

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

No. 55

June 2005

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EDITORIAL

What happens inside our legislatures?

While protected areas might be about wildlife and 'nature', their management, conservation, protection, and even their very creation is an act of the human. Most crucial then, in this context are the acts and actions of our fellow human beings within the hallowed portals of our democratic system. It is in our legislatures,

by people we send there, that laws and policies are proposed, debated and enacted. In spite of all its flaws and drawbacks this is a democracy that has served its people reasonably well.

Can the same be said of the service of this democracy towards the non-human denizens that we share this earth with? Responses might vary and let the jury be out on this for a while. The point being attempted here is reflected in the title question, in the particular context of wildlife and PAs. How often are wildlife issues discussed inside parliament or in the state assemblies? What are questions asked? Who asks these questions? What are the kinds of answers provided? What do our parliamentarians and legislators think of wildlife and protected areas? Most of us probably don't know the answers to many of these questions. Does it mean that matters such as these don't come up at all? Or is it that the media does not find them important enough to report. Except, of course, when there is a conflict or a crisis.

If this is important, it is a matter of serious concern that we know so little – something that is reflected in the news and information that is regularly (not) carried in the *PA Update* itself. Rarely do we have such reports and information. This issue of the Update then is slightly different. What is interesting to note is that the tiger crisis that led to the Prime Minister forming the Tiger Task Force, also catalysed other informal efforts. In this *PA Update* we have reports of at least two such initiatives, one in parliament and another in the Rajasthan assembly. This is not a statement yet on the composition of these fora or the issues that they chose– but an observation that matters related to wildlife can and do appear to have importance.

We also carry in this issue a special report– 'Questions on forests and wildlife in the 7th Session of the 11th Gujarat Assembly' transcribed and translated for us by the Ahmedabad based *Paryavaran Mitra*. The questions asked and the answers provided make interesting reading. If this can be considered a representative example of what happens inside legislatures, it would appear that wildlife and protected area issues do indeed get discussed. There might be concern regarding the quality of the answers provided, or for that matter the questions asked. But that is precisely where the space appears to exist, to inform, and influence.

Our democratic systems probably provide us more space that we credit them for. It is for us to see how best we can then use them.

It will be our continued endeavour in the *PA Update* to try and highlight news and events of this kind. Like we have a special report from Gujarat this time, we will try to bring such news and developments from other states as well in the future. And the best source for this could well be the readers of the *Update* from different parts of the country.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Panel to review Kolleru Govt. Order 120

The Andhra Pradesh Government has appointed a panel to examine the implementation of its Government Order (GO) 120 in the wake of widescale opposition by people residing in and around the Kolleru Lake. GO 120 had been issued in 1995 by the then Telugu Desam Government to regulate the misuse of the Kolleru Lake bed, but had been not implemented for various reasons.

Recently however, when, armed with the order, revenue and forest officials started to take some steps for evacuating unauthorised occupations they faced stiff resistance from locals, stating that evacuation from the lakebed would deprive them of their livelihood.

During the visit of Chief Minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy to West Godavari district recently, he was briefed about the intensity of the problem. In response, he constituted a cabinet sub-committee under the chairmanship of the Minister for Agriculture with ministers Pinnamaneni Venkateswara Rao, Fariduddin Mohammad, Jakkampudi Ramamohana Rao and Botsa Satyanarayana as members. The committee recently visited several places in the area to get a first hand understanding of the situation.

What decision, if any, has been made is not yet known.

Source: 'Panel to review Kolleru GO', *Deccan Chronicle*, 27/04/05.

Contact: **CWLW**, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, Aranya Bhavan, Saifabad, Hyderabad - 500004, Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 040-23230561 / 23232668. Fax: 337889

ASSAM

Increase in elephant population in Kaziranga

A recent elephant census at the Kaziranga National Park has revealed an increase in the population of the animal here. 1,194 elephants were spotted in the national park and 52 were seen in the periphery of the park. The 2002 census report had pegged elephant population here at 1,048.

Forest officials have, however, pointed out that a final picture will emerge only after receiving the complete set of results. The outcome of the census in other elephant habitats such as Karbi Anglong, Garampani (Golaghat division) and Nagaon was awaited.

About 50 teams of three persons each had begun the census on April 3. A sample count of 30 per cent of the identified habitats was completed the very next day.

FD officials are now also said to be working on the modalities for the tiger and rhino census that is to be held next year. The rhino census was to be conducted after the elephant count, but had to be postponed because of the early onset of the monsoon.

Rains started in the middle of March itself, preventing burning of the grasses to make the counting of rhinos easier. Smaller water bodies in the grasslands in the park also filled up, as a result of which the rhinos don't need to come to the larger ones outside, making the search and count of the rhinos a risky task.

A rhino census is a massive exercise where census teams headed by senior forest officials count rhino from the back of at least 60 trained elephants. The rhino habitat spread over 430 square kilometres is divided into 44 compartments during the census and the exercise is usually completed on a single day to get the correct figure.

The 1999 count had revealed 1,552 rhinos here.

Source: Bijoy Shankar Bora. 'Rains play spoilsport in Rhino census', *The Statesman*, 01/04/05.
Nishit Dholabhai. 'Census boost to Kaziranga image', *The Telegraph*, 12/04/05.

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

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

CHATTISGARH

Tiger figure rises at Indravati, raises eyebrows

Recently released tiger census figures from the Indravati Tiger Reserve indicate that the tiger population here is now 41, the highest since 1982, when Indravati was brought under the Project Tiger umbrella.

Several people including Chattisgarh's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), RN Mishra, have raised doubts over these figures and have asked for them to be verified. It has been pointed out that conducting a census in these forests itself is difficult due to Naxalite presence and that is the reason why the count was abandoned in 2000. Yet, forest officials have been filing records and surprisingly, the tiger population 'increases' year after year.

Interestingly the CPI (Maoist), which is a combination of the PWG and MCC, has also claimed that the tiger population in the reserve has gone up. They say that the number of tigers here is 55. In a handwritten note sent to newspapers from Bijapur in Dantewara, the Naxalite leaders said that forest officials were welcome to visit the park twice a year for 'management activities. They have claimed the creation of a three-tier security ring in the park for wildlife protection – at the village, the *dalam* and the top security level, which is directly supervised by the guerrilla squad.

Source: Ashwani Sharma. 'Tiger figure rises at Indravati, raises eyebrows' *The Indian Express*, 11/04/05.

'Tigers doing fine in Indravati claim naxals', *The Indian Express*, 14/04/05.

Contact: **Field Director**, Indravati Tiger Reserve, PO Jagdalpur, Bastar – 494001, Chattisgarh.

GUJARAT

Skewed lion sex ratio causes concern in Gir



An increase from 76 lions for every 100 females in Gir in 1979 to 94 males for every 100 females in 1995 has caused concern in the Gujarat Forest Department.

FD officials and researches worry that more males vis-à-vis females would translate into increased fights over territory and mates and, hence, more deaths. Though exact figures are not available, forest officials estimate that every year two to four lion deaths are reported due to fights for partners or territory. Additionally, between five and eight cases of cub deaths owing to lion attacks during mating are also reported.

Officials are not ruling out intervention to contain the trend, but are not sure what that could be.

Source: Abhishek Kapoor. 'Skewed sex ratio cause for concern in Gir', *The Indian Express*, 12/04/05.

Live bait used for Gir lion census

The Gujarat Forest Department is reported to have resorted to the banned practise of using live bait for the purpose of the lion census in Gir held in April. Baits were used in the Jamwala Range, Akoli Range, the Ghodavadi area of Jasadhar Range and in the Ankolvadi Range. Many of the buffaloes used as bait were either old or ailing.

The Gujarat High Court had ruled against use of live bait following a Public Interest

Litigation in 2000. Following this, a Gujarat Government plea to the Indian Board for Wildlife, to allow use of buffaloes during the census was also struck down in 2001.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Despite ban, live bait used in Gir lion census', *The Times of India*, 25/04/05

Contact: **CF (Wildlife)** Junagadh, Sardar Bag, Junagadh, Gujarat. Tel: 0285 - 631678/630051. Fax: 631211. Email: cfwildlife_ad1@sancharnet.in
Amit B. Jethava, Gir Nature Youth Club, At: Khambha, Dist. Amreli Gujarat. Tel: 02797-260121 / 260182. Fax: 02797-260182. Email: amitjethava@hotmail.com; amitjethava@rediffmail.com

Fires in Gir

A major fire was reported in the Tulsishyam range of Gir in the month of April. The fire was spread over an area of nearly 10kms and included areas of Khambha, Pipalva, Gidhardi and Khaladhar villages.

It was feared that reptiles and smaller mammals would be badly affected but that larger animals like the lion would escape unhurt. The exact cause of the fire could be ascertained, but the rise in mercury seems to be one of the main reasons. This is the second incident of fire here in less than a month. In March, a major fire had also broken out in the Akolwadi Range of Gir.

Source: 'Major fire in Gir sanctuary, *The Times of India*, 15/04/05.

Greater Gir proposed to accommodate lion population increase; lion numbers increase to 359

The Gujarat State government is said to be giving final touches to its proposed Greater Gir project aimed at accommodating the increasing population of lions in and around Gir. An increase in the lion population in Gir (it was 327 according to the 2001 census), has resulted in their dispersal into pockets of forests around Gir like Mitiyana, Jesar, Hipavali, and Paniya.

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Forests such as these have been identified for inclusion in Greater Gir, and the FD expects that an official 'protected' status will be accorded to the new project within six months. Work for creating the necessary infrastructure including construction of check dams and water holes has already started in these areas

The Chief Wildlife Warden of the state, Mr. Pradeep Khanna said that neither the FD nor the government was now keen on transporting lions outside the state and that the present project had been undertaken to ensure adequate space for the increasing population of the lions.

Figures released on the completion of the lion census that was conducted from April 24 – 26 reveals that the lion population in Gir has gone up to 359. Forest officials said that a scientific analysis of the figures was being done and final figure could vary by plus or minus 10.

As part of the procedure adopted for the census, the known region of lions was divided into 286 beats. The beats were grouped into 90 sub-zones, 26 zones and six regions. In the basic unit a beat guard assisted by two local labour canvassed in two phases of 24 hours each beginning on the morning of April 24. The sub zones were supervised by Range Forest Officers while zones were supervised by Deputy Conservators of Forests/Assistant Conservators of Forests and the regions by CFs.

