitat areas including Narsinghpur, Kapilas, Athmalik, Satkosia, Rairakhol, Boudh, Baisapalli, Simlipal, Keonjhar, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Lakhari valley and Kotagarh.

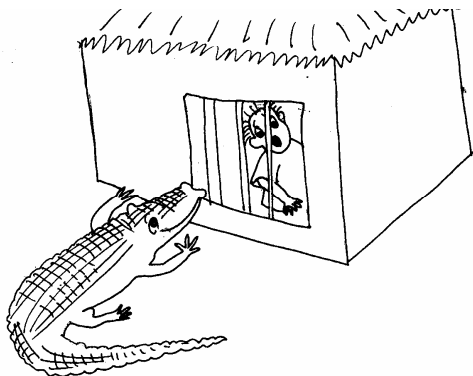
Source: Anurjay Dhal. 'Elephant count continues to decline', *The Pioneer*, 12/09/06.

Floods cause croc scare around Bhitarkanika

Heavy floods in Orissa have given rise to a scare regarding crocodiles in the flood affected coastal districts of Kendrapara and Jagatsingpur and particularly in areas in and around Bhitarkanika. Crocodiles were sighted even in areas where they are not seen regularly like in the Jajpur district

Forest officials have acknowledged that floods could have helped some of the crocodiles to sneak into rivers from the government run crocodile development centres like the one inside the Bhitarkanika sanctuary

The related problem of snake bites too was reported to have escalated. Reports of snakebite deaths were received from flood-affected areas almost every day and there were more than 10 snakebite deaths in the last week of August and early September alone.



Source: 'Flood-hit villages face croc scare', *Deccan Herald*, 03/09/06.

Contact: **DFO**, Bhitarkanika NP, At/PO Rajnagar, Dist. Kendrapada – 745225. Orissa. Tel: 06729-72460/64. Fax: 06727-20775

CWLW– Orissa, Plot No. 8, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751007, Orissa. Tel: 0674-2512502 / 2513134 / 2515840. Fax: 512502

RAJASTHAN

Increased security for Ranthambore NP

A new security system has been deployed at the Ranthambhore National Park to stop illegal grazing and poaching. This includes the creation

of a special information system that will allow immediate action in response to reports of grazing and poaching

Nine check posts manned by the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary (RAC) have been set up in different areas of the park in addition to the deployment of 40 homeguards and security guards. The guards have also been provided with helmets, shields and powerful torches.

Source: 'Security increased at national park', *Deccan Herald*, 08/08/06.

Contact: **Director**, Ranthambore TR, Sawai Madhopur – 322001, Rajasthan. Tel: 07462-220223 / 222004 / 221139 / 221142

Pilgrims prevented from entering Sariska TR; stage protests, ransack properties,

Over a 1000 people staged protests in the month of August when they were prevented from visiting religious sites inside the Sariska Tiger Reserve. They also ransacked a forest post, burnt some properties within the sanctuary, blocked a road and sat on indefinite dharna near the Tehla Gate of the sanctuary.

The devotees had been denied permission by forest officials on the ground that pedestrians are barred from entering the sanctuary. Devotees have been visiting these temples for long during the '*Bhadrapad*' month but the entry has been banned recently by the state government following the disappearance of the tiger from here.

A company of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary had been posted to restrict people's entry.

Source: 'Devotees state protests at Sariska Tiger Reserve', *The Hindu*, 25/08/06.

Contact: **Director**, Sariska Tiger Reserve, Sariska, Alwar – 301022, Rajasthan. Tel: 0144-241333 (O) **CWLW** Government of Rajasthan, Van Bhavan, Vaniki Path, JAIPUR - 302 005. Tel: 0141-2380832 / 2540531. Fax: 2380496/ 2380832

TAMIL NADU

FD to acquire *patta* lands in and around Mudumalai WLS

In an attempt to minimise human-animal conflicts and create adequate space for migrating wild elephants, the Forest Department has proposed to acquire some of the *patta* lands in and around Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and near Kallar in the Nilgiris. The State Forest Minister Mr M Selvaraj said that the conflict was more pronounced in patches of forestlands which are not under the complete control of the Department and that it was essential they be brought under the absolute ownership of the Forest Department through acquisition by the Government.

