

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

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LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Lessons from a tsunami

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Andhra Pradesh

Blackbuck to be trapped in Rollapadu WLS
Wildlife census results from Pocharam WLS

Assam

MoEF asked to tackle problem of encroachments
in Kaziranga additions

Pit-poaching of rhinos in Kaziranga

Large number of leopard deaths near Gibbon
Wildlife Sanctuary

State to set up elephant task force

Human-elephant conflict in Upper Assam

Gujarat

3000 tribal families to be evicted from forests,
protected areas

Funds raised for wildlife education centre in Gir

Himachal Pradesh

Fisheries Dept. blames migratory birds for fall in
fish population in Pong Dam

Call to remove encroachments from Kalatop-
Khajjiar

Karnataka

FD scheme for buy back of land from Shettihalli
WLS opposed

Concerns expressed about plan to promote
tourism in Bandipur

Madhya Pradesh

Efforts to promote tourism in Kanha and
Bandavgarh NPs

Proposals to declare Ratapani WLS and Sanjay
NP as Tiger Reserves

2	SC notice to Reliance for laying cables in Madhav NP	
	<u>Maharashtra</u>	7
	Sahyadri Tiger Reserve proposed; to include Chandoli NP and Koyna WLS	
3	Scat and transect survey training in Melghat	
	<u>Meghalaya</u>	8
3	Garos version of elephant manual released	
	<u>Orissa</u>	8
	Dead olive ridley turtles being washed ashore on Orissa's beaches	
	Orissa fisherfolk demand implementation of Orissa Marine Fisheries Regulation Act	
	Helipad in Bhitarkanika for visit of Vice- President	
	Orissa to involve SHGs for wildlife protection	
	CEC says no to port adjoining Bhitarkanika and Gahirmatha	
	<u>Punjab</u>	10
	Hyacinth covers 35% of Harike	
	<u>Rajasthan</u>	10
	First Annual Research Seminar on Keoladeo National Park held	
	27 new species of nematodes discovered in Keoladeo National Park	
	<u>Tamil Nadu</u>	11
	Animals in Point Calimere WLS responded 10 minutes before tsunami struck	
	<u>Uttaranchal</u>	11
	Elephants create panic near Rajaji NP	
	Uttaranchal forest guards go on strike	
	<u>West Bengal</u>	12
	Elephants from Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram move to Buxa	

Special new year festival planned at Jaldapara for tourists
2nd meeting of the State Wildlife Board

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA 13

Sanctuary - ABN Amro Wildlife Awards
Seminar held on human-wildlife conflict
Workshop on Community Based Tourism in Western Himalayas
Project Elephant - An update
Nominations invited for 'Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad Conservation Award'

Request for information on butterfly migration
MoEF proposes National Wildlife Crime Cell

INTERNATIONAL NEWS 15

Tsunami Affects Turtle Conservation Programs in Indian Ocean region
Society for Conservation Biology Distinguished Service Awards

University Of Florida researchers report new subspecies of tiger

UPCOMING 17

Conference on 'Biodiversity Conservation in Asia: Current Status and Future Perspectives'

WHAT'S AVAILABLE 17

- Linking conservation with Livelihood: Lessons from Management of Gir-Protected Area in Western India

READER'S RESPOND 17

IN THE Supreme Court 18

EDITORIAL

LESSONS FROM A TSUNAMI

It is one of the worst natural disasters to have ever occurred. Waves that followed the December 26 earthquake off the Sumatra coast, crashed into unprepared and unsuspecting coastlines all around the Bay of Bengal. As newspaper and television reports have informed us, the death and devastation has been unprecedented; nearly 250000 people have died, millions have been rendered homeless and without their means and sources of sustenance and livelihood.

As we enter the second month since the disaster, the focus is now clearly on the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation. While this has to be done as quickly as possible so that the affected people can restart their devastated lives, its important that environmental and social concerns are kept upper most in mind. Coastal reconstruction and even conservation needs to focus on participatory processes, to enable effective action against destructive development and also enable livelihood security. Only this will ensure that the process will be meaningful and sustainable from a long term point of view.

In the meanwhile, two other broad issues have also clearly come up. One is regarding the need of a warning and communication system that will help vulnerable people respond to a similar situation if it comes up again. The second is related to environmental and ecological issues along the coast.

Natural coastal protection provided by mangroves, beaches and coral reefs has come pretty much centre stage in the entire debate and discussion. While it is clear that this natural protection could not have 'stopped' the waves, its now commonly agreed, that they can certainly reduce the impact.

There are already reports from parts of Thailand that areas in which construction and the tourism industry has taken over the coastline, the impact and destruction caused has been substantial. Sri-Lanka is said to be considering the creation of a 300 metres no development zone from the high tide line, in a formulation similar to our own Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification. In India too, many states have indicated that they will work towards strengthening natural protection to the coast. What environmentalists and many working with fisherfolk communities have been demanding for many years without success, the tsunami of December 26 has achieved in a few minutes. It has been a heavy price to pay, but even now if intentions actually materialise along the coast, it would be worth it.

There also aberrations of sorts that are becoming visible. In the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, within a week of the disaster, the administration moved the Supreme Court

requesting the relaxation of its May 2002 orders that were aimed at protecting the fragile environment of this island chain. One of the requests was to allow for sand mining from the beaches for the reconstruction process. While the entire nation has been asking and promising protection of natural protection, it is ironic that the most vulnerable, and hardest hit A&N Islands have asked for the reverse. In Tamil Nadu too, initial reports indicate that the state wants to construct a sea wall along the entire coast. While its not clear if the coast and those living there will benefit, one set of people that certainly would, are the contractors and the cement industry.

Also in the context of the tsunamis, there have been some interesting discussions and pieces of information about the responses from wild animals. Reports from the Yala National Park in Sri Lanka have indicated that animals in the park may have sensed what was coming and as a result there were almost no casualties reported amongst them. Similar observations were made at the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu as well (see detailed story below). While it might be difficult to yet conclusively prove or explain what these responses were, or how they came about, an effort should certainly be made to see if the high-tech early warning systems could be complemented with systematic observations of animal behaviour also to get some early signals.

In any case, in some matters at least, it seems the wild denizens of this planet are still one up on their human counterparts.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Blackbuck to be trapped in Rollapadu WLS

The Andhra Pradesh FD has launched 'Operation Blackbuck' to trap blackbuck in Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Kurnool district as they have become a serious problem for farmers in the region. While the estimated population inside the sanctuary is 1000 animals, villagers say that the

total population in the 10 mandals in this region is in the range of 10,000-20,000.

Wildlife officials here have said that the problem has been caused because large tracts of marginal lands have been turned into farm lands over the years, attracting blackbuck and supporting the growth in their population too. About 140 blackbuck were captured in this region in 2004 and were translocated to the Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve. Experts and officials are however, not sure that that more blackbuck could be further moved here.

Source: K Srimali & K Veerabhadra Rao. 'AP to trap blackbucks to restrict their numbers', *The Times of India*, 09/01/05.