68 lions were sighted outside the boundary of the protected area. 39 of these were found in the grasslands of Lilia, Savarkundala and Jesar. These grasslands are located around 40-60 km away from the main sanctuary and though, this is not the first time that lions have been sighted here, maximum breeding seems to have taken place here after the last census in 2001. There has also been an increase in the numbers at Girnar where, this time, 17 lions were spotted. Twelve lions were seen in coastal Junagadh.

(Also see *PA Updates* 50, 46, 43, 34, 33, 32, 26, 22 & 20)

Source: 'Greater Gir for rising lion population mooted', *The Hindu*, 12/04/05

RK Misra. 'Asiatic lion population booms in Gir', *The Pioneer*, 29/04/05.

Palak Nandi. 'King looks beyond Gir', *The Indian Express*, 02/05/05.

Coral translocation in Gulf of Kutch MNP

In a first of its kind experiment for India, marine biologists have relocated over 300 coral formations in the Gulf of Kutch to protect them from the risk of oil pipelines being laid by Essar Oil. The National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) has translocated over 20 species of corals within the marine national park, situated 60 kms off the coast of Jamnagar district, a hub for oil refineries. A team of nine marine biologists from the NIO worked on the project for four months.

To prevent potential danger from crude oil pipelines, sedimentation and tourists, the corals have been picked up from the intertidal area and relocated in Narara, a kilometre away from the original location. The 2nd step will involve moving some of the species 2-3 kms away from their original location.

The project is being funded by Essar, which plans to set up an oil refinery here. The Supreme Court of India, had in January 2004 allowed Essar to lay pipelines through the national park in the Gulf here (see *PA Update* 47). During surveys conducted for the laying of the pipelines in the Gulf the Forest Department says, it realised that the corals could be destroyed. In response the company has agreed to finance the project of relocating the corals.

The NIO team has said that the challenge before them was not just to move the corals but to find a safer location with the same ecological condition. The translocated corals have been tagged using acrylic for monitoring their growth in the new location.

Source: 'Good news: Experts find safer home for corals', *The Indian Express*, 08/04/05.

Contact: **DCF - Marine National Park**, Forest Department Near Nagnath Gate, Van Sankul, Jamnagar, Gujarat

Contact: **CWLW** - Gujarat, Block 14, Dr. Jivraj Mehta Bhavan, Old Sachivalaya, Gandhinagar-382010, Gujarat. Tel: 02712-230007. Fax: 221097.

HARYANA

New Khol Raitan WLS notified

Over 2200 hectares of forest in the Pinjore-Morni Forest Division in Panchkula district was recently notified as the Khol Raitan Wildlife Sanctuary. As per the original proposal the total area to be protected was 4872 hectares, and Forest Department officials have indicated that the remaining area that is part of the Asrewali Reserve Forest will also be shortly notified.

The new sanctuary includes Jalan, Ambwala, and Burj Kotian in the north; Gumtala, Chowki, Ghaggar river and Nadda in the West, Mogi Nand, Naggal and part of Asrewali Reserve Forest in the South, and Mandana Forest area in the East.

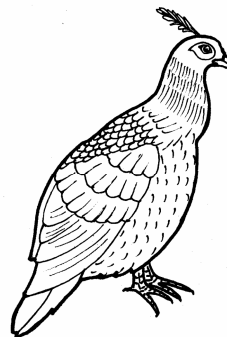
The issue of declaring a sanctuary at Morni had been hanging fire for the past couple of years (see *PA Updates* 45 & 36) and had also been discussed at several meetings of the Indian Board for Wildlife. The sanctuary was proposed in lieu of denotification of two sanctuaries – the 4400 hectares Saraswati Forest, which falls partly in Kaithal district and partly in Kurukshetra and the 400 hectares Bada Ban in Jind district.

Now, while the new sanctuary has been notified, denotification of the Saraswati Forest and Bada Ban is awaiting permission from the Supreme Court.

Source: Ruchika Khanna. 'Panchkula dist gets wildlife sanctuary', *The Tribune*, 09/01/05,

HIMACHAL PRADESH

First ever pheasant census in HP



The first ever pheasant census, to be organized by the State Wild Life Department in association with the Wildlife Institute of India and the World Pheasants Association was held in Himachal Pradesh from April 28 to May 3. It is hoped

that the census would give a fair estimate of the

pheasant population and also help know their concentration, which is very important for planning conservation strategies.

The state wildlife department has already started a Rs 4.93 crore project for the conservation breeding of the western tragopan at the Sarhan pheasantry. The core group on conservation breeding had recently approved a Rs 4 crore project for the conservation breeding of the cheer pheasant as well. Another project for the conservation of the red jungle fowl was being formulated.

Source: Rakesh Lohumi. 'First ever pheasant census on anvil', *The Tribune*, 28/04/05.

Contact: **Dr. Sathyakumar**, Wildlife Institute of India, PO Box 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun – 248001, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-640111 – 15. Fax: 640117

Dam approved inside Renuka WLS

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), which met recently in Delhi, is said to have agreed to a proposal for a dam project inside the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary (see *PA Update* 32).

This proposal was one among many development projects inside PAs that were before the Standing committee for approval. The Committee is said to have approved various projects put forth by different state governments, like the construction of dams, roads and power houses, besides laying down of power and electricity lines, after assessing and discussing their impact on environment and wildlife in the areas.

Full details are however not available. The decisions will now be put before the Supreme Court for final approval.

Source: 'Nod to build dam in Renuka sanctuary', *The Tribune*, 07/04/05.

Contact: **CWLW**, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Dept. of Forest Farming & Conservation Mist Chamber, 1st Floor, Khalini, Shimla – 171001. Tel: 0177-223038. Fax -224192/223038

JHARKHAND

Compromise reached on annual mass ritual hunting in Dalma WLS

Striking a balance between the age-old tradition of *Sendra* and the directives of the Forest Department to conserve wildlife, tribals in the state, including in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary agreed to organise only a mock hunt during the festival this year. Groups of 100 tribals in various parts would now only kill one animal as a token to keep alive the spirit of the festival.

This development was made possible with the help of village eco-development committees and the forest management groups, which were roped in by the FD to impress upon the tribals the need for protection of wildlife in the sanctuary.

On the day of the festival, thousands of tribals from Jharkhand and other states converge at Dalma to participate in the hunt, which continues throughout the night. Concerned with the rise in killing of animals during the festival, the state FD came up with the concept of the mock *Sendra*.

An intensive awareness drive was launched in the villages in the region in the month of March. The Forest Range Officers and guards were instructed to generate awareness about the need to conserve wildlife and promote a violence-free hunting festival. The FD now plans to conduct a workshop at the forest divisions and territories to further minimise the killing of animals. It has also been suggested that the FD should give token prizes to the villagers for following the new concept of *Sendra*. (Also see *PA Updates* 50 & 25)

Source: 'Hunting festival minus blood and gore', *The Telegraph*, 02/04/05.

Assam kunkis to deal with marauding wild elephants in Jharkhand

The Jharkhand Forest Department has decided to hire two *kunkis* (trained elephants) from Assam for a period of 25 years to deal with the rampaging herds of wild elephants from the forests of Palamau, Dalma, Dumka, Pakur and Saranda. The basic aim appears to trap the

problem elephants that have unleashed a virtual reign of terror in these areas for the last few years.



After the formation of the state in November 2000, over 250 people have fallen prey to wild tuskers in Jharkhand. The problem is said to have increased in recent years due to widescale habitat destruction and a reduction of food availability for the wild elephants. The worst affected districts are Dumka, Pakur, East and West Singhbhum, Ranchi, Palamau and Latehar

Over the years the FD has attempted several measures to minimize the human-elephant conflict. It has set up electric fences in the elephant habitats of Saranda and Dalma, tried to fit radio collars on the animals to keep track of their movement and deployed more forest guards. None of these, however, appear to have yielded the desired result as marauding herds have kept up their attacks. (Also see *PA Updates* 52, 47 & 41)

Source: Nityanand Shukla. 'Assam kunkis to rein in Jharkhand marauders', *The Pioneer*, 12/04/05.

KARNATAKA

Karnataka takes special measures to deal with fires

The Karnataka Forest Department is said to be taking a series of special measures to deal with the problem of fires affecting forests in the state, including in a number of protected areas. Satellites are now being used to detect the presence of fires, the news of which is then communicated to the forest officials in the affected areas.

This reportedly worked well recently when forest officials in Bangalore had alerted the staff in Chikmagalur about the forest fire that broke in Madhuguni and Koramballi forests of Narasimharajapura taluk.

Due to the devastating fire that broke out in Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary last year (see *PA Update* 49), preventive steps have been taken to avoid recurrence of such destruction. Paths have been created to monitor the forest fires. Flowering of bamboo is also being monitored and three training camps have been organised to help keep tight vigil of the forest.

It has also been suggested that unseasonal rains experienced this year will ensure that fires will not be too widespread.

Source: 'Eye-in-the-sky tech to combat forest fires', *Deccan Herald*, 09/04/05.

Contact: **DCF**, Bhadra Wildlife Division (Bhadra Tiger Reserve) Chickmagalur - 577 101, Karnataka. Tel: 08262-234904. Fax: 08262-232799 /235385

NGO efforts to prevent fire in Nagarhole

The Nagarhole Wildlife Conservation and Education (NAWICOED) Project has taken up a massive campaign to prevent fires in and around Nagarhole National Park. One of the main efforts has been towards improving the awareness among people in villages surrounding the national park. The effort involved campaigning in 15 villages where more than 25,000 pamphlets having conservation messages were distributed to the people. A programme to promote awareness among the elected representatives of the taluk panchayat and zilla panchayat and journalists was also to be held.

Source: 'Campaign to prevent fire in Nagarhole' *Deccan Herald*, 18/03/05.

Threat to archeological treasures inside Bannerghata NP

Large stone burials (megaliths) found in and around the Bannerghata National Park are reported to be facing multiple threats.

The structures in question seem like huge benches with a rather large, flat slab of

stone supported on boulders piled haphazardly. The slabs, some with a diameter of over 10 feet and as thick as two feet are elevated to three feet from the ground and are supported on piles of boulders. In appearance these burials look like houses, which have been ruined over the years. But in fact, these structures were used as burials like a coffin with the walls plastered and neatly finished.

