

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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EDITORIAL

A departure too soon

It was just as we were finalizing this issue of the *PA Update*, we got the shattering news that Dr. Ravi Sankaran had passed away after suffering a massive heart attack on January 17. It was difficult to believe at first, but as the news sank in, there was only a sense of huge sadness and deep loss. In his sudden demise the world of conservation has lost one of its most passionate, dedicated and innovative advocates.

His work on floricans, his studies of the Nicobari Megapode and Edible Nest Swiftlet in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and analysis of the impact of the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004 on the ecology of the islands were path breaking. He tirelessly argued to allow ranching of the nest of the Edible Nest Swiftlet in the islands as a new paradigm for conservation that ensured people's participation and also got them economic benefits. He was working on an ambitious project in Nagaland to build up the capacities of local communities and set up institutions to protect the forests and wildlife there, and more recently he had also taken over as Director of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Nature (SACON), the institution he was associated with for a long time and deeply committed to as well.

We all have to make our departure, but when someone leaves at his very prime, leaves so suddenly and particularly when that man is Ravi Sankaran, there can only be a vacuum. With Ravi around there was never a dull moment. He was gregarious and full of curiosity, fun and laughter. He pushed many boundaries and his great skill and capacity lay in the fact that he encouraged and showed many others how they should and could push their own limits. His was an unique personality, one that seamlessly harmonized innumerable polarities: unbearable, yet endearing at the same time; sharply critical and yet fully understanding of the same issue; quick to notice an error and quicker to admit to one of his own; challenging and inspiring; wickedly witty and deeply deeply compassionate.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Many of us in Kalpavriksh had the chance of knowing him, working with him, of being influenced by him and hopefully, of influencing him a bit as well. Many knew him personally and others knew him in more professional contexts like when he joined a workshop on community conservation in Nagaland that we had organized three years ago. We are all rich for those experiences, and poorer now that there will be no more such occasions.

Like many others I too feel immensely privileged and fortunate that I could consider Ravi a friend. I first met him nearly a decade ago, and in the years that have followed had many priceless opportunities of spending time with him in the field, particularly in the Andaman Islands. As I write this, there is an endless string of memories and images that flash by – the aristocratic élan which he smoked his pipe with; that warm hug at Chennai airport when we were meeting after a long time; sharing a meal with him and his field staff in the islands; his long pony tail, those many discussions and the many disagreements...and yes, that comment about the *PA Update* too. It was, if I remember right, a couple of years ago when I asked him if he thought the *PA Update* was useful and relevant. “Hey, stop sending it to me,” he said dismissively and without batting an eyelid, “I don’t read it anyway.” He then mumbled something to the effect that it might actually be an useful thing and I must continue working on it. Provocative, challenging, irreverent, and incisively brilliant– Ravi was all this and much more. He was a master in delivering the unexpected; in leaving people dumbfounded and groping for answers. On January 17th, he did it again; the only difference this time being that we’ll be groping much longer and he won’t even be there to help us out.

Many who read this will have their own memories and thoughts of Ravi. Please share these with us and we’d like to share it with all the others in the forthcoming issues of the *PA Update*. It might help us all deal with an immeasurable loss. The loss that his family feels cannot, perhaps, even be fathomed and we offer them our deepest condolences.

- Pankaj Sekhsaria

ANDHRA PRADESH

Tribals engaged to protect Kawal WLS

The Forest Department will be engaging local tribals for the protection of the forests in the Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary and has organized awareness campaigns to sensitize villagers for the purpose. This program was initiated after reports revealed that 13,246 trees were illegally felled over an area of 399 hectares of the sanctuary from July to October 2007.

The state government has booked 53 cases in this regard, and 420 persons have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody.

Source: ‘Encroachment of forest land in Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh’, Press Release of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, 04/12/08.

Contact: **DFO Wildlife**, Kawal WLS, Jannaram, Dist. Adilabad - 504 205. Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 08739-236224

Study finds Pulicat under severe threat

A recent survey has revealed that Pulicat Lake, the second largest lake in the country, is facing severe degradation and rapid reduction in size due to anthropogenic and natural causes.

The survey was conducted by a team from the Loyola Institute of Frontier Energy working on the ‘Pulicat Community-based Disaster Preparedness’ project. The findings revealed that the lake has shrunk from 460 sq. kms to 350 sq. kms in the last few decades, primarily due to silting in the northern part of the lake. The depth of the lake has also decreased from 4 to 1.5 meters due to receding seawater inflow during summer. The rapid reduction of depth and the water-spread area have both caused a considerable decline in the aquatic population of the lake. Evaporation due to summer heat has also affected aquatic life here by increasing salinity.

Also called the Pazaverkadi lagoon, the lake extends across the Andhra Pradesh and

Tamil Nadu boundaries. About 40,000 people living in the 34 villages on the Tamil Nadu banks of the Pulicat depend on it for their livelihood. Thousands of resident and migratory birds also take shelter here.

Source: 'Second largest lake under severe threat,' *The Times of India*, 10/12/08.

Contact: **DFO Wildlife**, Pulicat Lake WLS, Sullurpet, Dist. Nellore, Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 08623-262158
CWLW, Aranya Bhavan, Saifabad, Hyderabad - 500004, Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 040-23230561. Fax: 337889

ASSAM

Seismic survey in Brahmaputra riverbed opposed; impact on Gangetic dolphin feared

Protests have been raised over the allocation of 170 km of the Brahmaputra riverbed (between Sadiya and Nimatighat) in upper Assam to Oil India Limited (OIL) for conducting a seismic survey and later drill for oil in this prime Gangetic dolphin habitat.

The Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) has asked the Central Government, OIL and the MoEF's Multi-Disciplinary Advisory Group (MDAG) to clarify their stand on the issue of the proposed seismic survey.

AJYCP has accused all three parties involved of an attempt to deceive the people of Assam by deliberately obfuscating the issue. The student body pointed out that though the MDAG had recently claimed no permission had been granted to OIL so far, the company had nonetheless attempted to undertake a seismic survey in Dibru Saikhowa National Park on December 21. This attempt had been met with resistance by the local people.