Wildlife census results from Pocharam WLS

A two day wildlife census in the Pocharam WLS conducted in December has indicated a good number of wild animals including deer and wild buffalo. The census revealed the presence of over 100 deer, 8 sambhar and 12 wild buffaloes.

Forest Department officials have expressed satisfaction considering that these numbers were reported in face of the fourth consecutive year of drought in the region. The department had made a concerted effort to fill up water holes with the help of borewells and this had helped animals tide over the crisis periods.

The census however, also reported that the number of peacocks had fallen, primarily because of large scale poaching here.

Source: 'Wild animals survive drought in Pocharam Sanctuary', <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/12/12/stories/2004121205220300.htm>, 12/12/04.

Contact: PCCF (WL), Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, Aranya Bhavan, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

ASSAM

MoEF asked to tackle problem of encroachments in Kaziranga additions

Responding to a petition filed by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) in 2003 (see

PA Update 45 & 36), the Central Empowered Committee asked the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to look into encroachments in the six additions to Kaziranga National Park (KNP). The directions were passed in December 2004.

The government has over the years notified six Additions to the KNP, partly to compensate loss of parts of the park to erosion and (see PA Update 45, 34 & 29) also to serve as corridors for animals to higher ground during the annual floods. The future of the additions is uncertain due to continuous litigation in the Guwahati High Court by cattle grazers and settlers.

Mr. ADN Rao, counsel for the MoEF stated that he had received permission from the MoEF to proceed with the filing of Special Leave Petitions to settle the issue. These will be filed in the first week of January 2005.

Further details are not presently available.

Source: 'MoEF to Tackle Encroachments in Additions to Kaziranga', Email by WPSI to nathist, 22/12/04.

Contact: **WPSI**, M-52, G K I, New Delhi 110 048.

Tel: 011 - 26213864/2629.2492. Fax:

26464918 Email: wpsi@vsnl.com

Director, Kaziranga NP, PO Bokakhat, Dist. Golaghat – 785612, Assam.

Large number of leopard deaths near Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary

13 leopards have been found dead in the vicinity of the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in the last three years. The deaths have occurred mostly at Kakojan, Meleng and Kathalguri, areas.

It has been suggested that many of the deaths are because the animals are poisoned by the labourers who work in tea gardens that surround the wildlife sanctuary. There have also been reports of leopards attacking domestic cattle and the tea garden labour in the region.

According to the 1992 census, 10 leopards were found inside the sanctuary. In August 2004, the carcass of a full-grown leopard was recovered from Chenijan tea estate on the outskirts of Jorhat town. In 2003, three leopard

carcasses were recovered within 10 days in the Kakojan area alone. The most recent death was reported in early December 2004.

Source: 'Big cat deaths raise concern', *The Telegraph*, 10/12/04.

Pit-poaching of rhinos in Kaziranga

There are reports that poachers in and around Kaziranga National Park (KNP) are now using the pit-poaching method for trapping rhinos as opposed to gun shots and electrocution. The method which involves the making of a hole/pit for trapping the rhinos is being used in places like Bagori, Khutori, Baghmori, and Harmoti.

An elephant calf recently fell into such a trap, and sustained injuries.

Source: 'Rhino poachers resort to pit-poaching', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/12/04

State to set up elephant task force

The Assam Government has proposed the setting up of a taskforce to suggest ways to preserve elephant habitat and reduce conflict. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the state wildlife advisory board that was chaired by Chief Minister Mr. Tarun Gogoi.

The CM said the taskforce would survey the elephants in the wild and suggest measures on translocating them to areas, which are sparsely populated. He also said that the state government would seek the permission of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to capture wild elephants and send them outside the state. Assam, reportedly, already has permission from the Centre for the capture of 25 elephants from the wild.

Assam, presently, has over 5,500 wild elephants and about 1,200 domestic elephants. The meeting which was attended by wildlife experts, conservationists and senior forest officials from the state government and the Centre, concluded that the shrinking elephant habitat should be viewed seriously and encroachment of the areas should be avoided to prevent loss of lives.

Source: 'Gogoi mulls taskforce for elephants', *The Telegraph*, 26/11/04.

Human-elephant conflict in Upper Assam

Villages in the four Upper Assam forest divisions in Dibrugarh, Digboi, Doomdooma and Jorhat are reported to be experiencing serious problems with wild elephants destroying large areas of standing paddy. Forest Department officials attribute the problem to an acute shortage of food in the forests since the last wave of floods, which destroyed all food sources of the elephants in the wild. As a result they are now said to be turning to the paddy fields.

There were unconfirmed reports that residents of some villages in the area were planning to poison the elephants to deal with the problem. The old method of bursting crackers or lighting torches at night, appear to have stopped working and the trenches dug by the forest department are of no use either.

These four forest divisions of Upper Assam had received financial aid in the year 2000 from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for implementation of projects to reduce the man-elephant conflict. The funds were meant for the installation of "electric fencing", but this is yet to begin. Senior forest officials have however said that the work would commence soon.

Source: Ripunjoy Das. 'Jumbo menace after flood fury- Elephant-man conflict rears its head again in villages near Assam forests', *The Telegraph*, 26/11/04.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden** – Assam, Rehabari, Guwahati – 781008, Assam.

GUJARAT

3000 tribal families to be evicted from forests, protected areas

A process is reportedly on as a consequence of which nearly 3000 tribal families will be evicted from forests, primarily protected areas, in Gujarat. These include the wildlife sanctuaries of Balaram Ambaji, Shoolpaneshwar, Jessore, Ratanmahal and Jambughoda.

A resolution of the Forest Department dated January 8, 2004 (Sr. No. WLP. 102003-IBR-18-G1-816) has listed 2859 tribal families that need to be relocated in the six districts of Banaskantha, Dahod, Narmada, Panchmahals, Vadodara and Junagadh. The GR states that the rehabilitation package of 200 sq. mts. and two hectare of agricultural land is being suggested for the farmers, depending on the number of family members and cattle.

Source: Paul John. '3000 tribal families to be evicted from wildlife sanctuaries', *The Times of India*, 29/11/04.

Funds raised for wildlife education centre in Gir

Over 25,000 Pounds Sterling were raised at a charity extravaganza held in London in November for the 'Vanishing Herds Foundation' and the setting up a wildlife education and protection centre in Gir.

The event was organised by Kenyan born Harshad Patel who has planned to raise one million pounds sterling for the initiative that is his brainchild.

The charity event was attended by a number of celebrities in London, including Virginia Mckenna of the award winning film *Born Free* and novelist Jeffrey Archer.

Source: 'Funds raised for wildlife education centre in Gir', *Indian Express*, 17/11/04.

Contact: CF (Wildlife) Junagadh, Sardar Baug, Junagadh, Gujarat. Tel: 0285 - 631678/630051. Fax: 631211.