Locally known as *Pandavara gavi*, hundreds of these structures are found in the Bannerghatta National Park, namely on Mettabande, Dodda Ragihallibetta, Chikka Ragihallibetta and Mirza Hill. Locals believe that the Pandavas, a family of nomadic dwarfs according to tribal lore, used the stone structures as shelters.

The local Irula tribals used to leave their dead beneath these stone structures till as recently as seven years ago, when they were given a new burial ground. Human remains and shreds of clothes can still be seen beneath some of these ceremonial structures.

The main threats that these structures face come from treasure hunters who are known to blow these up in the search for hidden fortunes. Seven such men, armed with dynamites and lethal weapons, were rounded up by FD personnel recently near a cave at Dodda Ragihallibetta. The other main threat comes from the FD itself, which has in the past, demolished the ancient structures and used the rubble to build walls to stop the movement of elephants.

Source: Ashwin Raj. 'Archeological treasures under threat', *The Times of India*, 27/03/05.

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

Elephant census in Bandipur and Nagarhole

A three day elephant census was to be held from May 5 in the Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks, as part of a nation-wide count, conducted to ascertain the approximate number of wild elephants in the country.

The census was to include the block count, line transect method and waterhole

count, all undertaken to examine the family size, elephant structure and population trends among the pachyderms. Forest officials said that while nearly 30 per cent of the forest area would be covered in the block count method, dung counting would be undertaken in the line transects. Selected water holes in the forests were also to be observed.

The estimated number of wild elephants in India is more than 27,600, of which more than 14,800 are found in South India alone. Among the southern States, the elephant number in Karnataka has been pegged at 6,088, while Kerala and Tamil Nadu have 5,737 and 2,971 elephants respectively.

The Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks are part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, the first such reserve in the country that covers an area of over 5,000 sq km. This reserve is part of a large forest tract that covers over 13,000 sq km that supports about 6,300 elephants. Identified as one of the best areas for the conservation of the Asian Elephant, the reserve, with its large size of the habitat and population combined with the extensive network of protected areas covers a significant part of the elephant population and habitat.

Source: 'Elephant census to begin from May 5', *The Hindu*, 21/04/05.

Contact: **Director**, Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Ashokpuram, Mysore-570008. Karnataka.
Deputy Director and DCF (WL), Forest Department Bandipur National Park, Gundlupet, Chamrajnagar - 571 111, Karnataka.

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

KERALA

Tourism project proposed in Parambikulam

Kerala Tourism in association with the state Forest Department (FD) has proposed a number of activities to promote tourism in the Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary.

This prominently includes a Central Government assisted Rs. 46 lakh project to install tents here. Other activities proposed include setting up of tree-top huts, renovation of the abandoned hospital, commencement of boat services in the reservoir on securing permission from the Forest Department, introduction of mini-buses to travel through the forest and setting up a tourist facilitation centre at Parambikulam junction.

Source: 'Bid to make wildlife sanctuary a tourist spot', *The Hindu*, 21/01/05.

Contact: **Director**, Department of Tourism, Park View, Thiruvananthapuram - 695033, Kerala. Tel: 0471 - 326812. Fax: 322279

Eco-tourism project at Aralam WLS

An tourism initiative labeled as North Kerala's first eco-tourism project was recently launched in the Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary. It offers a series of options keeping in mind the diverse expectations of people.

Visitors on a day-trip can take short treks on the nature trails that have been developed along the fringes of the sanctuary, attend educational sessions at the information centre, go rafting on a section of the Cheenkannipuzha river that runs through the sanctuary or take a *coracle* ride on the river.

Other attractions include a ropeway and tree houses at two points within the project area. More serious enthusiasts, in small groups and with prior booking, can exercise the option of an overnight trek into the sanctuary.

The Aralam project, which is about 55 km from Kannur town, is said to have been designed to ensure involvement of the local tribal community. It is managed by the local community with support from the Kerala Forest Department.

The tourism department has invested about Rs 10 lakh in establishing tourist amenities in the project area.

Source: Sankar Radhakrishnan. 'Aralam eco-tour project gears for holiday season', *The Hindu Business Line*, 12/03/05.

Kerala cabinet gives green signal for new Sabarimala master plan

The Kerala Cabinet is reported to have given its green signal for a new master plan for Sabarimala, the first phase of which includes, a full-fledged queue complex on the Marakkootom-Sannidhanam stretch.

An apex-level steering committee headed by the Chief Secretary and a working level committee chaired by the Secretary (Devaswoms) would be set up to oversee the implementation of the master plan. A representative of the consulting company, Ecosmart India, (which prepared the master plan) would be in the working level committee besides the Pathanamthitta Collector and officials of the Dewaswom Board, Forest Department, Police and the Kerala Pollution Control Board.

Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. Oommen Chandy said that the details of the Sabarimala master plan would be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. The Central Government had promised to release forestland for implementation of the plan once the preliminary proposals were submitted. The Government, he added, had already released land belonging to the State Farming Corporation for the construction of a base camp at Nilakkal.

Earlier reports also pointed out that the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) will be implementing the first phase of the Pampa Action Plan (PAP) projects under the National River Conservation Programme along with its own projects to be taken up soon for the development of Sabarimala after the Centre allots forest land for the purpose.

Mr G. Raman Nair, President, TDB, said, that as required by the Union Government, the TDB has identified 305 acres of land in Sholayoor Panchayat in Attapady forest area in Palakkad district. This stretch of land would be bought and handed over to the Forest Department in lieu of the 12.712 ha of land in Periyar Tiger Reserve at Pampa and surrounding area and 90 ha of land in Nilakkal to be allotted by the Centre to the Board for development of the Sabarimala pilgrim centre.

A queue complex and toilet facilities among others are proposed to be built at Marakkootam area about 3 km away from

Sabarimala Sannidhanam for which 12.712 ha of forestland is needed. Since it is in the Periyar Tiger Reserve the allotment has to have the concurrence of the Supreme Court.

While in the case of Nilakkal, it is a rubber plantation currently held by the State Farming Corporation and hence no problem is expected in it being handed over. The Board would be handing over the 305 acres of land against the forestland to be made available at both the locations. The cost of land at Nilakkal was estimated to be about Rs. 9 lakh per hectare.

Negotiations were also on with the owners of land in Attapady. The TDB had also informed the Forest Department of its decision to buy the land, a green belt adjacent to the forest in the Attapady range.

The National River Conservation Directorate under the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has already approved the project involving an expenditure of Rs 18.45 crore and it has sanctioned the Centre's (70 per cent) share of Rs 12.90 crore. The allocation is for carrying out 11 pollution abatement works at Sabarimala and Pampa. Of these, the TDB would be implementing projects involving a cost of around Rs 16 crore at Sabarimala and Pampa under the PAP.

(Also see *PA Updates* 54, 47, 44, 41, 40, 34, 30, 27, 24, 23 & 21)

Source: 'Cabinet gives green signal for new Sabarimala master plan', *The Hindu*, 21/04/05.

KG Nair. 'Devaswom Board to take up PAP projects after land allotment', *The Hindu*, 29/03/05

Contact: **Field Director**, Periyar Tiger Reserve, Aranya Bhavan, Forest Complex, S.H. Mount P.O., Kottayam - 686 006

Water scarcity in Periyar



Reports indicate that the ongoing heat wave in the south has led to an acute water

scarcity for the wild animals, especially elephants, in the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Forest official sources said the Periyar dam level had touched an all-time low of 108 ft .

Tourists now walk more than one km to reach boats as the water has receded in the Thekkady boat station. The officials also said that wild animals were being closely monitored and drinking water would be arranged for them if needed.

Source: 'Water scarcity in Periyar wildlife reserve', *The Hindu*, 30/03/05.

MADHYA PRADESH

No more stray dog releases into Noradehi WLS

The Municipal Corporation of Sagar, a cantonment town in central Madhya Pradesh, has decided to put an immediate stop to its practice of releasing stray dogs into the Noradehi Wildlife Sanctuary located about 40 kms from the town.

The practise had been started by the corporation in response to a huge public outcry over rise in cases of dog bites owing to the flourishing stray dog population in the area. The corporation hired a contractor whose mandate was to catch the stray dogs and release them inside the Noradehi Wildlife Sanctuary. Over a period of about three months starting in December 2004, 724 dogs were caught from the town and released inside the sanctuary. The corporation duly paid Rs 33,000 to the contractor at the rate of Rs 45 a dog.

The decision to stop this practice was taken after an incident on March 20, 2005, when stray dogs killed 10 chital in the Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal. The Sagar Corporation officials now fear that the dogs released by them into the sanctuary may become the hunters, posing a threat to deer and other herbivores in the sanctuary. Significantly, the corporation had not taken the permission of the Forest Department before releasing the dogs into the sanctuary in the first place.

Source: 'Stray dogs not to be freed into sanctuary', *Deccan Herald*, 26/03/05.

Wild dogs found dead in Kanha

Reports indicate that at least 10 wild dogs were found dead in the Kanha Tiger Reserve in the month of March 2005. Five wild dog carcasses were found lying in a small area between Mukhi and Baihar on the Balaghat side and the Forest Department has said they have not been able to ascertain the cause of their death.

It has also been alleged by some forest staff that, initially, all effort was made to keep these deaths a closely guarded secret, that wildlife health experts were not contacted immediately and nothing was done by the park management to conduct an autopsy to find out how an entire pack of wild dogs was wiped out from a small area.

Experts say it is extremely important to find out whether the mass mortality was due to some disease or the wild dogs had died after drinking water from some poisoned water hole. Accidental findings during recent postmortems in Kanha and the Pench Tiger Reserve have already revealed that wild animals in these protected areas have been suffering from lungworm infection or the infectious feline pan leukemia (FPL).

Experts have also emphasized that there should be maximum coordination between park managers and wildlife health experts to ensure that a Kanha like situation does not get repeated in other protected areas.

Source: 'Wild dogs found dead in Kanha', *The Hindu*, 08/04/05.

Contact: **Director**, Kanha Tiger Reserve,
Mandla - 481661 Madhya Pradesh

MP Forest Dept., cops to jointly tackle poaching

A series of meetings have been held recently between senior officials of the Madhya Pradesh Forest and Police Departments to enhance co-operation in tackling wildlife crime in the state. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the police had submitted a list of detailed suggestions in the last meeting of the State Wildlife Advisory Board

to make anti-poaching operations of the Forest Department more effective.