In response, OIL has clarified that it was not conducting a seismic survey in Dibru Saikhowa as that was forbidden by a Supreme Court directive. The company instead was attempting to deploy gravity-and-magnetic methods to acquire geological data from the area. OIL said that it had received permission from the MoEF and the Supreme Court to conduct this non-destructive type of survey in the area. They further said that the method is

completely eco-friendly since it doesn't generate any type of pollution and would not disturb the area's fauna and flora in any way.

The MDAG set up in this connection too had pointed out earlier that OIL will not receive permission to conduct any seismic surveys till an impact-assessment study has been conducted by the Group. The study would determine the possible effects of the proposed survey on the dolphin habitats, populations and behavioral patterns in the earmarked area. It would cover water channels as well as dry aquatic beds; and would also look into the distribution of fish, herpetofauna and other aquatic life in the river. Local groups, experts from different states, organizations and even international agencies would be engaged in conducting the studies.

The impact assessment would take six months to complete, and OIL would be permitted to begin working here earliest by November if the impact assessment results indicate that the seismic survey would not harm the ecological system of the Brahmaputra in any manner.

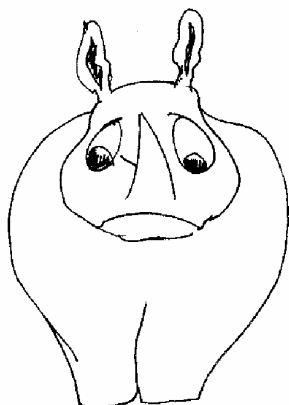
Meanwhile, some experts predict that the seismic survey could seriously affect the small population of the river's 212 Gangetic dolphin (apart from which only 29 are left in the Kushi and about 23 in the Subansiri River). The survival of this rare and protected creature is already threatened by gill net entanglements, over-fishing, habitat degradation, poaching for dolphin oil, and lately, by the proposed hydro projects in the tributaries upstream.

40 dolphin habitats have been identified across the Brahmaputra by the Gangetic Dolphin Conservation and Research Programme of the conservation group Aaranyak in collaboration with the state Forest Department. These habitats are being monitored through the programme's Dolphin Conservation Network, in which trained community youth work in association with the FD to protect the species. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, No 2; Vol XII, No.3; Vol XI, No 5 and No. 46)

Source: 'OIL yet to get nod for seismic survey,' *The Assam Tribune*, 16/12/08
'OIL denies seismic survey inside National Park,' *The Assam Tribune*, 23/12/08

'Make stand clear on seismic survey: AJYCP,' *The Assam Tribune*, 23/12/08
'Seismic survey may spell doom for river dolphins,' *The Assam Tribune*, 25/12/08.

Over 100 rhino deaths in Kaziranga in 2008



Over a hundred rhinos have died in 2008 at Kaziranga National Park. 10 of these were killed by poachers while the remaining deaths have been ascribed to natural causes which include killings by tigers and deaths due to old age and in floods.

According to area's residents, the absence of a forest camp at Kemari means that poachers are often on the prowl here, lying in wait for straying rhinos. Meanwhile, the two forest camps at Moriahola and Bonkual lie idle as rhinos do not cross the thickly populated areas. While the FD plans to put up a new camp at Alami-Langlengia to guard the Lohere, Borbali and Shiyal chapori, forest officials say that apart from arms and equipment, the existing forest camps also need connectivity. A wireless tower, for instance, would help enhance communication among forest personnel.

Source: 'Rhino toll at KNP 100 in current year', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/12/08.
'Poachers kill 10 rhinos this year,' *The Assam Tribune*, 31/12/08

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

Winter apparel donated to Kaziranga staff

The Balipara Tract and Frontier Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Wild Grass Resort recently donated 700 sets of winter apparel with the support of the Assam Forest Department to the staff of Kaziranga National Park. Frontline personnel, home-guards, casual workers and the Assam Forest Protection Force members received apparel sets consisting of a jacket, a pair of boots and two pairs of warm socks. The sets were given away in three separate lots in the central, western and eastern ranges by members of the Foundation, accompanied by the Park director and other Forest Department officials.

Source: 'Winter apparel donated to KNP staff', *The Assam Tribune*, 13/12/08

Militants lay siege on anti-poaching camp in Kaziranga NP

In a first of its kind incident a group of six armed Karbi militants climbed onto a camp-on-stilts in Kaziranga National Park, held three guards hostage, ate their dinner and left early the next morning with a service rifle. The incident occurred in the month of November at the Paharline Camp under the Kohora range, in the foothills of the Karbi Anglong Hills near the Hathikhuli Tea Estate. Though militants are known to use the national park to hide, this is the first time that any group has laid siege on an anti-poaching camp in this manner.

While six militants climbed onto the camp-on-stilts, several others stood on guard below. One spoke in Assamese while the rest used a tribal dialect. Though the guards had walkie-talkies, the rebels ensured that they were not used.

Karbi rebels have also reportedly served extortion notices to a few businessmen with establishments along the highway between Kaliabor and Numaligarh. Two unidentified rebels had been killed in October by security personnel at Panbari reserve forest, which is a part of the national park.

Park authorities have expressed concern that if the militant movement here is not checked, Kaziranga itself could be in danger. An appeal has also been made to the

state government to set up a police picket to patrol the Karbi Anglong foothills frequented by militants.

Source: 'Militants lay siege on Kaziranga camp',
The Telegraph, 26/11/08.

Kaziranga elephants on rampage in Kaliabor area

A herd of 100 – 140 wild elephants from Kaziranga National Park has caused considerable damage in the Kaliabor subdivision in December. The herd had been passing through Burapahar in the Karbi Anglong Hills. The affected areas included Dalgaon, Garikuri, Bharaligaon, Sakmothi, Oporchatal, Dolpukhuri, Majgaon Bamuni and Jaukata.

Another herd of eight – ten tuskers was also on the rampage in the same region, particularly in Sonarigaon, Kamakhya, Silghat, Madhatari, Samdhara, Porabheti, Bagharchook and Sukanekhhati.