Chief Wildlife Warden - Gujarat, Block 14, Dr. Jivraj Mehta Bhavan, Old Sachivalaya, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Tel: 02712-30007. Fax: 21097.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Fisheries Dept. blames migratory birds for fall in fish population in Pong Dam

The Fisheries Department in Himachal Pradesh has blamed the migratory waterfowl, cormorants

in particular, visiting the Pong Dam reservoir for the drastic fall in fish populations here. The Department has said that fish production from the reservoir had fallen from 797 tonnes per annum in 1998 to the present figure of only 300 tonnes. Nearly 3000 families who depend on this resource for their livelihood have been affected.

The Wildlife Department has denied this saying that though the number of migratory birds here may have increased, numbers of birds like the cormorants have actually fallen, and therefore the fall in fish populations is not due to the birds. The number of cormorants counted here in 2000-01 was about 27,000 but this number is said to have dipped to nearly half in 2003-04.

The solution according to the Fisheries Department is the formulation of a project wherein the Wildlife Department participates in adding more fish seeds to the dam for consumption by the birds.

Source: Vibhor Madan. 'Migratory birds behind fall in fish population?', *Tribune*, 22/11/04.

Call to remove encroachments from Kalatop-Khajjiar

The Himachal Pradesh Education Minister Asha Kumari has recently directed the state wildlife authorities to remove illegal and unwarranted constructions and encroachments which are fast mushrooming inside the Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary in the state's Chamba district (see *PA Update* 41).

One of the main issues of concern is the coming up of concrete constructions on individual private lands inside the sanctuary area in violation of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Source: 'Remove encroachments, officials told', <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/11/25/stories/2004112506130300.htm>, 25/11/04.

KARNATAKA

FD scheme for buy back of land from Shettihalli WLS opposed

The Shantaveri Gowda Samajwadi Adhyayana Kendra Trust has opposed the 'buy back' scheme
Protected Area Update 53

being implemented by the Wildlife Division of the Forest Department in 68 villages under the jurisdiction of the Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary. They have termed the scheme as an attempt to evict the cultivators, farm labour and those engaged in *bagair hukum* cultivation.

The scheme offers to buy back the land from the villagers at market price and if they refuse to sell the land voluntarily, basic amenities such as electricity and water are cut off.

Source: 'Forest Dept's scheme opposed', *The Hindu*, 17/12/04.

Concerns expressed about plan to promote tourism in Bandipur

A proposal of the Karnataka Government to develop Bandipur as a tourist destination is being treated with caution as the national park is facing problems of plenty with regard to tourists. An amount of Rs. Five crores is likely to be earmarked to develop the national park as a major tourist destination.

Conservationists and a section of the FD have opposed the proposal as, according to them, the national park received more tourists than it could handle. While more than 55,000 tourists visited Bandipur during 2000-01, the number went up to 68,000 in 2001-02. Over the years, the average inflow of tourists to Bandipur has been constantly above 50,000 per annum.

A few years ago, the authorities had increased the entry fee and accommodation rates at Bandipur to curb the increase in the tourist flow so that the casual visitors could be kept at bay. Yet there has been no decline in the number of tourists visiting here.

Source: R Krishna Kumar. 'Activists sceptical about package for Bandipur', <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/11/30/stories/2004113002200300.htm>, 30/11/04.

Contact: **Deputy Director**, Bandipur National Park, Gundlupet, Chamrajnagar 571 111.
Chief Wildlife Warden - Karnataka, 2nd Floor, 18th Cross, Malleshwaram, Bangalore – 560003, Karnataka. Tel: 080-3341993 / 3345846. Email: pccfwl@vsnl.com

MADHYA PRADESH

Efforts to promote tourism in Kanha and Bandavgarh NPs

The Madhya Pradesh Government has initiated talks with a number of private airlines to get more air traffic to Jabalpur which is the gateway to the Kanha and Bandavgarh National Parks. Additionally road shows are also being planned across the country to increase tourism in the state.

Source: 'Road shows for MP tourism', *The Hindu Business Line*, 06/12/04.

Proposals to declare Ratapani WLS and Sanjay NP as Tiger Reserves

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has proposed the declaration of the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary and the Sanjay National Park as tiger reserves. The proposal for Ratapani has already been sent to the Central Government.

As per a survey conducted in 2003, Ratapani WLS has 22 tigers and 26 leopards. The sanctuary is also said to have good populations of bear, wild dog, sambhar and spotted deer. The Forest Department has highlighted the illegal grazing of nearly 20000 cattle in the park as one of the major threats to the sanctuary. The FD is hoping that inclusion under Project Tiger would mean allocation of additional funds, part of which they want to use for the relocation of villages from inside the sanctuary.

As far as the Sanjay National Park is concerned, the present tiger population is said to be six, whereas in 1992 it was reported to be 35. It is proposed that inclusion under Project Tiger would help the FD to once again ensure that tiger numbers in the park go up.

Source: Rohit Bhan. 'Project Tiger: MP needs more space', *Indian Express*, 29/11/04.

SC notice to Reliance for laying cables in Madhav NP

The Supreme Court in November, 2004 issued a notice to the Reliance Telecom Ltd. (RTL) on a public interest litigation seeking a direction to the *Protected Area Update 53*

company to deposit Rs. One crore with the Compensatory Afforestation Fund for laying optical fibre cables in the Madhav NP.

The permission to allow RTL was taken by the earlier Digvijay Singh State Government on the grounds that it would strengthen the telecommunication facility in the park and help in dealing with poaching. RTL, in turn had agreed to provide five telephone and intercom connections to the forest personnel.

In 2003, the SC had allowed BNSL to lay cables inside the Mt. Abu Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan subject to the contribution of Rs. 18.38 lakh for compensatory afforestation and allied services.

Source: 'SC notice to Reliance for laying cables in MP reserve', *The Times of India*, 20/11/04.

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

MAHARASHTRA

Sahyadri Tiger Reserve proposed; to include Chandoli NP and Koyna WLS

The Maharashtra Government has proposed the creation of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve that will be spread over nearly 800 sq. kms. This will include the 327 sq. kms Chandoli NP, the 423 sq. kms Koyna WLS and the corridor between these protected areas. The tiger populations here have grown from two in Koyna and three in Chandoli to eight and four respectively in 2004.

If approved this will be the fourth Tiger Reserve in the state after Melghat, Tadoba and Pench. It will be the first one in the state in the Western Ghats.

Source: Uma Karve. 'Now, Koyna may turn tiger country', *Indian Express*, 15/11/04. 'Tiger Reserve status could be pride of Sahyadris', *The Times of India*, 22/12/04

Scat and transect survey training in Melghat

The Center for Wildlife Studies, Bangalore will conduct training camps in the application of

sampling-based methods for monitoring tiger and large mammal populations in Melghat Tiger Reserve in February. The training programme will focus on developing an index of relative abundance of tiger using the scat encounter survey technique and density estimation for prey species using Line Transect method.

Candidates who want to undergo the training must fit the following description: candidates in the 18-40 year group, who are physically very fit and have some experience in hiking through forests and rough country and have a reasonably good ability to spot and identify large mammals.