The Moyar elephant corridor is an important link between the Eastern and the Western Ghats and the FD has decided to acquire private *patta* lands in this region to the extent of 320.95 acres at a total cost of Rs. 181.45 lakhs

Another critical corridor is Kallar Jaccanari, adjacent to the Kotagiri Range of the Nilgiris North Forest Division and here too the FD has proposed to acquire about 76.984 acres for which Rs. 86.22 lakh would be needed. The Minister said that the Government had sanctioned Rs. 2.68 crore for the acquisition of these 398 acres of land.

Source: P Oppili. 'Forest department to acquire *patta* lands in Mudumalai', *The Hindu*, <http://www.hindu.com/2006/08/29/stories/2006082917830700.htm>

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Mudumalai WLS, Mahalingam Bldgs, Coonor Road, Udahagamandalam- 643001 Tamil Nadu. Tel: 0423-244098

Vaccination of cattle in forest fringe areas of Coimbatore Circle

The Coimbatore Circle of the Forest Department (FD) in association with the Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) has started vaccinating stray cattle in the fringe areas of the reserve forests in the region, including around protected areas like the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. The vaccination has been carried out to ensure that diseases like Anthrax and Foot & Mouth Disease

do not get transferred from domestic cattle to wild animals.

The AHD provided the vaccine, manpower and expertise, while the FD provided ground and logistical support.

A similar drive has also been planned in other divisions and protected areas including in the Nilgiris.

Source: VS Palaniappan. 'Forest department begins 'bio-fencing'', *The Hindu*, <http://www.hindu.com/2006/08/09/stories/2006080915510100.htm>

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Indira Gandhi WLS, 178, Fisheries Dept. Road, Govt. Timber Depot, Pollachi 642 001, Tamil Nadu. Tel: 04259 - 225356

WEST BENGAL

Aquatic survey in Mahananda and Gorumara

The Himalayan Nature and Adventure Foundation (HNAF) in association with the Forest Department has initiated surveys of the aquatic wealth in the Gorumara National Park and the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary. The plan includes the assessment of the quality of the water bodies in the PAs, status of indicator species of the aquatic eco-system, ascertaining the pollution level and have a status survey of the food chain dependent on the fish fauna.

Source: 'Fish count in sanctuaries', *The Telegraph*, 17/07/06.

Contact: **DFO**, Gorumara NP, Aranya Bhawan, Old Court Campus, Jubilee Park, Dist. Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Tel: 03561-224907(O), 222838(R). Fax: 03561-223563. Email: wild2@dte.vsnl.net.in

Tourist village near Gorumara NP

The West Bengal Forest Department is in the process of completing a project for a model eco-village in Ramsai Kalipur near the Gorumara National Park. To be named Gorumara Eco-village, it is likely to be opened to tourists in the first week of October. The foundation stone of the project had been laid in February.

Rs 24 lakh are to be spent on the project and the money has been taken from the Rs 28-crore central fund, sanctioned for the uplift of forest dwellers in the state.

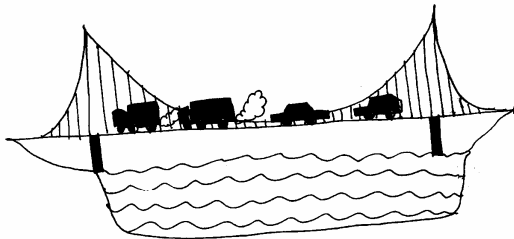
The project involves the setting up of four cottages on stilts and a few tents as accommodations for tourists. A watchtower is also to be constructed and plans for the future include the construction of tree houses.

Better amenities are also being provided to the villagers here. This includes the construction of new roads, repair of existing huts and provisions for bringing electricity and drinking water to every household. Local residents will be offered jobs and trained to act as guides in the project as well.

The site of the eco-village used to be a hideout for the cadres of the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO).

Source: 'Rural getaway near sanctuary', *The Telegraph*, 07/09/06.