These include suggestions for a weekly review of cases by senior officers, attachment of forest personnel with police personnel in sensitive districts, involvement of police officials and the public prosecutor in district-level meetings, checking places on the transit route of wildlife merchandise, training forest officials in investigation techniques, training prosecutors in various sections of the Wildlife Protection Act and appointment of a special prosecutor for dealing with poaching cases as in of narcotics.

The Police have also suggested that the FD consider transferring cases involving animals like the tiger and the leopard to the police for investigation and make provision for payment of compensation to people who have lost livestock in animal attacks. They have also proposed the involvement of the judiciary in district-level meetings of the anti-poaching squads.

A greater role of the police has been sought by the FD on the realization that the prosecution rate in cases of wildlife crimes was very low. The FD field staff was also found lacking in successfully investigating wildlife crimes, leading to the acquittal of the accused.

Source: Rahul Noronha. 'Forest Dept, MP cops join hands to tackle poaching', *The Pioneer*, 13/04/05.

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

MAHARASHTRA

Wildlife census 2005 in Maharashtra

The Maharashtra Forest Department is carrying out a detailed wildlife census this year with all the wings of the Forest Dept who will be actively involved in the field. The FD has also decided for the first time that the census would be held on private lands to get a detailed figure of the fauna. Following was the schedule that had been worked out for the purpose of the count:

1st Phase - Field Surveillance: 18th April to 22nd April 2005.

2nd Phase - Actual Census Count: 23 & 24 April 2005.

3rd Phase - Count at Water Holes: 22nd and 23rd May 2005.

Source: Email dated 05/04/05 from Manish Moghe to defendingwildindia@yahoo.com.

Fire in Melghat; animals safe

Fire broke out in parts of Melghat Tiger Reserve in the first week of April, but officials said it was brought under control and that there was no threat to wildlife in the reserve.

Fire was reported from Dolar, Somthana and Dhargarh areas in the park. Director Mr. Nitin Kakodkar said that this was a common thing in the dry season and there was nothing to worry about. It was suggested that the fires might have spread from the burning by tribals who set patches of forest afire for various reasons including for the collection of mahua flowers.

Source: 'Melghat fire: Officials say animals safe', *The Indian Express*, 05/04/05.

Contact: **Field Director**, Melghat Tiger Reserve, Amravati- 444 602
Maharashtra

ORISSA

Political spat over Bangladeshi settlers in and around Bhitarkanika NP

Political parties in Orissa are up in arms against each other over the sensitive issue of Bangladeshi settlers in and around the Bhitarkanika National Park. The present point of contention are the 'Quit India' notices issued in December 2004 to 1,551 'allegedly' illegal Bangladeshi settlers here (Also see *PA Updates* 44 & 43).

Officials in the state home department said that the government had no other option but to launch an operation to identify and deport Bangladeshis as they have become a major headache for the local administration in different districts, particularly in the coastal areas. They point to the fact that the settlers were responsible for the destruction of thousands of acres of mangrove forests in

Kendrapara, which has already affected the local ecology. Wildlife organizations like the Wildlife Society of Orissa have supported this move of the state government.

The state government has also claimed that they were causing law and order problems; they had been found indulging in illegal activities along the coastline including an attempt to set up clandestine radio stations and beating up forests guards manning important natural resources like the Bhitarkanika mangroves.

Moreover, officials point out, the state government has not done anything illegal by trying to identify and deport the Bangladeshis as a Government of India circular issued in September, 1997 had clearly stated that Bangladeshis settled in the country after December 16, 1971 (the day Bangladesh was created) are to be deported after due inquiry and issuance of Quit India notices as per provisions of the Foreigners Act.

The State Congress leaders however say that this is only a political move as all these Bangladeshis who have been served with quit India notices are genuine refugees who had come to the state and settled down much before the cut off date of December 16, 1971.

Source: ST Beuria. 'Political spat over Bangla settlers', *Deccan Herald*, 06/03/05.

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

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

Fire in Bhitarkanika National Park

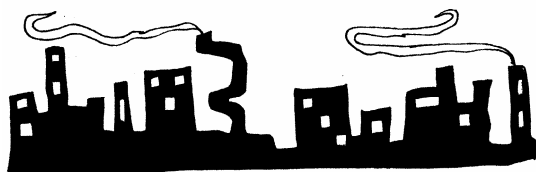
Nearly 12 acres of mangroves in the Krusnapriyapur area of the Bhitarkanika National Park were destroyed in the last week of April. It was suspected that the blaze was triggered by unauthorised honey collectors who set fire to a clump of mangroves in order to smoke out bees. The fire spread within a matter of minutes reducing large tracts of greenery to ashes.

A similar blaze had destroyed nearly seven acres of the mangroves here in April last

year as well. It has been suggested that this problem and threats to the mangroves here are due to the presence of the Bangladeshi settlers. (See above story. Also see *PA Update* 49).

Source: Ashutosh Mishra. 'Fire destroys precious mangroves', *The Pioneer*, 27/04/05.

Bhitarkanika threatened by mega steel plants hub at Duburi



The proposed mega steel plants hub at Duburi in Jajpur district with a combined capacity of 44 million tonnes of steel could pose one of the greatest threats to the survival of mangroves and ecosystem of the Bhitarkanika National Park. The threat arises from the fact that huge quantities of water from the Brahmani river that presently reach the park may be diverted to fulfill the needs of the steel plants in Duburi.

The reduction in water flow will lead to drastic changes in the water regime of Bhitarkanika mangroves as there shall be acute fresh water shortage downstream of the Jokadia barrage.

Steel making requires enormous quantities of water. For every tonne of finished steel, 100,000 cubic metres of water is required. The total live storage capacity (LSC) of Rengali Reservoir is said to be 4,400 million cubic metres. Rengali canals shall require 3,450 mcum. Large industrial users like NTPC, NALCO, Mahandi Coalfields, and SAIL shall draw 454 mcum. Additional 414 million cubic metres shall be drawn from Brahmani at Jokadia barrage once the mega steel plants go on stream. This will leave almost no water for the mangrove systems in Bhitarkanika. The water availability at Jokadia too is reported to be drastically reducing every year. It was only 98.56 cusecs in April 2003 compared to 231.66 cusecs in April 1999 — a

decrease of nearly 58 per cent over the last four years.

In addition to the environmental damage, lakhs of people depending on the river system for drinking and irrigation purposes would be adversely affected. Livelihoods of farmers and fishermen dependent upon the waters of the Brahmani and Kharasrota would be affected as well. Sweet water will no longer be available for farmers of Aul and Pattamundai areas. Similarly, commercially important species like the fresh water lobster and *bhekti* may disappear too, leading to decline in incomes of thousands of fishermen of Kendrapada district.

It is also feared that this could increase human-crocodile conflict as estuarine crocodiles could leave the core sanctuary area and migrating upstream due to increase in salinity level upstream. (see *PA Updates* 53 and 50)

Source: 'Steel may spell extinction for Bhitarkanika mangroves', *The Statesman*, 25/03/05.

Contact: **Biswajit Mohanty**, see above

Special measures to prevent Akhand Shikar in Simlipal

Security was beefed up in and around the Simlipal Tiger Reserve and national park in Orissa's tribal-dominated Mayurbhanj district in view of the 'Akhand Shikar', a tribal ritual observed here from April 14. During the month-long annual ritual, which begins every year on the day of 'Pana Sankranti' — a major festival in the state — tribals go on mass wild animal hunts.

Sources in the FD said that all entry points into the national park covering an area of 2,750 sq. kms. had been sealed and five sections of armed police had been deployed in and around the PA. Additionally, assistance of ex-servicemen was sought to prevent the event. Nearly 50 armed ex-servicemen were deployed to help the security personnel in guarding the forests of the tiger reserve.

Thirty-three 'anti-poaching' camps were also set up in and around the national park to create awareness among the tribals about the impacts of animal killing. Details of what transpired on and after April 14 are not presently known. (Also see *PA Updates* 49, 41, 26, 21 & 17)

Source: 'Security up in Orissa park as animal hunting ritual nears', *Deccan Herald*, 12/04/05.

Contact: **Director**, Simlipal Tiger Reserve, P.O. Baripada, Dist. Mayurbhanj – 757002, Orissa. Tel: 06792-252593 /252773. Fax: 256705
CWLW– Orissa, Plot No. 8, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751007, Orissa. Tel: 0674-513134 / 515840. Fax: 512502

PUNJAB

Punjab fails to utilise wildlife funds

Punjab has failed to utilise funds released by the Central Government for the maintenance of national parks and sanctuaries in the state. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), following a request from the state government three years ago, released Rs 50.05 lakh for the maintenance of Bir Moti Bagh (Rs 33.5 lakh) and Bir Bunerhari (Rs 1.5 lakh and Rs 0.40 lakh) near Patiala, Harike Lake (Rs 7.25 lakh) near Ferozepore, Bir Gurdial Pura (4.9 lakh) near Fatehgarh Sahib and the Abohar Sanctuary (Rs 2.5 lakh).

The state government has now been given permission by the MoEF to utilize the left over money for other permitted activities. This however means that the state government will not be able to get additional grants from the Centre for its parks and sanctuaries. The Punjab Government had asked for money for the protection and demarcation of sanctuaries, providing water holes for animals, improvement of roads, cleaning the Harike lake, forests communications, and vehicles.

Source: Vibha Sharma. 'Punjab fails to utilize wildlife funds', *The Tribune*, 23/04/05.

RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan MLAs forum for protection of environment and wildlife

Concern over the status of protected areas in the state like Sariska, Ranthambhore and Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur has

prompted MLAs in Rajasthan to form a forum to raise environment related issues in the state assembly and mobilize support from all sectors.

Called 'Parliamentarians for Protection of Environment and Wildlife' (PPEW) the forum is to be convened by the Congress legislator from Taranagar, Dr. Chandra Shekhar Baid.

Full details of actions taken or that have been proposed are not known.

Source: 'Parliamentarians forum for eco protection', *Deccan Herald*, 14/03/05.

CBI probe finds no tigers in Sariska; to investigate five poaching cases



A team of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) headed by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) BK Sharma reported that it could neither sight a tiger nor find a pugmark during its visit in March to the tiger reserve. The investigation had been undertaken on the directions of the PM, Dr. Manmohan Singh, following reports in the press that all tigers in Sariska had been poached.

The CBI has pointed out that negligence on part of the State Forest Department and poaching had led to the present situation in Sariska. The CBI said that it had identified an illegal wildlife trade network involving the well-known smuggler Sansar Chand.