Contact: **Dr. Prachi Mehta**, Envirosearch, B1/102 Nikash Lawns, 140/3, Sus Rd, Pashan, Pune - 411021, Maharashtra. Tel: 020- 56222 903 /25897570, Fax: 25897570. Email: envirosearch@vsnl.net; prachim@vsnl.com

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

MEGHALAYA

Garó version of elephant manual released

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) North-East in collaboration with Samrakshan Trust Baghmara Field Office in South Garó Hills recently released the Garó version of the Elephant Manual – Nature Scope India – Endangered Elephant. This was released on the occasion of a Children’s Day function jointly organised by the Deputy Inspector of Schools, and Deputy Commissioner, South Garó Hills, at Rangku Memorial Secondary School, in Baghmara.

The manual was developed by CEE North-East as part of the educational package under the United States Fish and Wildlife supported project ‘School Education to Support Asian Elephant Conservation.’ This project includes the design, development and production of educational materials, and the implementation of an intensive Asian Elephant environmental education programme in schools, targeted primarily at students of age group 10 to 14 years, and through them to the larger community.

The manual meant for the teachers’ community aims not only to provide information about various facets of the conservation of the Asian Elephant, but also suggests ways in which teachers can effectively communicate this to students.

Daniel S Marak, ex-Chairman of Municipality Board and T Dkhar, Deputy Commissioner, South Garó Hills, Baghmara, released the manual.

Source: ‘Garó version of manual on pachyderms released’, The Assam Tribune, 24/11/04.

Contact: **Nimesh Ved**, Samrakshan Trust, C/o Dorikson G Momin, Rangdokram, PO Baghmara, Dist South Garó Hills, 794102, Meghalaya. Email: nimesh@samrakshan.org; nimesh.ved@gmail.com

ORISSA

Dead olive ridley turtles being washed ashore on Orissa's beaches

More than a 1000 dead Olive ridley turtles have been found washed ashore on the beaches of Orissa in the two month period ending December 2004. The dead turtles have so far been seen at the Devi, Jatadhar, Harishpur, Chandrabhaga and Ramchandi areas and beaches bordering the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

While 70 dead turtles were counted at Chandrabhaga-Ramchandi, more than 400 dead turtles were counted between the mouth of the Devi and Paradip. An estimated 500 turtles were killed in the marine sanctuary area as well.

Wildlife activists have warned that these numbers would continue to rise if round the clock patrolling with speed boats is not taken up to check fishing by trawlers in the prohibited zone along the coast.

The Wildlife Society of Orissa has said that part of the reason for this is that the state government is still not implementing the April 2004 directions of the Supreme Court Appointed Central Empowered Committee for the protection to the endangered sea turtles.

Though an embargo had been clamped on fishing within 20 kms of the coastline between November and May, rampant fishing is being reported from near the mouth of the Devi and Rushikulya. The CEC had directed that Turtle Excluder Devices (TED) be put to mandatory use, but not a single trawler operating in the Orissa coast is reported to be using them during the current season, taking advantage of the lack of patrolling by the Fisheries Department. The patrolling has been of a sporadic nature and is being done with the help of old and slow fishing trawlers.

It has also been pointed out that an amount of Rupees one crore given by the Indian Oil Corporation for turtle protection has been lying unutilised for four years. (Also see *PA Update* 46, 45, 41, 40, 38, 34, 30, & 25)

Source: 'Dead ridley count worries experts', *The Statesman*, 31/12/04.

Contact: **Biswajit Mohanty**, Wildlife Society of Orissa, Shantikunj, Link Road, Cuttack – 753012, Orissa. Tel: 0671 – 334625. Fax: 610980. Email: biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in; bmwildlife@hotmail.com

Orissa fisherfolk demand implementation of Orissa Marine Fisheries Regulation Act

The Orissa Traditional Fish Workers' Union (OTFWU) has demanded strict enforcement of the Orissa Marine Fisheries Regulation Act (OMFRA) and stern action against the fishing trawlers from outside the state intruding in Orissa waters. They have demanded for the deployment of speed boats to seize these trawlers.

The union stated that livelihoods of around 80,000 traditional fishermen living in six coastal districts of the state were threatened due to these trawlers. Expressing concern over the dwindling fish catch due to capture of fish seeds from river mouths, the OTFWU leaders also demanded enactment of a stringent law to ban the capture of fish seeds. Attributing the silting of river mouths to the fall in fish landing, they also urged the government to take up dredging of river mouths on the Orissa coast.

Lamenting that the traditional fishermen were being deprived of their livelihood in the

name of protection of Olive Ridley sea turtles, the union leaders have asked for the restriction of the territorial limit of Gahirmatha marine sanctuary to allow for fishing by traditional fishermen. They also demanded compensation and financial assistance for the traditional fishermen who have lost their livelihood source.

The other major demands included giving land *patta* to all the traditional fishermen families living along the Orissa coast within a specific timeframe, recommending to the centre to include the marine fishermen in the list of scheduled castes, providing them subsidised housing and financial assistance for revival of the Orissa Traditional Marine Fishermen Cooperative Society. (Also see *PA Update* 45)

Source: 'Fishermen threaten agitation', *The Statesman*, 24/11/04.

Helipad in Bhitarkanika for visit of Vice-President

The administration had proposed the construction of a helipad inside the Bhitarkanika National Park for the visit of the Vice President (VP), Mr. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat that was scheduled for January 6. The helipad was to be constructed either at Khola or at Dangmal.

Conservationists had expressed their opposition to the proposed plan, questioning the logic and legality of the helipad within the boundary of the protected area. Official sources however clarified that the proposed helipad would only come up on the government revenue land not in forest land as is being apprehended. It has also been suggested that the helipad would eventually be made permanent to woo international tourists

While the VP cancelled his visit to the area in the aftermath of the tsunami, it is not yet clear if the helipad was indeed constructed

Source: 'Bhitarkanika helipad invites green ire', *The Statesman*, 14/12/04.

Orissa to involve SHGs for wildlife protection

The first meeting of the Orissa State Wildlife Advisory Board was held recently in

Bhubaneswar. The decisions taken included the involvement of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in wildlife protection, formulation of an action plan for the protection of elephant habitat and a more general working plan for the protection of wildlife in the state.

Additionally, a state level co-ordination committee is also to be constituted with representatives from the police, customs, the Coast Guard and INS Chilika to check poaching and smuggling in wildlife. The meeting also decided to set up a wildlife advisory council and to honour persons who contribute to wildlife protection with the Biju Patnaik award every year.

The meeting was chaired by the Chief Minister, Mr Navin Patnaik and attended by senior officers including among others, the Agriculture Production Commissioner G.B. Mukherjee; Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Bijay Patnaik; Secretary in the Forest and Environment Department, Aurobindo Behera; ornithologist, U.N. Deb; former MLA, Bibhudendra Pratap Das; former minister, Chaitanya Majhi; Professor Radhamohan and former chief wildlife warden, Saroj Patnaik.

Source: 'Involve SHGs to protect wildlife', *The New Indian Express*, 01/12/04.

CEC says no to port adjoining Bhitarkanika and Gahirmatha

The Supreme Court Appointed Central Empowered Committee has in its report in July 2004 objected to the proposal for the construction of the Dhamra Port adjoining the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and Bhitarkanika NP.