The elephants have destroyed standing crops and sugar plantations, and have also damaged rice storehouses, shops, kitchens and other property. Human casualties were also reported; and the Kaliabor residents' efforts to chase away the herds using fire torches remained unsuccessful.

Locals say that despite a demand voiced at a September meeting held in the SDO (C) Kaliabor office, neither the wildlife department nor the civil administration had taken adequate measures to address the problem. Residents said that the Forest Department failed to post forest guards in Dalgaon and Garikuri, and neither did it provide the people with necessities like fire crackers to drive away the animals.

Source: 'Tuskers on rampage in Kaliabor areas,'
The Assam Tribune, 15/12/08.

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

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Diesel engine steamer boats causing noise pollution in Pong Dam Bird Sanctuary



Diesel engine steamer boats plying in the waters of the Pong Dam Reservoir have been accused of operating in prohibited parts of the sanctuary and, of consequently, causing noise pollution here.

The wildlife department has asked the concerned SDM, BDOs and fisheries officials to submit information about the exact number of steamer boats plying in the reservoir waters. The boats have apparently been issued licenses in violation of Forest Department norms by the block development offices.

Local environmentalists have said that they will file a public interest litigation (PIL) in the state high court against the illegal operation of the steamers in the wetland. Apart from fishing, the steamers are also used for commercial transport through the silence zone of the bird sanctuary.

Some of the 1,500 local families that depend on the lake for their livelihood have started abandoning traditional fishing boats in favor of diesel pump steamers, which disturb the thousands of migratory birds that visit the lake every winter.

Source: 'Norms violated at Ramsar sanctuary,'
The Tribune, 22/11/08.

'Noise pollution continues at Pong reservoir,' *The Tribune*, 01/12/08.

Contact: **DFO (Wildlife)**, Pong Lake WLS,
Chamba Division, Chamba - 176310,
Himachal Pradesh. Tel:01899-22639.
Email: cfchamba@nde.vsnl.net.in

FD to set up 9 *van thanas*; forest officials to get powers to arrest

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has decided to set up nine *van thanas* to prevent forest mafia cartels from getting a free run in the deodar-rich jungles in Mandi, Kullu, Shimla, Sirmaur and other forest patches containing the valuable wood.

The first of the *thanas* will be located in Panarsa, Rohru, Theog, Mandi, Nahan and Kullu. If these pass the trial phase, the government may set up more in other sensitive forest areas.

Each *van thana* will be headed by a deputy ranger officer. It will include six trained forest guards and six other subordinate patrol staff. Personnel will be equipped with firearms, wireless sets, mobile phones and vehicles. There will also be a *munshi* for recording complaints and maintaining records; and additional staff will be provided by reorganising and merging existing forest beats.

With the *thanas* being planned on the pattern of police stations, forest officials will soon be able to arrest offenders under the Indian Forest Act, and will no longer need to depend on the police for taking immediate action against culprits.

Young guards from amongst new recruits will be selected for these *thanas*. They will undergo training at the Daroh police training college for two weeks, after which they will be attached to police stations for another week to get acquainted with how the stations function. Along with the building, armoury, equipment etc., the cost for setting up each *thana* would be about Rs 13 lakh. According to senior forest officers, the state government has already been sent a proposal worth Rs 25 lakh for infrastructure at the two *van thanas* in Mandi circle.

The impetus for the initiative came the FD's flying squads and the beat and block system failed to check illicit felling, timber smuggling, encroachments and other unlawful activities in the deodar-rich forests here. The *thana* system will enable the FD to focus on selected areas where forest mafias are active.

Source: 'Forest Department to set up nine *van thanas*,' *The Tribune*, 08/12/08

Rakesh Lohumi, 'Forest officials to get powers to arrest,' *The Tribune*, 02/12/08.

FD to lease out guest houses, sites for tourism

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (FD) is to lease out five sites and 10 guesthouses as a first step towards promoting public-private tourism partnerships in the state.

In response to the five year lease plan, the FD has received 126 proposals from 40 private parties. 82 proposals from 25 parties have already been short listed.

The guest houses to be leased are situated at Ala (near Dalhousie), Kangra, Gazta (near Khara Patthar), Theog, Tatta Pani, Majhwar, Dhuna Devi, Urla (all in Mandi), and Banethi & Trilokpur (Sirmaur). The sites to be given out include Barpg, Shoghi, Sonu Banlah (near Tara Devi), McLeodganj and Dalhousie.

Forest authorities said the lease would be given to private players on the strict condition that they will not raise any permanent structures – only camping sites can be set up here. The parties will have to appoint nature guides so as to generate awareness of the rich flora and fauna of the area. The applicants have also been asked to explain their management plans for garbage disposal and employment generation. The projects will be given out as per the Eco-Tourism Policy of 2005.

Source: 'Forest Dept to lease out guest houses, sites,' *The Tribune*, 26/11/08.

Breeding projects for endangered species

Following the success of the Western Tragopan breeding programme, Himachal Pradesh wildlife authorities are preparing to undertake similar conservation projects for other endangered Himalayan fauna like the Tahr, Monal, the Chir pheasant and the Brown bear.

Many of these projects have also been approved by the Central Zoo Authority (CZA). The Himalayan tahr, a mountain goat found in snowy altitudes 7,000 feet above sea-level, will be bred at the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) in Kullu. Manali will host the breeding programme for the Monal, found in deodar and oak forests at over 5,500 feet. The conservation

project for the Chir Pheasant will be located at the Chail sanctuary.

The spadework for preparing the blueprint for the brown bear breeding programme had also been initiated. Though the Kufri nature park is likely to be the venue for this programme, the authorities are in search of a site that is better suited and closer to the rehabilitation areas, located at greater heights.

Source: 'Breeding of endangered species planned,' *The Tribune*, 28/11/08.

Contact: **Vinay Tandon, CWLW**, Talland, Shimla – 171001. Tel: 0177-2624193.
Email: Vtandy@gmail.com

JHARKHAND

Team reviews tusker safety at Dalma

A three-member team appointed by the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoEF) visited the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in December to take stock of the elephant protection measures being implemented here.