Highway threat to East Kolkata Wetlands



Fears have been expressed about the implication on the East Kolkata Wetlands (a Ramsar site) of the four lane Expressway proposed from Barasat, headquarters of North 24 Parganas district to Raichak in South 24 Parganas. The Expressway is said to be part of the much-hyped deal signed earlier this year between the West Bengal CM Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and the Indonesian Salim Group for investments in infrastructure of upto Rs. 20,000 crores. Billed the 'New Kolkata International Development Project,' the deal includes expressways, bridges, special economic zones, industrial hubs and health and knowledge cities.

It is feared that the 85 kms long Expressway would go through the wetlands. State officials insist, however, that the proposed highway will skirt the wetland by two-three kms and no water bodies will be encroached upon.

They have further said that wherever the land contours are low there will be culverts and bridges, the waters will not be divided, and neither will the flow of wastewater from west to east be impeded. Officials of the State-run Institute of Wetland Management and Ecological Design have further clarified that there will be no heavy industry close to the road that will cause pollution and only information technology industries and housing projects will be allowed here.

A complete environmental impact assessment of the proposal is yet to be done and a proper plan for the expressway is expected soon.

Source: West Bengal's wetlands threatened', *Down to Earth*, http://www.downtoearth.org.in/Full6.asp?FolderName=20060915&FileName=news&sid=3&sec_id=4

294 cases of encroachment likely to regularized in East Kolkata Wetlands

The West Bengal State Government is mulling an amendment to the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955, which will allow the regularization of nearly 300 cases of encroachment in the East Kolkata Wetlands.

The move is said to have come in response to huge pressure from the builder's lobby and the regularization will happen only after "hefty fines" have been coughed up by the offenders. The government has said they will deal most strictly with offences relating to the wetlands and offenders will have to seek consent from the fisheries and environment departments. They might even be asked to create another water body for the one filled up. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XII, No. 4, Vol. XI, No. 4 and Nos. 40 & 24).

Source: 'Landfill legalized for fat fee', http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060912/asp/calcutta/story_6723636.asp

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

White rumped vultures found dead near Bethuadahari WLS

At least 10 Critically Endangered White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* were found dead in the Banguria forest near the Bethuadahari Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the Nadia district, some 90 kms. north of Kolkata.

Field studies in 2005 had estimated a resident population of around 35 birds in the Bethuadahari area. *Gyps bengalensis* numbers are critically low in West Bengal and estimates indicate the current population to be around 150-200 birds in the area.

Source: Sumit Sen. Email dated 18/08/06. Email: kolkatabird@yahoo.com

Steps to curb wild animal electrocution in North Bengal

The West Bengal Forest Department and the State Electricity Board (SEB) recently met to work out a solution to deal with the problem of wild animal deaths due to electrocution. The meeting was held at the Chapramari Forest Guest House and a decision was taken to work in close co-ordination the police, the panchayats, tea industry and non-government organisations in this effort.

The Central Electricity Authority, electrical inspectorate division had on 15 March 2002 issued a notice to all the chairpersons of SEBs advising them to liaise closely with the FD authorities to avoid usage of high voltage lines for killing wild animals. The notice had suggested the creation of a 'wild life protection against electrocution' cell that would have members from the SEB, forest department, NGO, police and any other individual or community that have a commitment to wild life protection.

To begin with, the forest department has identified five locations in North Bengal where such practices are used to ward off wild elephants. Five cells covering Kalabari, Gajaldoba, Nimti, Domohoni and Bandapani areas were created for administrative action and an awareness campaign against usage of electricity against wild life.

The Siliguri based Himalayan Nature and Adventure Foundation also participated and has supported this move of the government agencies.

Source: 'Bid to curb animal electrocution', *The Statesman*, 12/08/06.

Contact: **HNAF**, Nivedita Market, Hospital Road, Siliguri – 734401, West Bengal.
Tel: 0353 – 2430856. Fax: 2537609

Women in JFM in Buxa Tiger Reserve

Four women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) of the Khokla Eco-Development Committee have recently initiated an afforestation drive in the Rangamati 4th compartment of the Hamiltonganj Range in the Buxa Tiger Reserve - West Division.