The port project is a joint venture between Tata Steel and Larson & Toubro.

The CEC report has said that the coming up of the port project may seriously impact the turtles and world famous turtle nesting sites here.

The environmental NGO, Greenpeace too has opposed the construction of the port and in a press release issued in December requested the project promoters to abandon the project.

Source: Manojit Saha. 'Dhamra Port Project: SC committee put Tata, L&T in dock,'

<http://www.projectsmonitor.com/detailnews.asp?newsid=8383> 01-15 Dec, 2004

Contact: **Anup Nayak**. Email: bravo_123@satyam.net.in

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PUNJAB

Hyacinth covers 35% of Harike

Nearly 35% of Harike Lake is presently said to be choked by water hyacinth. The situation was the same about three years ago, but at that time the army had stepped in to carry out an extensive clean up exercise (see *PA Updates* 34 & 30)

Following the clean up in 2001, certain measures had been suggested for regular maintenance of the water body. The administration however appears to have ignored these, leading to the present situation.

Forest officials have put the blame squarely on financial constraints, saying that the eight conveyer belts installed for periodic extraction of the aquatic weed were now redundant. Four new machines, also bought for the same purpose, are yet to be installed due to lack of financial resources.

Source: Dharmendra Rataul. '35 pc of the 12 sq. km lake covered by the plant', *Indian Express*, 22/12/04.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Forest Department, Punjab, SCD 2463-64, Sector B-C, Chandigarh.

RAJASTHAN

First Annual Research Seminar on Keoladeo National Park held

The First Annual Research Seminar on Keoladeo National Park (KNP) was held at Bharatpur on December 22 and 23.

The objectives of the Seminar were:

- to learn about findings of various research studies being carried out at the park.

- to give a meeting platform to scientists so that they can benefit from each others experience and also
- to prepare a Vision Document for the park.

The seminar was attended by more than 50 participants that included prominent scientists and researchers from various fields including Ornithology, Remote Sensing, Nematology and Botany. 30 research papers were also presented on the occasion.

There was a unanimous agreement among the participants that the health of park depends on receiving water from the Gambhir river which has been its traditional source of water for more than two centuries. No other source such as ground water or water from other rivers like the Yamuna or the Chambal, is comparable to the water from the Gambhir.

It was also said that the park does not need water alone to maintain its unique aquatic ecosystem. The natural course of the Gambhir helps enrich this water with fishlings, alga, zoo and phytoplanktons that are needed at various trophic levels in the KNP ecosystem and that no underground water or water brought from rivers through pipelines can have this 'life-giving' property in it.

The experts also felt that KNP serves a very important role in the economy of the region. This has served as a traditional site for recharging the ground water (and controlling floods). The park also acts as a large sponge that absorbs excessive water at the time of plenty and releases it in the lean period. Thus it strengthens agricultural economy and also gives employment to several in the field of tourism.

Source: Dhirendra Devarshi. Email dated 24/12/04.
Contact: **Dhirendra Devarshi**, 490, Krishna Nagar
Bharatpur 321001.

Director, Keoladeo Ghana NP, Forest
Department, Bharatpur- 321 001 Rajasthan

27 new species of nematodes discovered in Keoladeo National Park

A three year study by the Department of Zoology, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) has reported 27 new species of nematodes from the Keoladeo

National Park. This is in addition to the nematode species belonging to 80 genera that have already been recorded from the park.

The study titled 'Nematode Faunal Diversity of Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan', was funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and conducted by Qudsia Tahseen.

Source: Sunny Sebastian. 'A wetland and its worms', *The Hindu*, 10/01/05.

TAMIL NADU

Animals in Point Calimere WLS responded 10 minutes before tsunami struck

Forest staff of the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary reported that 8-10 minutes before the tsunami crashed into the sanctuary, all animals in the sanctuary including about 1800 blackbuck, 250 spotted deer, 40 feral horses, a number of wild boar and jackal dashed towards higher ground and stood there. Birds like flamingoes and migratory waterfowl were also seen flying away before the waves came. They returned about an hour later and were seen feeding as if nothing had happened.

The lowlands in the sanctuary were also totally ravaged and the rainwater harvesting systems, fresh water ponds and water holes too were inundated by sea water rendering them useless.

Source: Janyala Sreenivas. 'Tsunami: basic instincts worked in death zone', *Indian Express*, 13/01/05.

UTTARANCHAL

Elephants create panic near Rajaji NP

Wild elephants from the Rajaji National Park were reported to have caused damage in a number of villages in the periphery of the park in the month of December. The villages worst affected were said to be Dhaur Tali, located about 15 kms from Muni-ki-Reti and Gumaniwala.

A number of houses in the villages and standing crops in the fields were destroyed.

There were no reports of any human injuries or casualties.

The main reason for this conflict is the disruption of the traditional migratory route of the elephants due to the Chilla HydroElectric Channel and other developments that have taken place in the area in recent years. This has, over the last two decades resulted in a large number of human deaths as also the deaths of at least 20 elephants who have been electrocuted by the irate farmers and villagers.

Source: 'Cornered elephants create panic', <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/12/24/stories/2004122405190500.htm>, 24/12/04.

Contact: **Director**, Rajaji NP, Shivalik House, Dehradun – 248001, Uttaranchal.

Uttaranchal forest guards go on strike

More than 2300 forest guards from Uttaranchal went on strike, starting November 26, in support of their demands for better facilities and working conditions. These included a change in the nomenclature of their posts from guards to forest beat officers, designations as class three employees and promotions. They also demanded an increase in their salaries that have remained unchanged for 20 years, and better arms for protection from poachers and the timber mafia.

They had also threatened to close down the Rajaji and Corbett NPs were not met.

The final outcome of the strike and the latest status is not known.

Source: SMA Kazmi. 'Forest guard strike threatens closure of national parks', *Indian Express*, 16/12/04.

Contact: **CWLW**, Uttaranchal, 85, Rajpur Road, Dehradun, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-744225 / 679817. Fax: 675138/747669

WEST BENGAL

Elephants from Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram move to Buxa

It has been suggested that increasing militancy and related disturbances are forcing wild elephants from Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram to move to the forests of the Buxa Tiger Reserve.

While this is not a new development the growing trend is causing concern to the officials and villages in and around the tiger reserve.

It has been reported that these elephants that have migrated into Buxa can be easily identified because of their short stature.

Source: Sudipta Chanda. *The Statesman*, 09/12/04.

Contact: **CF & Field Director**, Buxa National Park, Forest Dept. PO Alipurduar, Dist. Jalpaiguri - 736122, West Bengal

Special new year festival planned at Jaldapara for tourists

The Jalpaiguri district administration had planned a week-long tourism festival at Madarihat aimed at tourism promotion in the Dooars. Named 'Jaldapara Festival' it was to start on the 25th of December. The festival was to be organised in association with the forest and tourism departments of the state government.