The team was headed by Mr SK Dey, retired PCCF - West Bengal. Other members included a retired Professor of Daltonganj College and a retired forest official from Madhya Pradesh. The team visited different parts of the sanctuary to assess various aspects of local management like the condition of waterholes and wildlife corridors.

Sanctuary staff were quizzed about the safety measures initiated for wildlife and management issues like the utilisation of funds for projects were also investigated. The team will put up its assessment and recommendations before the MoEF shortly.

Source: 'High-level team takes stock of Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary,' *The Pioneer*, 12/12/08

Contact: **Divisional Forest Officer**, Dalma WLS Wildlife Division, Ranchi, Jharkhand.
Tel: 0651-301861
PCCF, Jharkhand, At- Doranda, P.O. Doranda, Ranchi. Tel: 0651-2500455(O), 2500413(R) Fax: 0651-500413

KARNATAKA

The Greater Talacauvery Wildlife Sanctuary proposal opposed

Members of the Kodagu Swabhimana Samrakshana Vedike have urged Kodagu's people and panchayat raj representatives to hold a public debate on the proposal to create the Greater Talacauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in the district. The Vedike itself is not in favor of the proposal, which seeks to combine the Brahmagiri, Pushpagiri and Talacauvery sanctuaries into one contiguous area which could subsequently become a national park.

The Vedike has also urged elected representatives to conduct an inquiry into the activities of the NGO's that sent this proposal to the government, especially into their utilization of foreign funding. It lashed out at the environment groups which had earlier dismissed the resolutions passed by the Kodagu Zilla Panchayat against the sanctuary proposal. The Panchayat has contended that the move would displace scores of tribal people living in the region charted out for the sanctuary.

A call was also made for the proper implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act in the region. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XII, No. 5 and Nos. 46 & 45)

Source: 'Vedike for public debate on wildlife sanctuary project,' *The Hindu*, 20/11/08.

KERALA

Forum for wetland protection by 2009

The Kerala State Water Resources Minister N.K. Premachandran has said that the proposed Wetland Conservation Authority under the State government would begin functioning in 2009 and that the rough draft of the Bill for the proposed authority is ready.

He was of the opinion that the responsibility and powers for wetland management to maintain and manage the wetlands of the respective region should be vested with the State government and not the Centre as the absence of an exclusive authority with statutory powers had caused much

confusion in the past. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, Nos. 6 & 5).

Source: 'Forum for wetland protection by 2009,' *The Hindu*, 18/11/08.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden** – Kerala, Vazhudaud, Trivandrum – 695014, Kerala. Tel: 0471-2322217 / 2360452 / 2204896. Fax: 2360452 / 2322217

MADHYA PRADESH

Two tigresses to be translocated from Bandavgarh to Panna TR

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has finalized a plan for the translocation of two tigresses from the Bandavgarh Tiger Reserve to the forests of Panna, where not a single tigress has been sighted for about a year.

Permissions for the project have already been obtained from the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The Chief Wildlife Warden of the State said that the translocation was likely to be executed in the month of February 2009 under the supervision of scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

Source: 'Two tigresses to be rehabilitated', <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/02/12/08>

Contact: **Field Director**, Panna National Park, Panna – 488001, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07732-252135. Fax: 07732-252120

Cops allegedly involved in tiger poaching at Kanha TR

Wildlife authorities in the Kanha Tiger Reserve have alleged that local police officers have been involved in recent cases of tiger and leopard poaching in the reserve. In a letter to the State Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), Kanha Director RP Singh has said they suspect that policemen finance such operations to claim monetary rewards from the forest authorities.

In the last six months, one tiger and three leopards were killed and their skins were 'seized' by the Balaghat police. Suspicions surfaced in November, when a tiger was killed in the buffer zone of Kanha. The Balaghat

police claimed to have seized a tiger skin, but refused to share details of the finding or of the accused with the forest department. Doubts were compounded after a few locals claimed that the police were involved in the killing.

Singh's letter also says that in all the four cases, the police could not provide information on how the animal was killed or who was involved. The police also did not probe the matter after the forest authorities pointed out the discrepancies. A part of the Kanha Tiger Reserve falls under the Naxal-affected area of Balaghat. The region's police receive huge funds from the Centre to tackle Naxals and also to build up their network of informers. Foresters say that some of this money is diverted to fund the killings.

According to the FD the modus operandi is as follows: The police pay about Rs 5,000 to an informer (usually with a criminal background) to kill the animal. A prey animal like a deer or a goat is poisoned and its carcass is used to lure the tiger/leopard. Once lured, the big cats are killed and skinned by the locals, and then handed over to the police. The police then present the skins before the media at a news conference and claim the reward money of about Rs 25,000 from the forest department.

The Inspector-General of police at Balaghat has denied the allegations. When contacted by the *PA Update*, CWLW Dr. Pabla, too denied that the FD had made these allegations. He said that the news report was a misinterpretation of internal government communication.

Source: Meenal Dubey, 'Cops 'poach' tigers at Kanha reserve,' <http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in>, 28/12/08

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

Tourists taken into Kanha NP at night to see gaur killed by tiger

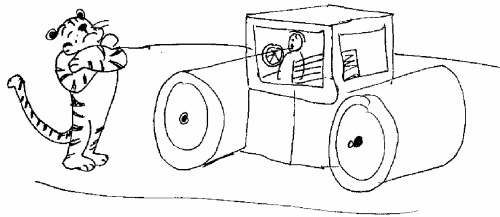
Three tourists from Nagpur were arrested near the entrance gate of the Kanha National Park for entering the park at night after the gates

were closed. They were in a government vehicle when they were arrested by the Khatia police. The tourists had reportedly gone in to see a gaur killed by a tiger and in the hope that the tiger too would be sighted.

The tourists had in fact been accompanied by a Range Forest Officer (RFO) and a mahout. The matter was brought to the notice of the Khatia police by local residents. The tourists were searched and subsequently released when no objectionable material or photographs were found with them. A detailed enquiry has been ordered into the incident.

Source: 'Tiger hunts bison in Kanha – 3 young tourists caught at night', *Nayi Duniya*, 19/11/08.