The Hamilton Range is reported to have had good forest in the past but is now badly degraded. Detailed discussions were held between the members of the four SHGs in the area, the local panchayat members and beat officer of the Forest Range officer here. Following this plantation work was taken up over a 15 hectare plot in the area.

The work had been undertaken jointly by the FD and the SHGs and has so far included cleaning, burning, and sowing of seedlings. 10 members from each SHG (a total of 40) have been involved in the work and this has also helped them make a financial income.

Source: Letter from the W Bengal FD, 21/08/06.

Contact: **Deputy Field Director**, Buxa TR (West), Alipurduar Court, Jalpaiguri – 736122. Tel: 255129.

Field Director, Buxa Tiger Reserve, P.O. Alipurduar, Dist. Jalpaiguri - 736122. West Bengal. Tel: 03564-256333 /255979. Fax: 03564-255577

CWLW, 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

International Cosmos Prize for Dr. R Sukumar

Dr. Raman Sukumar of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of

Science, Bangalore, has been awarded the 2006 International Cosmos Prize in recognition of his research and academic achievements in the fields of ecology and conservation biology in the Western Ghats.

The International Cosmos Prize is an annual award presented by the Foundation to honour those who have, through their research, achieved excellence and are recognised as having contributed to a significant understanding of relationships among living organisms, the interdependence of life and the global environment, and the common nature integrating these inter-relationships.

Dr Sukumar is the 14th (and only Indian) recipient of the International Cosmos Award. He has been presented with a number of other prestigious awards, including the Order of the Golden Ark, the Netherlands (1997), the Whitely Gold Award for International Nature Conservation (2003), and the T N Khoshoo Memorial Award for Conservation (2004).

Source: <http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/137227/1>

Rs. 3260 lakhs provided to state governments and UTs for forest protection

The Union Government has provided financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 3260 lakhs to all the States and Union Territories for protection of forests from fires, illicit felling and strengthening of infrastructure to State Forest Departments. This has been provided under the centrally sponsored integrated forests protection scheme on cost sharing basis.

The state governments had requested a total for Rs. 15624 lakhs for this purpose.

The provision of the assistance is as follows: Gujarat was accorded Rs. 192 lakhs, Himachal Pradesh - Rs. 180 lakhs, Andhra Pradesh - Rs. 175 lakhs, Uttaranchal and Tamil Nadu - Rs. 150 lakhs each. Other states that have been allocated more than Rs. 100 lakhs are Bihar, Chattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Among the North-Eastern States, a total Rs. 1253 lakhs has been accorded and the highest amount of Rs. 274 lakhs went to Arunachal Pradesh.

Steps taken by the Government for protection of forests include administrative, legal,

management and financial measures. The network of protected areas has been established which include national parks, sanctuaries, Project Tiger, Project Elephant areas and Biosphere reserves.

The information was provided in the Rajya Sabha by Mr. Namo Narain Meena, Minister of State for Environment & Forests in a reply to a question raised by Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy.

Source:

<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=19720>

Request for articles on butterflies

The Butterfly Newsletter, *Indian Lepidoptera* has requested for articles on various aspects of butterflies.

These include Unexplored life cycles, new host plant records, courtship, puddling, basking, territorial behavior, feeding, ovipositing, mounting, observations on butterfly migration, checklists, about prey and predators, seasonality and flight periods, distribution, record of rare species supported with sufficient evidence, notes on butterfly gardens, conservation strategies, notes on people who are working on butterflies, comparative studies of our butterflies with butterflies of some other region, poems, stories, cartoons and sketches, photography related articles, and review of butterfly books/publications.

Contact: **Kishen Das**. #951, 6th cross, I Main, Srirampura II stage, Mysore-570023 Karnataka. Email: kishen.das@gxs.com

SOUTH ASIA

BHUTAN

Wildlife award for Bhutan king

Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has been conferred the 2006 J. Paul Getty Conservation Leadership Award in

recognition of “his leadership and deep concern for the environment.