The proposed package included arrangements for viewing the scenic beauty of the Dooars — its hills, forests and the movement of wild animals — during the seven days of the festival. It also included an opportunity for the tourists to experience the rich cultural heritage of the Dooars tribal population, including through the presentation of traditional folk programs.

It is however not clear whether the proposed festival was indeed held.

Source: 'A year end treat for Jaldapara tourists', *The Statesman*, 08/12/04.

Contact: **DFO, Wildlife (II)**, Aranya Bhawan (Near Court), Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Tel: 03561-24907(O) / 30383 (R).
E-mail: wild2@dte.vsnl.net.in

2nd meeting of the State Wildlife Board

The 2nd meeting of the West Bengal State Wildlife Board was held in Kolkata in December. It was chaired by the Chief Minister of the state, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

The State Forest Minister Mr Jogesh Burman announced the formation of a committee to oversee the habitat conditions of

animals at the Alipore zoo under the leadership of the State Forest Secretary, Mr RK Tripathy. The committee would suggest the improvements needed and even explore possibilities of removing some animals to open zoological enclosures, hinting that this was the first step towards shifting the zoo to the proposed site at Sonarpur, in South 24-Parganas district.

It was also decided that, as per earlier recommendations of a committee headed by the Chief Secretary, compensation to victims of wild animal attacks in the state would be enhanced from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 in case of deaths and from Rs 15,000 to 25,000 for cases resulting in permanent disabilities. Compensation for forest employees who succumb to animal attacks has been raised from Rs 25,000 to Rs One lakh.

The Forest Minister also announced that efforts were on to convert the Santragachhi lake, which attracts a huge variety of migratory birds every year, into a 'wildlife conservation centre'. The government has got an informal commitment of cooperation from the railways and a written confirmation of the same is awaited.

The meeting also discussed the proposal of fitting radio collars to some tigers in the Sunderban and constructing a tiger rescue centre at Jharkhali. The decision to retain the wetland at Narendrapur, South 24-Parganas, as a wildlife sanctuary was also taken.

Source: 'Makeover plans for zoo habitat', *The Statesman*, 22/12/04.

CWLW, West Bengal, Vikas Bhawan,
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NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Sanctuary - ABN Amro Wildlife Awards

The Sanctuary - ABN Amro Wildlife Awards for the year 2004 were awarded in Mumbai in December.

Wildlife service awards were given to Manglu Baiga from the Kanha Tiger Reserve:

Pankaj Sharma, Range Forest Officer, Dibru-Saikhowa NP, Assam; Niren Jain, Wildlife Conservation Society, Karnataka; Ratan Singh, rickshaw puller and bird expert from the Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan and jointly to the husband wife team of Charudatt Mishra and Aparajita Dutta of the Mysore based Nature Conservation Foundation.

The Green Teacher Award was awarded to Sonam Wangchuk, founder of the Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL), while the lifetime achievement award went to KM Chinnappa, the 63 year old wildlife activist who works for the protection of the Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka.

This year a new category of Young Naturalists Awards was also created. The awardees were Mann Barua (Kaziranga, Assam), Rahul Alvares (Goa), Aaron Lobo (Goa) and Indrapratap Thakare (Maharashtra).

Source: 'Karnataka activist gets Sanctuary Lifetime Award', *Hindu Business Line*, 03/12/04.

Contact: **Bittu Sahgal**, Sanctuary, 602 Maker Chambers V, Nariman Point, Mumbai -- 400021. Tel: 022 - 283 0061 / 81. Fax: 2874380 Email: bittusahgal@vsnl.com

Seminar held on human-wildlife conflict

A one day seminar on 'Human-Carnivore Conflicts Issues' was organised in New Delhi in December by the Embassy of the United States. The topics discussed at the day long seminar included human-lion conflict in Gujarat, human-wolf conflict in India, leopard conflicts in Maharashtra and use of satellite imagery for wildlife conservation.

The seminar was attended by a range of wildlife experts from India and the USA. These included author David Baron from the US, Belinda Wright of the Wildlife Protection Society of India, Dr. Ravi Chellam of the United Nations Development Program, and a team from Maharashtra that along with the state government has recently completed work on the leopard conflict in parts of the state.

Source: 'Spotlight on human carnivore conflicts',
<http://www.thehindu.com/2004/12/02/stories/2004120217010300.htm>, 02/12/04.

Workshop on Community Based Tourism in Western Himalayas

The Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Livelihoods, Chunakhan Ramnagar, in collaboration with LEAD India organised a three day Workshop on Community Based Tourism in Western Himalayas at Claridges Corbett Hideaway Garjia Ramnagar from 9-12 January 2005. The Workshop was sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

Further details are not yet available.

Contact: **Rajiv Bhartari**, Conservator (Eco-Tourism)
Office of the PCCF, Forest Department, 87
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2746934. Fax: 2743964. Email:
rajivbhartari@hotmail.com

Project Elephant - An update

It has been reported that in the last two years about 40 people were killed by wild elephants in the country and a huge amount of damage was also caused to houses and crops.

The Government of India is said to have spent Rs. 5.41 crores for the period 2003-04 for mitigation of human-elephant conflict across the country. While this amount was spent of anti-depredation measures, another Rs. 1.91 crores was spent on providing ex-gratia relief to the victims.

Some of the measures taken under Project Elephant to deal with the problem include constructing elephant proof barriers (trenches and energised fencing), deploying of trained domestic elephants, engaging specially equipped squads, distributing crackers and searchlights among villagers and by capturing or eliminating troublesome elephants.

Project Elephant also started a program during 2002-03 in Assam, Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh for the registration of domestic elephants by using microchips. About 700 elephants have been micro-chipped in this manner and the

initiative is being extended to other parts of the country as well.

Project Elephant, has since its inception, disbursed Rs. 74.64 crores as grants-in-aid to various states and the project outlay for the 10th plan period is Rs. 60 crores.

Other surveys have shown that while the general trend of pachyderm population in the country is positive, in the North Eastern states there is a decline. There were 25,604 elephants in the country in 1993, 25,877 in 1997 and 26,413 in 2002. Poaching too is said to be on the decline as only 30 tuskers were reported killed in 2003-04 as against 38 in 2002-03, 43 the year earlier, 62 in 1999-2000 and 75 in 1995-96.

Source: Aarti Dhar. 'An elephantine project for systematic management', *The Hindu*, 08/11/04.

Nominations invited for 'Fatehsinhrao Gaekwad Conservation Award'

The Baroda based International Society of Naturalists (INSONA) had invited nominations for the Lt. Col. Fatehsinhrao Gaekwad Award for Conservation and Environmental Achievement. The award has been constituted to honour a school child and an university student every year for outstanding recognition/achievement in the field of environment.

The last date for sending in the nominations are April 22, 2005.

Contact: **Dr. Gunavant Oza**, INSONA, Oza Bldg.
Salawada, Vadodara - 390001. Tel: 0265-
2421009. Email: insona@123india.com

Request for information on butterfly migration

Following details and information on butterfly migration have been requested:

- 1) Place
- 2) Time /Duration
- 3) Date (Please inform if migration was observed for more than a day)
- 4) Species count (if taken)
- 5) Direction of Migration (approximate)

- 6) Species seen (If not known details of the colour and size of the butterflies)
- 7) Names of people who observed this migration.