NTCA opposes highway widening project at Pench TR



The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has strongly opposed the proposal to widen National Highway (NH) – 7 in areas adjoining the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. The NTCA has also opposed the National Highway Authority's (NHAI's) plan to build an underpass which would allow wildlife to cross across without being run over by speeding vehicles.

In his report to the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC), Dr. Rajesh Gopal, Member Secretary of NTCA has argued that four laning of NH-7 would require over 22,000 trees to be felled in Maharashtra alone; and would cause irreversible damage to the tiger habitat and surrounding forest corridors. He also suggested three alternatives to the widening.

The NHAI has, in response, accused Dr. Gopal of presenting incomplete and misleading information to the CEC. It has argued that he should be asked to prove his statement of violation of the Forest

Conservation Act (FCA) by the NHAI; otherwise action should be taken against him for the advice to suspend tree cutting from Khawasa to Kurai. It added that work of widening the North-South corridor had been undertaken after environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and other relevant bodies, and that the tree felling stretch did not attract provisions of the FCA.

The main proposal includes the widening of the existing two-lane road of 45-foot width to four lanes over a stretch of eight kms. The NH- 7 connects Jabalpur and Nagpur and passes through Seoni forest division in Madhya Pradesh. This area is a part of Pench, and also serves as an important wildlife corridor to the Kanha Tiger Reserve.

The Wildlife Trust of India had challenged this road widening in the CEC and the CEC in turn had asked the NTCA for its opinion in the matter. In the latter half of December, the CEC had written to the MP Chief Secretary asking for tree cutting to be stopped immediately.

Source: Meenal Dubey. 'NHAI objects to Project Tiger chief's Pench forest report', *Mail Today*, 16/12/08.

Ashok Kumar. Email dated 21/12/08.

Contact: **Field Director**, Pench Tiger Reserve, P.O. Barapathar, Dist. Seoni - 480 661.

Tel: 07692-250794/250594. Fax:

250794/221180. Email:

root@trpench.ren.nic.in

Ashok Kumar, WTI, Email:

wildhaathi@yahoo.com

Gaur translocation plans stalled following NTCA opposition

The Madhya Pradesh Governments' Rs. 1.25 crore project to translocate gaur from the Kanha Tiger Reserve to Bandavgarh has been put on hold following strong opposition from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

As part of the proposed plan, the state authorities were to capture and move six male gaur to the Bandavgarh Tiger Reserve with the help of the Conservation Corporation, Africa. (*PA Updates* Vol XIV, Nos. 5 & 3). The Chief

Wildlife Warden of MP Mr HS Pabla said that the need for the translocation was based on the observation that gaur had disappeared completely from Bandavgarh. Moreover, it would also help spread the animal over a larger landscape.

Recent reports have, however, confirmed gaur sightings in forests adjoining those of Bandavgarh (*PA Update* Vol XIV, No 5). The NTCA too pointed out that the animal had been sighted during the tiger census conducted recently at the reserve. The Authority holds that instead of the translocation, the FD could make an effort to revive the gaur population here and by restoring the wildlife corridor between Bandavgarh and Kanha.

The Ministry for Environment and Forests (MoEF) has now asked the state government to re-examine the status of the gaur in Bandavgarh and plans for the translocation project have been put on hold for the present.

Source: 'MP govt locks horns with NTCA over Bison translocation,' *The Times of India*, 22/11/08.

Contact: **Director**, Bandavgarh TR, Umaria – 484661, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07653-22214(O). Fax: 07653-22214/22648
Dr. Rajesh Gopal NTCA, Annexe No. 5, Bikaner House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi-110011. Telefax: 2338 4428. E-mail: dirpt-r@nic.in

MAHARASHTRA

RFO posts vacant in Tadoba-Andhari TR for a year

Reports in November 2008 revealed that protection in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) was being seriously compromised as Range Forest Officer (RFO) posts had been lying vacant for nearly a year.

There are five RFOs for TATR, one each for Tadoba, Moharli and Kolsa (the three ranges of the 625-sq km tiger reserve), protection and research. The high tiger-density Tadoba Range was without a RFO for nine months while the post in Moharli has been lying vacant for 21 months.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Is Tadoba headed the Sariska way?', *Times News Network*, 14/11/08.

Contact: **Field Director**, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Project, Mul Road, In front of Sanchiti Chamber, Chandrapur – 442401, Maharashtra. Tel: 07172-51414(O), 56382(R)

Coal mining leases in vicinity of Tadoba Andhari TR

The Central Government is reported to have given coal mining leases totaling 3,350 hectares to three companies in forests adjoining the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). The largest lease of 1,600 hectares has been awarded to Adani Enterprises for its opencast mining project in western Lohara village. The company recently submitted an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report for its 140-million-tonne project and is in the process of obtaining other clearances.

On examining the EIA, local NGOs Green Planet Society and Eco Pro have alleged that the report does not include the project's impact on the TR nearby. Moreover, the company's plans mention the rehabilitation only of the Lohara village, while 11 others that will also be affected have been ignored. The NGO's further allege that much more land will be required than has been suggested in the EIA. The Adani project itself will need another 1,750 hectares of forest land for housing, roads, and workshop construction.

Fears have also been expressed over the effects of the mining activity on the hydrology and water security of region. Finally, the EIA's wildlife survey does not take into consideration the 14 categories of fauna found in the area, nor does the report mention the tiger, despite the fact that the region has some of the best tiger habitats in the country.

Public hearings for the project that were to be held on September 11 and November 4 could not be completed successfully because of altercations between project supporters and opponents. In the meanwhile, park officials have written to the PCCF reiterating that the project and the tiger reserve cannot co-exist.

Residents of Lohara village have supported the project but have demanded compensation of Rs 20 lakh per acre, against Adani's offer of Rs 2 lakh. They are confident that they will be able to negotiate a good deal, and are said to have considerable local political support.

Source: 'Clearing forests for coal', *Down to Earth*, 15/12/08.