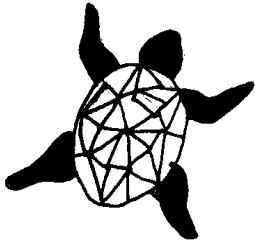
According to a statement issued by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the King’s efforts have resulted “in the establishment of government policies and laws that have substantial positive impact on conservation and help ensure environmental sustainability in Bhutan, and by example globally as well”.

The King was quoted to having said that the award belonged to the government and the people of Bhutan and not to any individual because all involved had worked together to achieve the goals of conservation.

Source: ‘Wildlife award for Bhutan King’, *The Statesman*, 20/08/06.

SRI LANKA

First marine turtle sanctuary at Rekawa



The Sri Lanka Government marked the Year of the Turtle 2006 by the official declaration of Sri Lanka’s first marine turtle sanctuary at Rekawa and also the initiation of a turtle

satellite tracking program here. The initiative has been taken up by the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC).

The sea turtle satellite tracking project aims to reveal for the first time the inter-nesting habitat, post-nesting migratory routes and foraging grounds of adult female green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) nesting in Sri Lanka. This will be achieved by attaching six Sirtrak satellite transmitters to the carapaces of the female green turtles shortly after they have nested at the Rekawa rookery in conjunction with the TCP’s flipper-tagging and genetic sampling studies.

The turtles will then be tracked via the Argos satellite system for an anticipated average of 10 months per animal. Through analysis of the data generated by the tags, the project hopes to provide a valuable insight into the ecology of Sri Lanka’s green turtles throughout their range and will be critical to understanding and addressing

potential local threats at sea as well as the impacts of incidental catch in regional high seas fisheries and coastal fisheries in other areas of their range.

The project involves collaborations between groups from 3 different continents and will also involve in-field training to DWLC officers, TCP officers and other interested parties so that they may continue the project into the future.

Once tagged, the real-time tracking maps of the turtles’ journeys will be available live at www.seaturtle.org/tracking to anyone with internet access around the world.

Source: Thushan Kapurusinghe. ‘Sri Lanka marks YoT with new marine sanctuary’, http://www.ioseaturtles.org/yot2006/feature_detail.php?id=138

No behavioral response of elephants to tsunami

A study of movement patterns of two (a juvenile male and an adult female) radio-collared wild elephants before, during, and after the December 2004 tsunami in the Yala National Park indicate that there was no behavioral response of the animals to the tsunami. There were news reports in the immediate after the disaster that the animals had been warned by a ‘sixth sense’ that helped them escape to safety (*PA Update* 53).

The elephants’ GPS-satellite collars recorded locations at four-hour intervals. The records revealed the following sequence of events. At 2:01 a.m. on December 26, the female was close to the seashore. The first tsunami waves reached Sri Lanka’s coast at around 9 a.m. local time. By 10:01 a.m. the female had moved 581 feet east, closer to the coast suggesting she was by the beach when the tsunami hit. After 10:01 a.m. she moved inland in a counterclockwise arc, returning to the beach by 2 a.m. on December 27. Movement distances ranged from 988 to 2,867 feet.

Further inland, the male elephant showed even less movement. Between 2 a.m. on day one and 2 a.m. the next day, his locations were less than 656 feet apart. The

movement of the individual animals approximates that of their respective herds and indicates that the animals were not forewarned.

Source: No behavioral response of elephants to tsunami,
http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/ConservationGIS/projects/asian_elephants/tsunami.cfm

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Ramsar Technical Reports series launched

The Ramsar Technical Report (RTR) series has recently been launched and is designed to publish, chiefly through electronic media, technical notes, reviews and reports on wetland ecology, conservation, wise use and management, as an enhanced information support service to Contracting Parties and the wider wetland community in support of implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

In particular, the series includes the detailed technical background reviews and reports prepared by the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at the request of Contracting Parties, which would previously have been made available in most instances only as "Information Papers" for a meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Ramsar Technical Reports are chiefly published in English in electronic (PDF) format. The first RTR report, 'Guidelines for the rapid assessment of inland, coastal and marine wetland biodiversity', was published jointly in May 2006 with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The second, 'Low-cost GIS software and data for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring', by John Lowry, is now ready, and a number of additional papers are presently in preparation. These are available from http://ramsar.org/lib/lib_rtr_index.htm.