The CBI report is said to have suggested several measures to 'improve' the state of affairs in tiger reserves in the country. It was also pointed out that census figures of 2001 showing 26 tigers in Sariska were inflated and that there was no coordination between the centre and state forest officials.

In a subsequent development, it has also been decided that the CBI will take over the investigation of five cases relating to poaching in Sariska. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) in its short-term recommendation had suggested that five poaching and related cases that were

registered this year should be handed over to the CBI for further investigation. This has now been approved. Four of the cases — No. 11/91 dated 15.03.05, 45/91 dated 11.03.05, 11/92 dated 15.03.05, 11/93 dated 15.03.05 — are registered in Rajasthan and one case is registered in Delhi — Kamla Market Police Station FIR no 82/2005 dated 31.01.05. The cases also relate to a gang of suspected poachers who reportedly confessed to killing tigers in Sariska between 2001 and 2004.

The SIT in its long-term suggestion had pointed out that there is no way of relocating tigers to Sariska because of the absence of a fringe population and link with any other tiger habitat. The team said that implementation of the short-term measures, could be followed by a programme for re-introduction of tigers there.

Source: 'No tigers found in Sariska', *Deccan Herald*, 11/04/05.

Nirmala Ganapathy. 'CBI probe into 5 cases of poaching in Sariska', *The Indian Express*, 07/05/05

Contact: **Director**, Sariska Tiger Reserve,
Sariska, Alwar – 301022, Rajasthan.
Tel: 01465-25043

SC asks for report on illegal mining in Sariska

The Supreme Court has recently issued a notice to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) asking for a report on illegal mining in the forests of the Sariska Tiger Reserve. The apex court also asked the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to visit the tiger reserve and submit its report.

The notices were issued in response to an application filed by the *Bandhua Mukti Morcha*, which has a list of 145 mines allegedly working in the tiger reserve area. The application also recalled that the court had ordered in 1993 itself that no mining could be done in the tiger reserve area and the same was reiterated in the 2000 order.

The allegations were denied by the advocate representing the MoEF.

Source: 'Court asks for report on illegal mining in Sariska', *The Pioneer*, 06/05/05.

TAMIL NADU

Proposal for a Blackbuck sanctuary in Sujilkarai forest area of Sathyamangalam district



Sathyamangalam Forest officials have proposed the creation of a Blackbuck sanctuary in the Sujilkarai forest area at Sathyamangalam. An estimated 450 blackbuck are found in this area, which lies within the Bhavanisagar forest range.

Further details are not known.

Source: 'Forest officials seek sanctuary for blackbucks', *The Hindu*, 27/04/05.

Meeting held to discuss protection/conservation of Gulf of Mannar MNP

A meeting of the District Wildlife Coordination Committee (DWCC), chaired by the Tuticorin Collector, V. Chandrasekaran was held in March to discuss the enforcement and regulatory mechanism for conservation of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park (GMMNP). Those participating included officials from the Departments of Forest, Revenue, Health, Coast Guard, Animal Husbandry and Customs

Following the meeting, the DWCC is reported to have instructed the Fisheries Department to keep tabs on fishing using banned nets inside the park and to prevent trawlers from entering within three nautical miles of the park area, besides monitoring fish landing centres to trace harvest of 'banned animals.' It was decided to intensify enforcement of laws against those indulging in marine animal-related crimes through joint patrols involving various government agencies and to invoke the Goondas Act for the purpose.

The DWCC has also decided to send a detailed report to the State Government on rehabilitation of coral miners, especially from the Tharuvaikulam fishing hamlet. The attempt is to

provide an alternative livelihood package to coral miners to wean them away from mining activities

Source: 'Conservation efforts in marine park to be stepped up', *The Hindu*, 25/03/05.

Post tsunami afforestation in Gulf of Mannar

Officials of Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park (GMMNP) have submitted a proposal for afforestation along a 340-km coastline here to the 'post-tsunami afforestation committee' set up by the State Government. V. Naganathan, Wildlife Warden, GMMNP, said that 650 hectares of land between Tuticorin and Thondi in Ramanathapuram district had been identified for afforestation with mangroves and casuarina to create natural barriers against disasters such as the tsunami.

Mangroves are to be raised as 'block plantations' at 19 locations over 550 hectares. These are to be planted in mud flats near estuaries. The remaining area of nearly 100 hectares, where the soil is loose, would be covered with casuarina that would act as 'shelter belt plantations.' These plantations are to come up in six different locations.

The entire scheme costing about Rs. one crore was expected to be executed within nine months. The scheme has been chalked out as part of the efforts to cover every inch of land along the Gulf of Mannar coast with plantations, which could protect the fishing hamlets from destructive winds and waves.

Source: 'Gulf of Mannar afforestation', *The Hindu*, 21/04/05.

Contact: **CWLW**, Tamil Nadu, 6D, Panagal Building, No.1, Jeenu Road, Saidapet, Chennai - 600015. Tel: 044-24321738 / 22353589. Fax: 2433707/24321738

UTTARANCHAL

***Kaal* shooting in Corbett, allegedly in violation of Wildlife Act**

An application was recently filed in the Supreme Court (SC) alleging that the Hindi

film *Kaal* that was released on April 29, was shot inside Corbett National Park in violation of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The application seeking directions to the Union Government to initiate appropriate action after investigating the matter and submit a report in this regard to the court was mentioned before a bench of the Supreme Court by Amicus Curiae and senior counsel Harish Salve. The court has issued notices to the Central Government, the Uttaranchal State Government and the producer of the film.



The petition requested the Supreme Court to impose exemplary damages on the film for the violations that it has committed.

The Uttaranchal Government has in response denied that it violated any provision of the WLPA. None of the animals used were from the park. The State Chief Wildlife Warden, Shrikant Chandola clarified that he was legally competent as per Sections 28 and 35 of the WLPA to grant permission for shooting of films in protected areas. According to him the film crew was allowed in and around the park for 27 days in November 2004, following a payment of Rs. Six lakhs. The state government is reported to have issued an order in 2002, fixing the rate for shooting in PAs at Rs. 20,000 per day.

The Director of the Park when the shooting took place, Mr. Digvijay Singh Khatri has said that all precautions were taken during the shooting and that the park officials had even made a video of the entire shooting to ensure that wildlife was not harmed. He further clarified that the film was shot inside the park for only two

days while the rest of the work was done in Ramnagar and other buffer areas.

Source: 'Kaal in Corbett shoot trouble', *The Asian Age*, 30/04/05.
SMA Kazmi. 'Tigers in Kaal not from Corbett', *The Indian Express*, 05/05/05.
Contact: **Field Director**, Corbett Tiger Reserve, Ramnagar –244715, Nainital, Uttaranchal. Tel: 05947 – 85489. Fax: 85376

Chilla range of Rajaji NP flourishing after relocation of gujjars

The Chilla Range, spread over nearly a quarter of the Rajaji National Park is said to be flourishing after the 2002 relocation of 193 gujjar families from here, and their resettlement in Gaindikhatta.

To learn how the forest would regenerate after the removal of human and livestock pressure, a study was initiated by the Wildlife Institute of India to scientifically monitor vegetation, ungulates and tiger recovery. Chilla range was divided into three parts and twelve camera traps were rotated within these so that the entire area was covered within a thirty-day cycle. The camera traps recently revealed the presence of two breeding tigresses, which is being considered an important indicator of the recovery of the forests here. Significantly, this is the first confirmed tiger sighting in the Chilla range in twenty years.

Chilla is on the east bank of the River Ganga and almost contiguous to the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Experts believe that it is possible that the tigers migrated from the buffer zones of Corbett to Chilla after the Gujjars were relocated.

(Also see *PA Updates* 47, 41, 29 & 20)

Source: Perna Singh Bindra. 'Amber eyes warm Chilla', *The Pioneer*, 14/04/05.
Contact: **Director**, Rajaji NP, Shivalik House, Dehradun – 248001, Uttaranchal.

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

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Petition before SC asks for steps to save the tiger

The Supreme Court recently directed the Central Government to address the 19 points raised in a petition by Mr. Navin Raheja asking for protecting the tiger. Mr Raheja is a former member of the Steering Committee of Project Tiger. In response, the Union Ministry has agreed to implement 12 of the proposals spelt out in the petition and court has asked that the other seven also be considered.

The 12 issues, which the government agreed to implement with the help of the state governments included: timely release of funds to tiger reserves, filling up of vacant posts of forest officials, timely payment of compensation to owners of cattle killed by tigers, proper training to forest officials and guards, legal powers to forest officers to take action against culprits, settlement of rights of the tribals, intelligence networking, incentives and rewards for catching poachers, proper transfer and posting policy for forest officials, setting up of rationalisation committees and creation of effective communication networks in the protected areas.

The seven issues on which the government was silent included setting up of a legal cell in reserved forest areas, education of local population about the importance of the species through the media, matters related to interbreeding, development of peripheral areas of protected areas, tourism and raising of funds through it, relocation of roads and rail lines from sanctuaries and parks and control on giving licences for guns

Source: 'Act on petition to save tigers, SC asks Centre', *The Pioneer*, 02/05/05.

Online database on Indian legal instruments related to fisheries

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), an international NGO working on issues related to small-scale and

artisanal fisheries, has made available online, a database on Indian legal instruments relevant to fisheries and fishworkers at www.icsf.net/jsp/english/legalInstruments.jsp. The database is a compilation of national and State-level laws relevant to marine fisheries and fishworkers.

The Central Acts section provides the full texts of The Indian Fisheries Act, 1897; The Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other Maritime Zones Act, 1976; and The Maritime Zones of India (Regulation of Fishing by Foreign Vessels) Act, 1981, and Rules, 1982. This section also includes selected legislation on environmental pollution and protection of wildlife and the coastal zone.

The section on states provides the full texts of the acts, rules, amendments and subsequent notifications enacted by the nine Indian coastal States and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. These cover various areas such as reserved artisanal fishing zones, resource management measures, licensing and registration fees for different vessel categories.

Contact: **ICSF**, 27 College Road, Chennai 600 006. Tel: 044-28275303. Fax: 28254457. Website: www.icsf.net; www.icsf.org

Wildlife awareness campaign for Tibetans in India

A joint campaign launched by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and Care for the Wild International (CWI) to build awareness on the significance of nature conservation and the status of protection of wild species among the Tibetan community living in India and the Buddhists of the Himalayan region was recently inaugurated and supported by the Dalai Lama in New Delhi.