Govt. admits that wrong tiger was killed as man-eater in Tadoba in 2007

Maharashtra officials have admitted that the wrong tiger was killed as a man-eater in the Tadoba forests in 2007. The clarification came in response to a query filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act recently by Mumbai resident Ajay Madhusudhan. The reply said the officials shot a tiger dead whereas the man-eater in Chandrapur district's Brahmपुरi forests was a tigress.

It is clear from the reply that the Forest Department (FD) had acted in haste under political pressure. The reply refers to letters from local politicians who had threatened to agitate and even kill the man-eater themselves. In a letter, Chimur MLA Vijay Wadettiwar had for instance, served an ultimatum to the Chief Conservator of Forests to capture or kill the man-eater within 15 days, the RTI reply said.

Villagers had complained in October 2007 that a tigress was killing people and cattle in and around the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. The FD began a hunt in November but failed to capture the animal. Local politicians then turned up the heat on the department. During the operation, the officials sighted a tiger eating its kill. The team fired 39 bullets, of which 12 had hit the mark (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, Nos. 5 & 2).

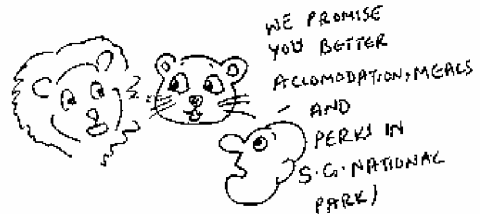
Source: 'Tigress kills, tiger shot', *The Telegraph*, 10/11/08

Sanjay Gandhi NP seeks more lions for safari

In a bid to boost its flailing lion safari, the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in Mumbai is on the look out for Asiatic lions to add to its current population of two lions and

one lioness. The park has initiated correspondence with the Central Zoo Authority, expressing the wish to introduce two pairs of Asiatic lion in its existing animal family. The park has offered a couple of its six white tigers in exchange. At present, the Park has two options to choose from – the Mysore zoo and Bangalore's Bannerghatta Zoo.

SGNP officials are eager to get ahead since the park's lions are inadequate for safari purposes and are also too aged to reproduce. The lioness is barred from entering the safari zone since she cannot walk, and the males have to be kept sheltered when ill or injured. Tourists have, consequently, often gone home disappointed after seeing the ailing lions, and sometimes without seeing them at all.



Source: 'National park officials seek more Asiatic lions,' *The Times of India*, 25/11/08

Contact: **DCF**, SGNP, Borivili (East), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-28860362, 28860389(O), 8862780(R) Email: sgnpb@rediffmail.com

Three leopard safaris for state

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has approved a proposal of the Maharashtra State Government for setting up leopard safaris in three different parts of the state. These are to come up near Belwandi in Ahmednagar district, at Manikdoh in Pune district and at Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai.

60 leopards captured from various parts of the state will be rehabilitated in the safaris, the first of which will come up in the Ahmednagar district. The state government expects to spend Rs. 10 crores for the establishment of these safaris.

Source: Forest dept. to set up three leopard safaris in state', <http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1222153>

MEGHALAYA

Mining stopped near Balpakhrum NP

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) of the South Garo Hills District has issued a notice to the relevant persons of the Gongrot Aking to halt mining and associated road construction. The mining was being undertaken in the forests adjoining the Balpakhrum National Park (*PA Update* Vol XIV, No. 6).

The Chitlang Hills Anti-Mining Forum (CHAMF) that was opposing the mining on grounds of loss of livelihoods and damage to the environment has welcomed the action. In a press release, the Forum had pointed out that the mining was clearly illegal as the chosen site was a forest area, and as clearances had not been obtained from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority and State Pollution Control Board.

The Forum is a conglomeration of organizations and citizens against unplanned and unscientific mining. It is comprised of the Garo Students Union, Youth Development and Vigilance Committee, Southern Youth and Cultural Organization, Atong Cultural Organization, Samrakshan Trust, Siju Youth Socio Cultural Organisation, Achik Tourism Society and Achik Youth and Cultural Organisation.

Contact: **Secretary**, CHAMF, C/o President GSU South Garo Hills Unit, Simsang Bridge Junction, Bolsagre, Baghmara, South Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Tel: 09436742958. Email: ginsadawa@gmail.com

ORISSA

Tourists flock to Satkosia

A large number of tourists have reportedly been visiting the Satkosia Tiger Reserve this season. Earnings for November were pegged at Rs. 1.2 lakh and more is expected for the season that will extend till March 2009.

The nature camps organized at Tikarpada within Satkosia offer 10 spacious tents on the banks of the river Mahanadi, each with water supply and an attached bath.

Although the bookings are made with the Forest Department, the nature camp is managed by the local community working under the Tikarpada Paribesh Paryatana Samiti (*PA Updates* Vol XIII, Nos 6, 4, 3 & 2). All the earnings go to the Samiti, which spends 35% of the annual profits on camp maintenance.

Source: 'Satkosia: Hotspot for tourists,' *The Statesman*, 2/12/08

Contact: **Divisional Forest Officer**, Satkosia Wildlife Division, at/P.O./Dist. Angul – 759143, Orissa. Tel: 0674-230218(O), 230219®

14 fishermen held for entering Gahirmatha marine sanctuary acquitted

14 Bengali fishermen who had been jailed for 2½ years for illegally entering the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary (GMS) and for assaulting forest officials were acquitted in November by the Kendrapara Additional District Judge.

In early January 2006, about 12 to 15 deep sea trawlers were reported to have entered the waters of the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. When a team of forest officials and Rajnagar police tried to intercept them from fishing illegally near Chinchiri, the fishermen allegedly opened fire on two patrol boats and tried to ram into them.