Contact: **Dwight Peck**, Communications Officer, Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland. Email: peck@ramsar.org
Web: <http://ramsar.org>

UPCOMING

National Seminar on Wildlife Biodiversity Conservation

The Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University is organising a National Seminar on Wildlife Biodiversity Conservation from October 13 to 15.

The scientific themes under discussion during this seminar would mainly deal with finding out reasons and solutions of wildlife extinction and the need for their conservation, with case studies from different national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere reserves, with particular reference to Ecology and Conservation of rare and endangered animals.

Contact: **Prof Vikram Reddy**, Department of Ecology & Environmental Sciences, School of Life Sciences, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry – 605014. Tel: 0413-2655991-98 ext.485. M: 09443377987. Email: mallapureddymv@yahoo.com

Call for social science inputs at annual meet of Society for Conservation Biology (SCB)

The annual meeting of the SCB is being held in Port Elizabeth, South Africa from July 1-5, 2007. The theme for the meeting is One World, One Conservation, One Partnership'. The SCB's Social Science Working Group (SCWG) is seeking to use the opportunity to forge collaborations between social and natural scientists and between African and non-African social scientists interested in conservation issues that transcend location or case-specific application.

For those interested in participating formally there are three relevant deadlines:

- The call for proposals for symposia and workshops is now open, and closes on October 16. For submission criteria for symposia and workshops, please see

<http://compworx.isat.co.za/scb/callsym.htm> .

- The call for proposals for short courses closes on November 13. For more information, see <http://compworx.isat.co.za/scb/callcour.htm> .
- The call for individual abstracts opens on October 16 and closes on January 8. Check the following site for details: <http://compworx.isat.co.za/scb/dates.htm> .

OPPORTUNITIES

Gharial Conservation Coordinator

The Gharial Multi-Task Force, based at the Madras Crocodile Bank/Centre for Herpetology is looking for a Gharial Conservation Coordinator.

The candidate is expected to have five years of experience with conservation activities, coordination and facilitation of fund-raising, publicity/advocacy campaigns, public education, eco-development projects and the ability to do field work when required.

Contact: **Romulus Whitaker**, Gharial Multi-Task Force, Post Box 21, Chengalpattu, 603001, Tamil Nadu. Tel: 044 2742 0195. Email: serpentcatcher@yahoo.com

Position in Project on Canopy Science

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) is seeking a person for its project on epiphytes as part of its program on Canopy Science In India. This is a Department of Science funded project for 3 years.

Qualifications and other requirements: Candidates with M.Sc in Ecology/Forestry/ Wildlife Biology are eligible to apply for the position. He/she should be willing to spend several months during the first and 2nd year of the project in Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, South India collecting data. The candidate has scope to enroll in the Ph.D programme of ATREE.

Contact: **Dr. M.Soubadra Defy**, ATREE, No. 659, 5th A main, Hebbal, Bangalore - 560 024, India. Phone: 080-3530069 / 3533942 / 3638771. Fax: 3530070 Email: soubadra@atree.org Web: www.atree.org

READERS WRITE

There is nothing sacrosanct about the 1980 cut off date

With reference to the editorial 'Balance needed in the tribal bill discussion' (*PA Update* Vol. XII, No.4, August 2006), I would like to ask a few questions before we settle down on 1980 as a cut off date for settling tribal rights.

Has the rate of malnourishment among tribals decreased after 1980? Has infant mortality rate or anemia among tribal women come down? Did all tribals become landlords by 1980? Has there been no alienation of forest land after that? Is there any study suggesting that tribals occupying forest lands and eeking out a meager living from these cause more environmental damage than our modern life styles?

In today's scenario there is no work for the tribal except under the Employment Guarantee Act (EGA). This too is limited and often not paid for properly. Consequently, more than 50% of the tribal population migrates for work for six months of the year. The Public Distribution System (PDS) too is almost non functional and even in the new Below Poverty Line (BPL) survey most of the tribal families have been left out. In the plains too work during the harvesting season is decreasing with increased mechanization and there are now regular reports of starvation deaths among tribals, even during the monsoons.