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

MoEF proposes National Wildlife Crime Cell

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has proposed the setting up of a National Wildlife Crime Cell on the model of the Narcotics Control Bureau. It will have officers from the customs, police and forest departments. A note on the proposal was to be sent by the MoEF to the Cabinet in November and at that time it was expected that cell would become functional by February 2005.

This proposal has been in the pipeline for nearly four years and according to some sources its need acquired urgency after the huge haul of tiger and leopard skins in Tibet in October 2004 (see *PA Updates* 52 & 46).

Source: 'Govt. planning NCB-type body against poaching', *The Times of India*, 10/11/04.
'Environment Ministry set to move cabinet on wildlife cell', *Indian Express*, 19/11/04.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Tsunami Affects Turtle Conservation Programs in Indian Ocean region

Marine turtle conservation programmes in the Indian Ocean region are said to have suffered considerable damage from the giant ocean waves of December 26, 2004, severely undermining regional plans to save the highly endangered marine reptile. The Indian Ocean and South East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA MoU) has started assessing the extent of the damage caused.

Turtle conservation facilities in the Indian Nicobar Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand were the hardest hit with reports of dead and

missing field staff and destruction of research stations.

The Andaman Nicobar Environment Trust field station at Campbell Bay in Great Nicobar was devastated. Six out of its seven field staff, including four scientists studying the Olive Ridley and Leatherback turtles, are still missing. Miraculously, however, field assistant, Santosh Augu, who sustained two broken collarbones, survived after he was reported missing for 17 days. He said that a few of them had clung on to a tree, which was uprooted after the third wave battered the coast, but also that he had not seen his colleagues since.

The Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in Orissa escaped virtually unscathed. Waves surged into the Babubali and Agarnasi nesting grounds, causing minor erosion on the sandy beach. Forestry personnel who were present escaped unhurt as their camps were a safe distance from the coast.

The Kosgoda nesting beach on the southern coast of Sri Lanka was hit by a six-metre high wave which surged 1.5km inland. The Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) is managed by 17 local egg-protectors, six research officers and some foreign volunteers. Everyone was saved except for three egg-protectors who were swept into the sea. The TCP field station located 1km inland was inundated and suffered damage to equipment and educational materials although the building remained intact.

Immediate relief efforts went into operation to assess damage and provide basic humanitarian aid to the affected staff and their families. The turtle conservation project which finds its strength in community participation, needs to recommence operations as soon as possible to enable its staff to earn an income amidst the bleak future faced by the fishing community which has suffered heavy losses in terms of damaged fishing boats and gear. Two other nesting grounds at Rekawa and Bundala National Park are yet to be surveyed.

Several privately-owned turtle hatcheries were also affected by the killer waves which shattered holding tanks and washed away the reptiles. One operator lost about 10,000 eggs and a few hundred hatchlings.

In Thailand, three turtle research facilities were badly affected. At Koh Phra Thong, the Italian Naucrates Conservation Project was wiped out and suffered heavy losses. Two of its marine biologists, Rebecca Clark from Canada and Lisa Jones from Britain, who were working on the Golden Buddha Beach, were swept away by the giant waves. A memorial fund has been set up in the biologists' names to continue Naucrates's conservation work there.

Located in the same province of Phang Nga as Naucrates, the Thai navy's turtle head-start programme at the Tap Lamu naval base was also in ruins. Two thousand turtles from two months to seven years old were lost. In neighbouring Phuket, the Marine and Coastal Resource Development and Research Institute which was conducting research on the Olive Ridley and green turtle, reported 20 missing Olive Ridley turtles. The institute's biologist, Kongkiat Kittiwattanawong, fears that the tsunami incident may push the dwindling turtle population one step closer to extinction.

It is also feared that the surviving turtles may not find their regular food sources like seagrass, as in the case of the green turtle.

Under IOSEA MoU's conservation and management plan, turtle range states in the region are supposed to cooperate in protecting turtle habitats which include both nesting and feeding grounds.

An initiative has been launched to raise funds to help rebuild damaged and destroyed infrastructure related to sea turtle research and conservation in the Indian Ocean region, and in other ways that are deemed most helpful. An advisory panel of sea turtle experts in the region is being established to determine how funds should be disbursed.

For more details visit the Indian Ocean - South-East Asian (IOSEA) Marine Turtle website. For more status updates check www.seaturtle.org

Source: Janki Lenin. Email posted to Nathist on 19/01/05.

Original source: www.herpdigest.com

Society for Conservation Biology Distinguished Service Awards

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) recently announced its Distinguished Service Awards. Those awarded this year include Dr. David Ferguson of Division of International Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and BC Choudhury of the Wildlife Institute of India.

While Dr. Ferguson was recognized for his efforts to conserve the world's biodiversity and for inspiring colleagues worldwide, BC Choudhury was awarded the recognized for his outstanding contribution to the conservation of Olive Ridelys Sea Turtles, Gharials and the Sarus Crane through science, policy and advocacy.

University Of Florida researchers report new subspecies of tiger

A genetic analysis of tigers from across Asia has revealed that tigers roaming the wilds of the Malaysian Peninsula are substantially different from those in the rest of the continent, enough to be considered a new subspecies.

The research was carried out by scientists in the University of Florida. The study that examined blood and tissue samples from 134 tigers captured in different locations from around Asia, found that a single endangered subspecies, the Indochinese tiger, is actually two subspecies, each with a population that numbers in the hundreds.

Biologists traditionally have recognized eight subspecies, including three that were wiped out by hunting and habitat destruction in the 20th century.

Source: 'University Of Florida Researchers Find Subspecies Of Tiger', <http://www.wftv.com/news/3978451/detail.html>

UPCOMING

WHAT'S AVAILABLE

Conference on 'Biodiversity Conservation in Asia: Current Status and Future Perspectives'

The Asia Section of the Society for Conservation Biology is organising a conference entitled 'Biodiversity Conservation in Asia: Current Status and Future Perspectives' in Kathmandu, Nepal from November 17 – 20, 2005. The goal of the conference is to bring together practitioners of biodiversity conservation throughout Asia, and the world, to share experiences and learn strategies for preserving Asia's biodiversity.

The conference will consist of four days of oral presentations, workshops, poster presentations and conservation films. An excursion to Royal Chitwan Conservation Park has also been organised for interested persons.

The organisers have called for papers that will deal with the following broad topics: the role of PAs, endangered species, trans-boundary issues, community-based conservation, sustainable use of biological diversity, conservation education and its reform, technological advancements in the realm of conservation biology and implementation of major treaties (such as CBD and CITES).

Abstracts should be less than 200 words and in English. The last date for submitting abstracts for oral presentations is 31 May 2005 and for poster presentations it is 31 August 2005. Persons wishing to organize and chair specific workshops or panel sessions must present a one page proposal to the Conference Organizing committee no later than 1 March 2005 indicating the need, goals, and expected outcome of the session.