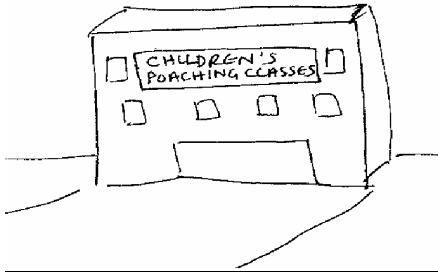
The police team fired 22 rounds and Ganesh Das, a resident of the Sunderbans was killed in the exchange of fire (*PA Update* Vol. XII, Nos. 6 & 1). Five others were also reported to have sustained injuries. 14 fishermen including the minor Gokul Das (son of Ganesh Das) were subsequently arrested and charged by the Court of Pattamundai under Sections 147,148, 332, 333, 307, 427, 379; 149 IPC; 25 and 27 Arms Act and 27 and 29 of Protection of Wildlife Act, 1972. They were jailed after their bail petitions were rejected and Gokul Das was subsequently released.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, Nos. 2 & 1)

Source: '14 fishermen held for entering marine sanctuary acquitted,' *The Pioneer*, 30/11/08.

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

Poachers employ minors to hunt migratory birds at Chilika



The Orissa Forest Department (FD) has alleged that bird poachers have recruited a number of minors in the age group of 12-17 years to hunt migratory birds visiting the Chilika Lake. They recently also arrested a thirteen year old boy and seized six dead birds from him. Two other boys assisting him are yet to be apprehended.

Officials say that some children are trained to hunt using nets and poisoned grain, while others are used only to carry the birds away after killing them. Five minors had been arrested a few years ago as well.

The FD has heightened surveillance around Chilika this season by setting up 16 security posts and appointing hundreds of people, including 40 former poachers, to check illegal activity in the area (see *PA Updates* Vol. XIV, No. 6). An estimated six lakh birds are reported to have arrived in Chilika this winter.

Source: 'Poachers using kids to hunt birds in Orissa's Chilika Lake,' *The Times of India*, 15/12/08.

'Teen boys hired to hunt migratory birds at Chilika,' *The Pioneer*, 16/12/08.

Contact: **DFO (WL)**, Chilka Wildlife Division, At/PO Balugaon, Dist. Khordha – 752030, Orissa. Tel: 06756 – 211012 / 9437109889

Over one lakh birds counted at Bhitarkanika this season

As many as 1,01,293 migratory and residential birds belonging to 79 different species were counted in the water bodies of the Bhitarkanika National Park during the annual bird census in December 2008.

The count was carried out by forest officials working in 10 teams under the guidance of ornithologists and wildlife

researchers. The estimate was arrived at using GPS tools. Permanent transit lines were put in position in the GPS as coordinators in mapping the rivers, creeks and mangrove forests.

The number of birds counted in the December 2007 census was slightly higher at 1.31 lakh.

Source: 'Census: 1.01 lakh birds sighted at Bhitarkanika,' *The Pioneer*, 16/12/08.

Poachers injure Bhitarkanika forest guard

In an incident that occurred in the first week of January, poachers badly injured a forest guard in the deer-rich Barapatia forest of the Bhitarkanika National Park. The Forest Department says that it was a retaliatory attack, since it occurred after the wildlife protection staff had seized poaching implements here.

Officials say that poaching activity has picked up alarmingly with the onset of winter. A senior official pointed out that wild animals, particular deer, are easily ensnared with nylon-made nets fitted with loops. A majority of such wildlife offences escape the notice of departmental higher-ups because of the covert connivance of some subordinate staff with the poaching syndicates.

Source: 'Poachers injure forest guard at Bhitarkanika', *The Statesman*, 05/01/09.

Meeting held to discuss conservation and livelihood issues of Simlipal BR

A two day 'National Consultation on Simlipal' was held in Baripada on November 21 and 22. Jointly organized by Gram Swaraj and the Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) - Exchange Programme, the consultation and was attended by seventy different participants. These attending included villagers from Simlipal; representatives of national, state and local level NGOs, academics, forest department functionaries and NTFP-Exchange programme partners from Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Chhatisgarh.

The meeting was focused on the issues of conservation and livelihoods in around the forests of the Simlipal Biosphere Reserve.

Contact: **Deepak Pani**, Gram Swaraj, Kamala
Nehru Girls High School Road, PO-
Baripada Dist- Mayurbhanj Orissa, Pin-
757001, Tel- 06792-258511/259565.
Email: deepak_gramswaraj@hotmail.com

RAJASTHAN

No tigress for Sariska from Ranthambhore NP

The second phase of the Ranthambhore to Sariska tiger translocation programme has met with an unexpected roadblock. A directive issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has stalled the translocation of a 2nd tigress to Sariska (scheduled November), after a tiger and a tigress had been moved here from Ranthambhore last August (*PA Updates* Vol. XIV Nos. 5 & 4).

The NTCA has said that no tigers should be caught from the Ranthambhore National Park, which constitutes the core area of the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (RTR). The RTR consists of the Ranthambhore NP and the Keladevi and Sawai Mansingh Wildlife Sanctuaries.

In an NTCA missive, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the Rajasthan Forest Department and the Ranthambhore Park authorities have been told to choose only a “young, dispersing tigress, who has not yet established her territory”. Another letter from the NTCA directed that a “non-encumbered tigress dispersing to prey-deficient areas of Keladevi and Mansingh Sanctuaries” should be selected for relocation. The Authority’s argument is that tampering with the tiger population in the core area will lead to inter-territorial fights between tigers, thus disturbing the “tiger sociology” of the region.

Source: Neha Sinha, ‘NTCA throws spanner in Sariska relocation,’
The Indian Express, 22/11/08

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

TAMIL NADU

Directory of environmentalists released

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India has brought out a directory of environmental resource persons in Tamil Nadu to help improve networking amongst those involved in environment conservation. About 130 experts, including scientists, academicians, NGOs and government officials have been listed along with their contact details and area of specialisation. For details, contact the State office of WWF-India on

Source: ‘Directory of environmentalists released,’ *The Hindu*, 21/11/08.

Contact: **Dr. V Dakshinamurthy**, WWF India
Tamil Nadu State Office, No. 2
Subramaniam Avenue, Valmiki Nagar,
Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai – 600041. Tel.
044 - 4211-0690 / 24992847. Email:
wwftnso@airtelbroadband.in

Rs Two crore for Project Tiger in TN

The state of Tamil Nadu received Rs. Two crore from the Centre for Project Tiger in the year 2008. This is more than four times the amount of Rs. 45 lakhs that the state got the preceding year and the reason for this is the notification of two more tiger reserves in Anaimalai and Mudumalai.