As far as land holding is concerned many tribals have lost most of their lands to non tribal settlers in various ways. In any case most of the area occupied by them was either reserved by the British or alienated to Zamindars since they were unable to pay land revenue. This process of land alienation continued after independence and our development model has only aggravated it further. It needs to be noted that in many tribal areas up to 75% of land is Reserved Forest.

The case of Bori, the first to be declared as Reserved Forests by the British in

1862 is very illustrative. The forests that had the best teak in Asia were owned then by the Korku Chieftain Bhaboot Singh. He was hung by the British in 1861 and by 1864 the tribals who were living here were induced to move elsewhere. When the tribals of the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary filed their claims with the collector of Hoshangabad as a part of settlement of rights in 2000 they were told that all their rights had been settled in 1862 itself and their claims were not valid. The then (1862) Collector of Nasik, E N B. Erskine himself had noted that no Bhil or Koli had the capacity to give in his claims in writing. That being the case, is it correct to say that the rights of the tribals have lapsed?

Here is another more recent example. Starving tribals of the village Bathri in Chindwara district had settled on Reserved Forest land of the abandoned Bhandarpani Village in adjoining Betul district in the year 2000. Their houses were burnt down by the Forest Department in 2003. In 2004 the entire village was uprooted by Collector Betul and shifted to 'rehabilitation camps'. They were released and left to fend for themselves on the intervention of the High Court (HC). Later the HC also ordered for their rehabilitation but nothing was done. Even filing of a contempt petition did not lead to any action. They continued to live through the cold of winter by the river side in shanties made of plastic. A child also died during that period. Finally, in 2005, they were sent back to the reserved forests of Bhandarpani where they had been evicted from so brutally.

The situation in this part of Chindwara district is very bad. All facilities including transport or the health center are nearly 50 kms from tribal settlements. Though area is included under EGA, its operation is non-existent here. Their shifting cultivation practice has been discontinued and tribals here are starving and are forced to survive on mango kernel for many months. For them the forest guard in Khaki is the government. They have no other alternative but to settle on Reserved Forest in Betul district since all the land here is Reserve Forest. What should these tribals do? Should they be told that they have no right to survive after 1980? Incidentally, more than 14000 hectares of forest in this area was denotified not very long ago for the resettlement of Bangladeshi refugees.

Many tribals who have lost their land and resources in dams, mines and many such projects have never been rehabilitated. Many settled themselves on forest land much after 1980 and this process is still continuing.

Tawa dam and the ammunition testing range built in the 70s in the Kesla Block of Hoshangabad district are other classic examples. The tribals here now survive by collecting and selling the shell remains of exploded bombs from the firing range. It is a great irony that what they are doing for survival has become one of the major reasons of death among them. The village of Chindapani that was displaced by the testing range is now known as the 'Village of Widows' because most of the male members have died while collecting these used shells. Fed up with this situation, some of these people may have occupied some forest land after 1980. Now should they also be thrown out and left to scavenge for scrap metal from bomb shells?

I would also like to know how many environmentalists have stopped using modern gadgets which are destructive to environment after 1980? How many have stopped using air conditioners, traveling by flights or have stopped using computers?

We must realize that forests and tribals are inseparable. People living in cities do not realize that there are tribals around forests and vice-a-versa. Tribals can only make their living through forests.

My only submission is that there is nothing sacrosanct about the 1980 cut off date. We have to take a practical view. I think we must organise a "Face to Face with Tribals" and only then will we know the real picture.

- **Anurag Modi**, Shramik Adivasi Sangathan C/o Shirinbhai, Near Bohra Masjid, Kothi Bazar, Dist Betul 460 001 Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07141-233971. Email: sasbetul@yahoo.com

Thanks to the PA Update

Thank you very much for regularly sending us the *Protected Area Update* which is very helpful in keeping in touch.

We used one of the recent issues with the vulture reference to get the State Animal Husbandry Department to ban Diclofenac use for veterinary use through a government notification. Sikkim seems to be the first state in the country to do so and thanks to the *PA Update* for that.

- **Usha Ganguli-Lachungpa, Sr.**
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