Those who spoke at the event included among others, Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, who has established the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Dr Barbara Maas, Chief Executive, CWI and Mr. Ashok Kumar of the WTI.

It would be recalled that a large seizure of wildlife articles en route to Tibet

took place in Nepal in March last year (see *PA Updates* 52 & 46). A haul of eight tiger skins and nearly 400 kg of tiger bones was made in New Delhi as far back as 1993 and on October 9, 2003 again, Tibetan enforcement authorities intercepted a truck on the border with Nepal that carried 32 tiger skins, 579 leopard skins, and 665 otter skins – probably the largest single haul of tiger and leopard skins, internationally, in recent history

Source: Arjun Rammohan. Email to nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU dated 07/04/05.

Contact: **Arjun Rammohan**, WTI, A-220, New Friends Colony, New Delhi - 110065. Tel: 011 - 26326025/26. Fax: 26326027 Email: arjun@wildlifetrustofindia.org

Green Guard awards presented

The third Green Guard Awards instituted by the Kolkata based NGO 'The Jungles' were recently presented in Kolkata. The 'Exceptional Individual Performance' award for the year 2002-03 was given posthumously to Shyamsundar Singh, a forest guard at the Bhitarkanika National Park who was tortured and killed on February 8, 2003 by poachers.

The other recipients short-listed from 53 national parks were Prakash Damodar Salelkar, Range Forest Officer, Mollem National Park, Goa, who was also awarded for individual performance, and three national parks that were selected for 'Exceptional Team Performance'. The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, Tamil Nadu, received the team performance award for its 'Anti-Poaching Operation'.

Source: 'Guards of the green bastion', *The Telegraph*, 30/04/05.

Contact: **Raja Chatterjee**, The Jungles, 78, Brahma Samaj Rd., Behala, Kolkata – 700034. Tel: 033 – 4680271. Fax: 292897.

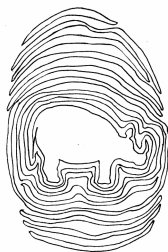
Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Awards presented

The annual Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Awards were presented recently in a function held in New Delhi.

Wildlife photographer, filmmaker, author and conservationist Belinda Wright was presented this year's conservation award, while scrolls of honour were presented to the Conservator of Forests, Yamuna Circle, Dehra Dun, Paramjit Singh: ranger in the Assam Forest Department, Pankaj Sharma: naturalist Maan Barua: and the Supreme Court lawyer, Ritwick Dutta.

Source: 'Wildlife conservation award presented', *The Hindu*, 09/04/05.

Proposal for National Bureau of Wildlife Crime



The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has proposed the setting up a National Bureau of Wildlife Crime (NBWC) to collect and analyze intelligence data, and investigate & prosecute

wildlife related crimes. To be modeled on the Narcotics Bureau, the NBWC has been envisaged as a multi-agency unit that will integrate operations with the Forest Department, Police Intelligence Bureau, Central Bureau of Investigation, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Border Security Force and Customs.

The MoEF is said to have already prepared a draft Cabinet note and circulated it to different ministries for comments. The bureau will be headquartered in New Delhi, with nine branches in different parts of the country. Besides poaching, the agency will trail trade in illegal wildlife parts across India's borders and will also implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the international treaty that seeks to curb illegal wildlife trade.

Source: Srinijoy Chowdhury. 'Anti-poaching cell on CBI lines in offing', *The Statesman*, 02/04/05.
'Ministry mulls bureau for wildlife protection', *The Pioneer*, 12/04/05.

Meeting of the Project Tiger Steering Committee

The Steering Committee of Project Tiger held its first meeting in two years in New Delhi on April 12 and 13. Non-governmental members participating in the meeting submitted their detailed assessment of the situation. The note highlighted various issues that included collapse of reserve protection, diversion to big budget rural projects, damage to tiger habitat, the big negative impact of development projects, the lack of investment in credible science in tiger monitoring and the failure, even, to call meeting of the Project Tiger Steering Committee.

They also demanded the deployment of a 1000 men in 10 tiger reserves, at least half of them armed, to prevent poaching during the forthcoming monsoon season. The MoEF said that poaching was the main problem and that it would deploy home guards, retired army personnel and other staff to prevent poaching activities in problematic areas. Official figures on tiger poaching made available said that between 1999 and 2003, as many as 114 to 122 tigers were poached and about 60 died of natural causes.

It was also decided at the meeting that no new tiger reserves will be declared till present problems were sorted out. Five states had recently proposed creation of new tiger reserves based on tiger sightings in the respective areas (see *PA Updates* 54, & 53). It was also decided that enlargement of existing reserves would be considered after a committee decided norms and also that no tiger reserve would be delisted.

Source: 'Activists, officials roar at tiger meet', *The Times of India*, 13/04/05.

'Ministry okays tighter vigil at reserves', *The Indian Express*, 13/04/05.

Vibha Sharma. 'Corridors between tiger reserves mooted', *The Tribune*, 13/04/05.

Contact: **Dr. Rajesh Gopal**, Director, Project Tiger Annexe No.5, Bikaner House, Shah Jahan Road, New Delhi 110 001.
Email: dirpt-r@hub.nic.in

Sunita Narain to head tiger task force

Sunita Narain, Director of the New Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has

been appointed as Chairperson of the newly created Tiger Task Force, that was set up by the Prime Minister during the meeting of the National Board for Wildlife held in March

The task force has been given the job of reviewing the management of tiger reserves in the country within a time frame of three months.

Other members of the task force are Mr. Valmik Thapar, Mr. HS Panwar, Dr. Madhav Gadgil and Mr. Samar Singh.

The terms of reference for the Task Force are to:

1. Suggest measures to strengthen tiger conservation in the country.
2. Suggest measures to incentivise the local community in conservation of tigers.
3. Suggest measures to incentivise local forest staff posted in sanctuaries/national parks and ensure an effective HR plan for tiger conservation/wildlife managers.
4. Suggest measures to improve the methodology of tiger counting and forecasting.
5. Suggest methods of transparent professional audit of wildlife parks and placing data on tiger conservation in the public domain.
6. Suggest a new wildlife management paradigm that shares concerns of conservation with the public at large

(See Page 25 for press release by the Tiger Task Force)

Source: 'Sunita Narain to head tiger task force', <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/showbnews/1077248.cms>, 14/04/05
'Task force suggests ways to improve conservation', *The Indian Express*, 30/04/05.

Contact: **Sunita Narain**, CSE, 41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi 110062.
Email: sunita@cseindia.org

MPs form 'Tiger and Wilderness Watch' forum

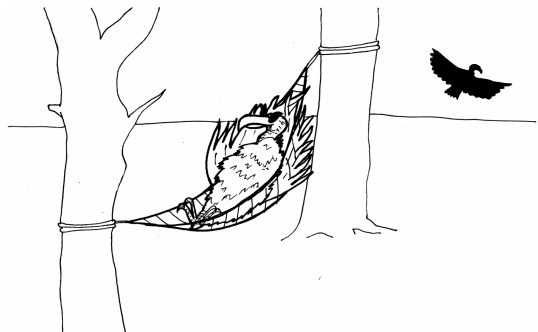
10 parliamentarians cutting across party lines have formed 'Tiger and Wilderness Watch', a forum to lobby for conservation and tiger protection. The members of the forum are

Jyotiraditya Scindia, Rahul Gandhi, Renuka Chowdhury, BJ Panda, Suresh Prabhu, Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Anand Sharma, Manvendra Singh, Natwar Singh, Karan Singh and VP Singh Badnore.

Members of the forum recently met the Environment Minister A Raja and demanded among other things, the deployment of additional forces in 10 tiger reserves believed to be the troubled reserves. The reserves identified by the forum as troubled are Manas (Assam), Namdapha (Arunachal Pradesh), Simlipal (Orissa), Valmiki (Bihar), Palamau (Jharkhand), Nagarjuna (Andhra Pradesh), Indravati (Chhattisgarh), Panna (Madhya Pradesh), Pench (Madhya Pradesh), and Tadoba (Maharashtra).

Source: 'MPs form tiger caucus, to meet PM by weekend', *The Indian Express*, 28/04/05.

Special fund for vulture conservation



The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) will provide special funds for vulture conservation through its existing programmes for wildlife conservation. The Chief Wildlife Wardens of vulture-range states have also been asked to set up technical advisory committees for the same. The steps have been taken following an unprecedented decline in the number of three species of Gyps vultures found in South Asia, including India, since 1990. The Oriental White-Backed Vulture, Long-Billed Vulture and the Slender-Billed Vulture are facing imminent extinction across most of their current geographical range, due to the veterinary drug, 'diclofenac.'

Population surveys have revealed declines of vulture species in excess of 97 per cent over a period of 12 years in India. Unusually high mortality was reported in White-Backed and

Long-Billed Vultures in Keoladeo NP, Bharatpur, in 1996-97. Between 1987 and 1996, the number of nests of White-Backed Vultures reduced from 353 to 150 in the park. The Long-Billed Vultures also showed a similar decline of 97 per cent from 816 in 1985-86 to 25 in 1998-99.

Similar declines were noticed in Pakistan and other neighbouring countries and post-mortem findings showed the presence of visceral gout or accumulation of uric acid within tissues and on the surfaces of internal organs as the major cause of death. Diagnostic tests conducted by the experts revealed detectable levels of 'diclofenac' in their kidneys. Further scientific experiments showed that vultures often fed on livestock treated with 'diclofenac' in a quantity sufficient to kill the birds.

'Diclofenac' is a member of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) group, which includes aspirin and ibuprofen, and has been widely and safely used in humans to treat pain, fever and inflammation since its introduction in the market in the 1970s. It is not approved for veterinary use in North America or Europe but was marketed in the Indian sub-continent to treat livestock in the late 1980s. A decision to ban its use was taken recently at the meeting of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) that was chaired by the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

A high-level meeting of the Ministry of Forest and Environments, the Animal Husbandry Department the Ministry of Agriculture, wildlife experts from the Wildlife Institute of India and the Bombay Natural History Society along with the Drug Controller of India and drug manufacturers, was also held recently in New Delhi to figure out the modalities of implementing the ban and drawing a roadmap for vulture conservation

The MoEF has written to the Ministries of Agriculture and Health and State Governments to phase out the use of 'diclofenac' and replace it with non-lethal substitutes. They have also been asked to ensure safe disposal of 'diclofenac' contaminated carcasses, if any, with the help of the Animal Husbandry Department.