Contact: Linda Whittaker. Email:

linda.whittaker@nature-parks.org.il

http://www.conbio.net/SCB/AsiaMeetings_EN.asp

- Linking conservation with Livelihood: Lessons from Management of Gir-Protected Area in Western India

This analysis is part of a larger study supported by the Environmental Economics Capacity Building Program supported by the World Bank. The present monograph prepared by Amita Shah is part of the Working Paper Series of the Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR), Ahmedabad.

Contact: **Amita Shah**, GIDR, Gota, Ahmedabad - 380060. Tel: 02717- 242366 / 242367.
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READER'S RESPOND

Resolve the Sultanpur impasse soon

Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) has closed the tap on Sultanpur (see 'No water supply to Sultanpur NP', *PA Update* 52) because it hasn't paid its pending water bills. These authorities are probably ignorant of the damage this will to the national park which is one of the important watershed regime for the area. They probably don't know that the birds won't wait for their dispute to be settled.

It is an issue resembling what is happening in Bharatpur where water is available only in an isolated patch today. In both the cases the supreme primates on the earth used its insensitive brain to harm the nature which is very foundation of the universe. They must solve their dispute soon so that the precious bird species shouldn't suffer.

- **Faiyaz Khudsar**. Email: fkhudsar@yahoo.co.uk

IN THE SUPREME COURT - 4

- 1) Hearings before the CEC on 17/12/04
- 2) CEC Hearing on Mining in Lanjigarh, Orissa, 18/01/05

1) Hearings before the CEC on 17.12.2004

This report by the editors of Forest Case Update is based on their observations during the hearing:

- Regarding encroachment in the additions to the Kaziranga National Park (Application No. 179 by Wildlife Protection Society of India):

The CEC members highlighted that three hearings on this case have already been held and the MoEF needs to take further action on this. Members also pointed out that the centenary of the National Park will be celebrated in February where these issues are bound to be raised. The MoEF counsel informed the CEC that they would be filing a Special Leave Petition (SLP) before the reopening of the Supreme Court in January. The counsel also requested the CEC that the state government also be directed to respond in this matter.

- Illegal felling within the proposed Bhimgad sanctuary (Application no. 218 by Durgesh Kasbekar):

Following a detailed inquiry into the instances of illegal felling, the state government has filed a response which is in support of the issues raised by the applicants. The CEC highlighted that the state government has also issued show cause notices to the concerned forest officials. The matter will be listed in 3 months, till which time the CEC has directed the state government to take necessary action against the concerned officials and also put a stop to the illegal felling taking place. The state government stated that some more investigations will be needed in the case of the mining activity and also with regards to the private *malki* lands (where the Karnataka Tree Preservation Act will be applicable).

- Regarding lease of Reserve Forest land for Rubber cultivation in Dodagu district, Karnataka (Application No. 410 by Air Marshal K.C. Cariappa):

The CEC had invited the Chief Secretary, Karnataka as a special invitee in this case. In response to the CEC queries, the report of the state government has been received, which states that the area in question is a Reserve Forest and has not been dereserved. It further highlights that the state government has the authority to lease out land and procure lease rent in such cases. On encroachments, the state government report presents that 107 acres has been encroached as per satellite data, for which ground truthing needs to be done. The encroachment also involves the adjoining Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary. The CEC has directed the applicants to reply within three weeks and raise objections, if any.

- Regarding illegal cemeteries in Okhla Bird Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh (Application No. 559 by Faiyaz A. Khudsar Trustee, Biodiversity Conservation Trust of India):

The standing counsel for the state of Uttar Pradesh said that he had not been served copies and sought time to respond. The CEC highlighted that the area is a very important bird habitat. Further, the fishing contract that has been given to one person in violation of the 14.2.2000 of the Supreme Court. It also directed the standing counsel for the state government to take corrective steps in this case.

2) CEC Hearing on Mining in Lanjigarh, Orissa, 18/01/05

Three Applications related to mining at Lanjigarh in Orissa were listed before the Central Empowered Committee on 18th January 2005. These were:

- *Application No. 564:* Regarding diversion of the forest land and proposed road construction in Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary in Kalahandi District, Orissa by Biswajit Mohanty, Secretary, Wildlife Society of Orissa.
- *Application No. 571:* Appeal against the illegal bauxite mining on the hills of Niyamgiri and Karlapat & in forest area in Kalahandi, Orissa, by Prafulla Samantara
- *Application No. 579:* For Direction in the matter of Setting up of Alumina refinery by M/s Sterlite Industries (India) Ltd. in Lanjigarh in Kalahandi District and Rayagada District of Orissa in joint collaboration with Orissa Mining Corporation, filed by Ritwick Dutta, Advocate on behalf of Academy for Mountain Environics, through R Sreedhar

The CEC referred to the fact finding report of the expert team which visited the area in December 2004 (Refer Forest Case Update, Issue 7, December 2004). The expert committee report points to several violations pertaining to mining and processing of bauxite by M/s Vedanta Aluminum Ltd. It also pointed out the detrimental impacts of the mining activity on the flora/fauna and the water resources of the region. Further, the area allocated to the company forms part of Schedule V area as specified by the Constitution; the area cleared by the company for constructing the refinery had extensive extent of natural growth, and so on.

The team has made several other observations related to the validity of the environmental clearance granted by the MoEF (as it says that there is no forestland involved); construction prior to seeking forest clearance which is in violation of the Forest Conservation Act; the inadequacy of the rehabilitation package etc. It also questioned the validity of the agreement of the Orissa Mining Corporation on allotment of mining areas before a clearance as it is also a violation.

The CEC pointed out that the expert team has suggested against the diversion of 600 hectares of forest land for the mining activity.

The CEC directed the respondents in the case to reply to the point on whether the entire mining project is dependant on the use of the forest land or not. If the use of the forest land is integral to the project and without that the project viability is likely to be affected then there is no way the project could come up without seeking forest clearance. And in this light how could the company start mining activity without even applying for forest clearance. If the use of the forest land is not integral to the project then the CEC can simply first direct that no forest land in question could be diverted for non-forest use.

The counsel representing the Academy for Mountain Environics pointed out to the facts in the EIA report wherein it states that a large amount of area is forest land. To this one of the respondents questioned the information in the EIA as being false.

The respondents have been given four weeks time to respond to all the three applications as well as the observations made in the fact finding report. If the applicants have any point/additional information then they would need to file it within two weeks so that they can also be considered in the reply of the respondents. The CEC also directed the MoEF to respond especially on the grant of the environmental clearance in violation of their own guidelines as well as on the rehabilitation plan.

'In the Supreme Court' is based on the *Forest Case Update*, which is a web based initiative to provide information and updates on developments related to forests and wildlife in the Supreme Court (see *PA Update* 49). It is produced with the support of the Foundation for Ecological Security, Anand.

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The *PA Update* can be accessed on the following websites as well
www.indianjungles.com; www.sanctuaryasia.com/resources/paupdate; www.wildlifeofindia.com

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