The Punjab government also took a decision to ban the use of the drug during a meeting of the State Wildlife Advisory Board that was held in the last week of April.

Source: Aarti Dhar. 'Special fund for vulture conservation', *The Hindu*, 22/03/05.

Swati Vashishtha. 'Meeting discusses vulture conservation programmes', *The Tribune*, 25/04/05.

Wildlife advisory board bans diclofenac', *The Pioneer*, 29/04/05.

SOUTH ASIA

Traffic International South Asia Regional office in Sri Lanka

The South Asia office of Traffic International, which monitors trade in wildlife products is being set up in Colombo in Sri Lanka. Recruitment for the office that will be the co-ordination centre for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan is also said to have started. The Colombo office will also help these countries set up national offices, which will then report to Colombo.

The office in Colombo will take on the task of strategic planning, development of work programmes, financial administration and fund raising, research and policy development. It will also organise investigations and analyses of wildlife trade issues in the region within a pre-agreed framework.

Source: Bindu Shajan Perappadan. 'Traffic International by-passes India, to set office in Colombo', *The Hindu*, 05/04/05.

MoEF proposes Task Force on Trans-Boundary PAs

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has proposed the creation of a Task Force for Trans-Boundary protected areas that will look at ways of setting up such parks between India and its neighbours. Some of the areas proposed to be so declared include the Manas National Park in Assam and Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan, Sunderbans of India and

Bangladesh and Dudhwa National Park and Chitwan in Nepal.

The task force would have to seek approval from the Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence and External Affairs and sign MoUs with the respective neighbouring countries as well. The MoEF has already proposed the composition of the task force with Secretary, MoEF as chairperson. The other members would include Mr. Samar Singh, Mr. Inayatullah, representatives of the MEA, MHA, MoD and directors of Project Tiger and Project Elephant.

Source: Nirmala Ganpathy. 'On MEA cards, parks beyond boundaries', *The Indian Express*, 16/03/05.

NEPAL

Rhino numbers fall in Royal Chitwan NP

The recently concluded Rhino Count 2005 in the Royal Chitwan National Park has shown that the rhino population here is 372, down from a high of 544 in the year 2000. Poaching has been cited as the main reason for rhino deaths here. A total of 101 rhinos were reportedly poached between 2000 and March 2005, while 66 rhinos succumbed to natural deaths - fighting among themselves, killing by tigers and old age.

The ongoing conflict in Nepal, which has diverted the security forces from protection in the parks, is said to have allowed a great deal of freedom and free access to poachers who are making the best of the opportunity. Merging of the posts of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) due to insurgency has declined vigilance in the park. Till 2001, Chitwan had 32 RNA posts to keep watch. This has now been reduced to only seven. (Also see *PA Updates* 47, 45, 43, 41 & 40)

Source: Kiran Chapagain. 'How Nepal is losing its endangered one horn rhinos', *The Kathmandu Post*, 23/04/05.

Contact: **Director**, Dept. of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, PO Box 860, Babarmahal, Kathmandu, Nepal:

UPCOMING

Vatavaran 2005 – Environment and Wildlife Film Festival

The Centre for Media Studies (CMS), New Delhi has invited entries for the 3rd Vatavaran Film Festival that will be held in New Delhi from November 21 to 24, 2005. The last date for the submissions is July 15, 2005.

Contact: **Vatavaran Film Festival Directorate**, CMS, Research House, Saket Community Centre, New Delhi – 110017. Tel: 011-24992597/ 26522244/ 26864020. Fax: 26968282. Email: vatavaran@cmsindia.org Website: www.cmsvatavaran.org

Workshop for the conservation of freshwater turtles and tortoises

The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust in association with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and with the support of the TSA/IUCN/SSC has organized a workshop 'Conservation and Action Plan for Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises of India'.

The workshop will be held at the Kukrail Breeding Centre in Lucknow from October 7 – 20, 2005. It includes training for frontline Forest Department staff from various states, training for zoo vets, review of current status, red list assessment and preparation of the action plan. There will also be a 'Round Table' on the current crocodile status and situation.

Registration fee for the workshop is Rs. 1000/- and registrations are open upto September 1.

Contact: **MCBT** Post Bag 4, Mamallapuram - 603104 Tamil Nadu. Email: mcbtindia@vsnl.net

CBD Working Group on Protected Areas

The First Meeting Of The Working Group On Protected Areas; under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is being held on June 13 - 17 in Montecatini, Italy. For details: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=PAWG-01>

WHAT'S AVAILABLE

- **Saikia, Arup Joti.** *Jungles, Reserves, Wildlife, A History of Forests in Assam.* Wildlife Areas and Development Trust (WADT), Guwahati 2005., pp. 372, Rs. 595

The book gives a sense of how and why the forests of Assam came to be in the state they are today. It is a story that spans a century and a half, taking us to the British designs for Assam post conquest, with tea and timber, especially teak being the major product of the high lands, even as rice cultivation was given incentive to expand in the basin of the Brahmaputra.

In a situation where the north east rarely gets serious mention, the book puts Assam firmly on the map of the ecological historian and concerned citizen alike.

Contact: **WADT**, MG Road Pan Bazar, Guwahati, 781001.

- **Divyabhanusinh,** *The Story of Asia's Lions,* MARG Publications, Bombay, 2005, pp. 259, Rs. 1850. (www.marg-art.org)

The book deals with the remarkable story of the survival of the Asiatic lion in the forests of Gir in Gujarat. It also deals with the history of the lion symbolism, imagery and relations

with successive rulers and peoples. The cultural resonance of the lion especially in the cultures of western India in general and Gujarat in particular are explored with thoroughness and lucidity

The book is also well illustrated, both, with miniatures from the medieval period and black and white photos.

OPPORTUNITIES

Satpuda Foundation Volunteer Programme

The Satpuda Foundation (SF), a non-Governmental organization (NGO) working for Satpuda landscape conservation since 2000 is in the process of establishing a force of young, educated, trained and dedicated conservationists in the entire Satpuda range. The Foundation has announced a special summer volunteers programme for a month starting from May 2005. Two volunteers are to be selected for each of three, month long programmes that will start on May 1, June 1, and July 1 respectively.

The programme will involve spending one week in the SF head office to learn more about the foundation's field projects and the ongoing nature education programmes, conservation issues, applied research in conservation biology and assisting SF staff in administration. The volunteers would then be sent for three weeks to Melghat Tiger Reserve/ Pench Tiger Reserve (MP and Maharashtra)/ Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve for assisting in the SF's field projects

The fees for the Volunteer programme will be Rs. 5000 which includes accommodation and other expenses like training material, and field facilities.

Contact: **Kishor Rithe**, Secretary, SF, 1st Floor, "Pratishtha", Bharat Nagar, Akoli Road, Near Sainagar, Amravati – 444607. Tel: 0721-2511966(0). Email: quickly.satpuda_found@yahoo.com

TIGER TASK FORCE HOLDS FIRST SET OF CONSULTATIONS

Press Briefing Note: May 19, 2005

No quick fix answers for tiger conservation

New Delhi, May 19, 2005: Tiger conservation strategies have failed on fronts - from setting up enforcement networks capable of breaking organised wildlife crime to creating conditions, which involve people in wildlife conservation without which there is increased conflict and anger around all our tiger reserves. All these factors have all made the protection of the species and its habitat increasingly difficult pointed out experts at the consultation organised Tiger Task Force, set up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to review tiger conservation in the country.

The consultations, held on May 18 and 19, in New Delhi were attended by leading wildlife experts, scientists and environmental activists and environment experts from around the country. The five-member task force, set up after the alarming disclosure that tigers had disappeared from the Sariska reserve in Rajasthan, has been charged with reviewing programmes to protect the tiger so that it can suggest a new paradigm of conservation that shares the concern of species protection with people.

The consultations highlighted the following issues:

The recent Ministry of Environment and Forests ruling, "all rights and concessions (traditional rights to collect minor forest product) cannot be enjoyed in protected areas" has increased man-animal conflict enormously. Under this direction, roughly 3.5-4 million people living inside and at the fringes of protected areas have lost all sources of livelihood and revenue, which has exacerbated destitution and in turn their anger against the tiger.

It was pointed out that the in spite of the organised investigations and professional law enforcement, sandalwood smuggler Veerappan had the run of the land for many years, because of the support he received from local communities who had been denied access to benefits of forests. This was the case in tiger conservation as well. The exclusion of

the communities in management of forest and wildlife resources affects the gathering of intelligence and information, which is critical to preventing poaching, an expert commented.

Illegal trade in tiger parts is highly organised agree experts. They say that events in Sariska reveal that the killed tigers are part of this organised international trade, which moves via Nepal to Tibet and China. In recent years the tiger skin trade is back in fashion and investigations have tracked tiger furs in markets of Tibet, where it is used as traditional clothing. The increased economic affluence in Tibet and China is clearly spurring this trade comment national and international experts.

They also say that this highly skilled and organised international crime needs a highly coordinated and skilled response to combat it. They point out that current systems to undertake criminal investigations and enforcement are inadequate. What is needed urgently is to set up a multi-disciplinary and professional task force for wildlife law enforcement, which will be charged to follow up the investigations across borders and in major city markets of the country.

But experts also voiced their disquiet over the current proposal of the government to set up such a wildlife crime bureau on the lines of the narcotic bureau. It will be noted that the government has for many year agreed to set up this mechanism. The proposal that is currently being discussed by government authorities will require setting up a multi-agency unit, staffed with 285 people, with budget of Rs 163 crore spread over 5 years. Experts said, that while the bureau was necessary, the size was not needed. They instead suggested a 'lean and mean' organisational structure, which could track crime, manage databases and follow through on investigations. The agency needed to build strong networks with the local law enforcement and forest officials so that they could gather intelligence and investigate offences. They pointed to the urgency of setting up this facility and urged the task force to look into its provisions.

The current database of poaching data - both official and non-official of seizures show increasing trends, but all agree that this reporting is the tip of the ice berg. The fact is that seizures cannot be translated easily into tiger mortality, as they include parts of tigers, which cannot be used as estimates for deaths. The official database reveals 114 tiger deaths due to poaching in five years between 1999-2003 and 238 items of tiger parts seized in 211 cases in the same period. The unofficial database reveals higher estimates. But it is difficult to analyse the exact difference because of varying systems of classification and categorisation in the different database. The problem experts point out is that there is no coordinated and corroborated database of the seizures, which can be used for further investigation.

It is also clear that wildlife offenders have long criminal records and are well practiced in this art. Experts argue that investigations carried out based on the long term offenders will crack many cases and can effectively destroy the networks, which are today out to wipe out our wildlife species.

But this will also require legal reforms to ensure that people who are arrested in wildlife crime are tried and convicted speedily. It was agreed that the low rate of convictions in wildlife crime needs to be looked at urgently. It was noted that although hundreds of wildlife crime cases have been filed only a handful convictions have actually taken place over the past several years therefore prosecution had not worked as a deterrent for poachers. Lacunae in the existing laws where small petty poaches are treated at par with organised wildlife crime lords was also highlighted. Provisions like pre-charge evidence, has given wildlife criminals the run of the land, they said. They pointed out that the case against a key accused, caught in 1993, in a major wildlife bust is still in the pre-charge evidence stage after 12 years. The experts concurred that a serious overhaul of forest and wildlife management mechanisms in the country is required to control the menace of poaching.

How many tigers do we have? The fact is that unless we have ways to count the

tigers in the wild, which are reliable and scientifically verifiable, we really do not know. The consultation included brainstorming with key scientists who are engaged in developing census methodologies to count animals in the wild. Experts agreed that there was a need to change the current "pug-mark" system, in which the pug prints of animals are tracked and cast to estimate numbers. A number of different methodologies are now being developed and all the top experts, working in the field made presentations to the task force, pointing to the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems. The task force will review the different options to suggest what should be done and in particular, how data on tiger conservation can be made transparent and put in the public domain.

The Indian tiger is the flagship species and must be saved. But what is clear is that saving the tiger will need much more than guns and guards. It will need a serious revamp of the current paradigm of conservation, which makes people criminals in their own land. The task force will continue its deliberations with experts and local people. It also plans, during this three-month period, to visit key protected areas in the country in its search for answers.

The following experts, wildlife conservationists and environmentalists were consulted over the two days:

B K Sharma, Central Bureau of Investigation, **Belinda Wright**, Wildlife Protection Society, **John Sellers**, CITES Secretariat, **Debbie Banks**, Environment Investigation Agency, **A K Mukherjee**, former Director General Forests, **Manoj Mishra**, Peace Foundation, **Madhu Sarin**, environmentalist, **Harsh Vardhan**, conservationist, **P K Sen**, Director WWF-India, **Ashok Kumar**, Director, Wildlife Trust of India, **B S Bonal**, Director, National Zoological Park, **Y V Jhala** and **Qamar Qureshi**, Wildlife Institute of India, **Ullhas Karanth**, Wildlife Conservation Society, **Raghu Chundawat**, **Ravi Chellam**, UNDP, **Vasant Sabarwal**, Ford Foundation.

For more details about the Tiger Task Force visit www.cseindia.org.

Tel: 011 - 29955124, 29955125, 29956401, 29956394 / 9810098124

SPECIAL REPORT

Questions on forests and wildlife in the Winter (Feb-March 2005) Session of the
11th Gujarat Assembly

- All answers by the Minister of State in the Department of Environment and Forest

A) To protect turtle's eggs near Chanch port, Dist: Amreli

Unstarred question: 2871

Mr. Gopal Dhuva (Mundra - Dist: Kutch)

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. Whether the government is aware that the Olive-Ridley turtles which are protected as per Wild Life Protection Act -1972, came for first time to lay their eggs;
2. If so, what steps have taken by the government to protect the turtles? and
3. Which department is engaged in the protection and preservation of the turtles?

Answers

1. Yes Sir. Government is well aware.
2. A survey of the coastal belt of Rajula & Jafrabad district (State: Gujarat) has been carried out by the range staff of Rajula and Jafrabad and protection is constantly provided to the turtles and their eggs. Many people have given appointment on a temporary basis to keep constant watch. And if required, fencing is also done temporarily around that area. Moreover, awareness programmes are also being carried out to protect such turtles in the surrounding area due to development of fishing industries.
3. The responsibility is given to Range Forest Officer, Extension Range, Rajula and Jafrabad.

Source: Winter session (14/03/2005)

B) Discharge of industrial effluent in to the bird sanctuary of Porbandar

Unstarred question: 2892.

Mr. Shivji Ahir, Bhuj - Dist: Kutch

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. Whether Government is aware what industrial effluent (quantity of effluent in terms of million liters) is being discharged in the bird sanctuary of Porbandar;
2. Whether government is aware that due to discharge of industrial effluent, the effluent deposition in the sanctuary is to 1 to 9 feet. As a result the birds could not come to the sanctuary and the real intention of this bird sanctuary has been violated; and
3. Which kind of steps has been taken by the government to abate the situation?

Answers

1. Yes Sir. Government is well aware. As per the monitoring carried out by the Gujarat Pollution Control Board, it is concluded that the rainwater is mixed with the sewage water of Porbandar Nagarpalika and the depth occupied by such water is about 10 ft.
2. Because of the accumulation of water the level is being raised at certain time. So, the birds of shallow water have moved to surrounding areas. But, it is not true that because of industrial effluent the birds have not come to the sanctuary.
3. Porbandar Municipal Corporation has given legal notice as per Water (Prevention & Control) Act -1974. Additionally, the facility of static and floating mount has been provided in the sanctuary to deal with the problem.

Source: Winter session (14/03/2005)

C) Regarding the selling of birds by the residents surrounding area of Nal Sarovar, Dist: Ahmedabad

Unstarred question: 3045

Mr. Shivji Ahir (Bhuj, Dist: Kutch)

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. Whether the government is aware that birds are hunted and the meat of birds is sold by the residents of villages like Durji, Vekariya, Shanasar and Kathechi, surrounding area of Nal Sarovar;
2. What measures have been taken to put an end to this practice; and
3. What precautionary steps have been taken by the government to solve this problem forever?

Answers

1. Such types of complaints have not been received by the Government. But, sometimes incidents of hunting birds in this region do take place.
2. Government has taken protection measures in the form of night watch with the help of local staff and police of that area.
3. Effective steps are taken for protection include:
 - The state government offers various work opportunities to the villagers of the surrounding area for their socio-economic upliftment.
 - Providing employment to the people so that they can stay away from hunting activity.

Source: Winter session (16/03/2005)

D) Regarding the demand for Lions of Gujarat from the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

Starred question: 3046 (18/01/2005)

Mr. Shivji Ahir, Bhuj, Dist: Kutch

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state-

1. Whether it is a fact that the Government of Madhya Pradesh asked for lions from Gujarat for their Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary in the month of August / September 2004;
2. If so, what is the response of the state government in the said matter? and
3. Whether the government is aware that people strongly oppose the shifting of lions from Gujarat.

Answers

1. No, sir
2. Question does not arise.
3. Yes, sir.

Source: Winter session (16/03/2005)

E) Management of the sanctuary near Balaram- Ambaji, Dist: Banaskantha
Starred question: 9513

Mr. Mukesh Gadhavi, Danta, Dist: Banaskantha

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. Which type of precautionary measures have been taken by government for the management of the proposed sanctuary near the region of Balaram-Ambaji and for the protection of prosperous mineral deposits taken out from the sanctuary, in the year 2004?
2. Provide details of the activities being taken by the government and what are the results obtained due to taken step?

Answers

1. For the effective management of sanctuary near Balaram-Ambaji, the Government of Gujarat has submitted proposal to Central Government to the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife in the year 2004.
2. The proposal is in process in Union Government.

Source: Winter session (22/02/2005)

F) For acquiring land for Barda Sanctuary (Dist: Jamnagar)

Starred question: 8789

Mr. Mulu Aayarbera, Bhanwad, Dist: Jamnagar

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state-

1. Whether it is a fact that the final award has not been declared for acquired land for Barda Sanctuary in Dist: Jamnagar;
2. Whether the village panchayat has opposed the acquiring of the grazing land in the village; and
3. What is the current status of the said matter?

Answers

1. No, Sir.
2. And 3: Yes, sir. Deputy collector has quoted references in his order

Source: Winter session (22/02/2005)

G) The incidents of forest fire in the forests of Sasan (Dist: Junagadh)

Starred question: 12169

Mrs. Jasu Korat, Jetpur, Dist: Rajkot

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. The details regarding the occurrence of forest fires in the forest of Sasan (Dist: Junagadh) during last two years as on 31/12/2004.
2. What measures have been taken by the forest department to overcome this problem?
3. What are the reasons behind the forest fires?
4. Whether the Government is aware about this reason or not?

Answers

1. 36 such incidents took place
2. Forest department has appointed local staff and other persons on daily wages to deal with the incidents of forest fires
3. And 4: Usually the incidents of forest fires occur by accident or due to human negligence.

Source: Winter session (09/03/2005)

H) Regarding the migration of people from Vansada National Park, Dang-Dediapada Sanctuary and Bear Sanctuary of Ratanmahal

Starred question: 12077

Mr. Madhu Bhoje, Dang-Vansada, Dist: Dang

Will the Minister of Environment and Forests be pleased to state -

1. Whether it is a fact that the people have been forced to migrate from Vansada National Park, Dang-Dediapada Sanctuary and Bear Sanctuary of Ratanmahal;
2. If so, then which is the place where people are forced to migrate, under what circumstances they had to migrate and also want to know how many people were forced to migrate from that place as on 31/01/2005?
3. What steps are being taken by the State Government for the rehabilitation of these people?

Answers

1. No, Sir.
2. Question does not arise.
3. Question does not arise.

Source: Winter session (13/03/2005)

This translated version of the Questions and Answers were sent by
Paryavaran Mitra, 502, Raj Avenue, Bhaikaka Nagar, Nr. Thaltej Cross Roads, Thaltej, Ahmedabad – 380059. Tel: 079 – 26851321. Fax: 26851321 / 26857443. Email: paryavaranmitra@yahoo.com;
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Protected Area (PA) Update is produced every two months as a follow-up to the workshop on **Exploring the Possibilities of Joint Protected Area Management (JPAM)**, organised at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi, in September 1994.

We acknowledge the support of the **Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)** for the compilation and production of *PA Update* 55. Additional support was provided by **Greenpeace India**. This issue has been compiled and edited by **Pankaj Sekhsaria**. Illustrations by **Madhuvanti Anantharajan**. Several news items were accessed from the Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) Green Files, the EnvironmentNepal website, press clippings from the FES, and Green Media, the E-Newsletter published by the Centre for Media Studies, but have been credited to their original sources.

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