The amount however is still on the lower side compared to the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan that were allocated Rs 24.77 crore and 20.83 crore respectively.

The state government puts the total tiger population in TN at 72. It has been suggested that there are 20 to 25 tigers in Kalakkad Mundanthurai, 25 to 30 in Anaimalai and 30 to 40 tigers in Mudumalai.

Source: B Aravind Kumar, ‘Centre sanctions Rs 2 crore for project tiger in TN,’ *The Times of India*, 16/12/08.

Huge protest against Mudumalai CTH

A huge protest was held on December 30, 2008, opposing the declaration of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve as a Critical Tiger Habitat

(CTH). Over 50,000 participants including tribals and prominent politicians came together under the banner of People's Livelihood Rights Protection Movement to declare that the notification of the CTH was illegal as it was carried out sans scientific investigation, and also without the consent of the gram sabhas. They expressed fear that thousands of people would be displaced by the CTH.

The traffic on the Ooty-Kozhikode and Ooty-Mysore roads was paralysed for about four hours as the protestors squatted on the road, demanding the immediate implementation of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Rights (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. All the shops and commercial establishments in this town downed their shutters in support of the rally.

A charter of demands circulated earlier said that the CTH as has been declared now also includes the Mudumalai panchayat and part of Masinagudy panchayat of Gudalur Taluk. It was further pointed out, that there was a proposal to declare a 'buffer zone' of about 500 sq km area around the Mudumalai Critical Tiger Habitat, covering eight panchayats, namely Gudalur, Srimadurai, Devarshola, Nellakottai, Mudumalai, Masinagudy, Sholur, Ebbanad and Kookal.

Protesters alleged that the officials of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve officials and the Forest Department (FD) have been trying to force communities to consent so that it can draw as big a buffer zone as possible. The FD was said to be offering funds and promising development to people in the buffer zones; but was allegedly suppressing information about the restrictions (deemed "necessary" for tiger conservation) that would be imposed on the people. The Department has apparently not provided the people the Tiger Conservation Plan that it is required to create under the Wild Life (Protection) Act; and has also refused to share details of how funds will be spent in the critical tiger habitats and buffer zones.

Source: 'Massive rally against tiger project', *Press Trust of India*, 30/12/08
Statement issued by the People's Livelihood Rights Protection Movement on 27/12/08

Contact: **MS Selvaraj**, People's Livelihood Rights Protection Movement, Law Chambers, Calicut Road, Gudalur, Nilgiri District, Tamilnadu. Tel: 09442085049. Email: bijoy.cr@gmail.com
Wildlife Warden, Mudumalai WLS, Mt. Stewart Hill, Udthagamandalam - 643001 Tamil Nadu. Tel: 0423-244098

TRIPURA

Confusion over wildlife reserve proposal; locals fear massive displacement

Tribal communities and political outfits have strongly opposed the Tripura Government's move to create a 'wildlife reserve', fearing that it will lead to large scale displacement of the indigenous people here.

In early November, the State Wildlife Advisory Board had apparently approved the establishment of a wildlife reserve at Kalajhari-Laxmipur-Dhalagari in Dhalai district, and at Mukhcherri and New Gomati village in South Tripura district. More than 400 indigenous families residing inside the earmarked reserve area were subsequently served eviction notices by the local administration; and were told by sub-divisional magistrates to submit details of their lands.

The Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) has alleged that the project would displace between 50,000 to 100,000 families and that the people to be evicted have already been displaced once before. When the Dumbur Hydro electric project was commissioned in 1974 they had had to leave three hill ranges – Atharamura, Kalazhari and Bhagaban tilla – bordering Bangladesh. The Tripura Janajati Jami Punuroddhar Committee (JJPC), a non-political wing of indigenous people, and the Tribal Wing of the Congress Party has also opposed the government's move to create the wildlife reserve.

The Tripura Forest Minister, Jitendra Chowdhury, however, denied that the state government was creating a new wildlife sanctuary in the state. He held instead that a 'critical habitat area' was being planned in southern and northern Tripura, especially as the elephant population here has increased to 59 from 38 in 2002.

According to an earlier report, an Elephant Reserve was being planned in the Atharamura Hills of the Dhalai District, and a high level committee had been formed to submit a rehabilitation plan for the 800 odd tribal families that would be displaced because of the project.

(Ed: It is quite evident from the three reports quoted that there are many inconsistencies and contradictions and that a lot of local social and political dynamics are also playing out. There is a lot of confusion and lack of clarity, and it's difficult to explain or understand what is exactly happening about the real situation on the ground.)

Source: 'Elephant population on the rise in Tripura,' *The Assam Tribune*, 17/11/08. 'Tripura parties stir against wildlife sanctuary,' *The Times of India*, 24/11/08. 'Wildlife reserve plan irks Tripura tribals,' *The Assam Tribune*, 25/11/08.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Aranya Bhawan, Nehru Complex, Agartala – 799001, Tripura. Tel: 0381-225223. Fax: 0381-225253/224013, 2422249

UTTARAKHAND

FD again sends back Army's proposal for land to replace Raiwala depot

The Army's proposal that it be allocated land in exchange for the Raiwala depot has again been sent back to it by the Forest Department.

The 3 Field Depot regiment land has long been a bone of contention between the Army and the FD, with both parties claiming ownership. Two years ago, the matter was finally taken to the Supreme Court, which asked the Army to vacate the Raiwala depot land and to send a proposal for allotment of alternate land of the Army's choice. The Court had also appointed a nodal officer to look into the matter.

The Army apparently took a year to send the proposal seeking land at Bibiwala in Dehradun Forest Division. This was sent back by the nodal officer as it allegedly did not contain some necessary details. A fresh proposal sent six months later in November

was also sent back because the map submitted was unclear.

According to the FD the presence of the Raiwala depot had been a hindrance to the free movement of elephants of the Rajaji National Park.

Source: Prithviraj Singh, 'Forest Department sends back Army's proposal for land again,' *The Pioneer*, 29/11/08.

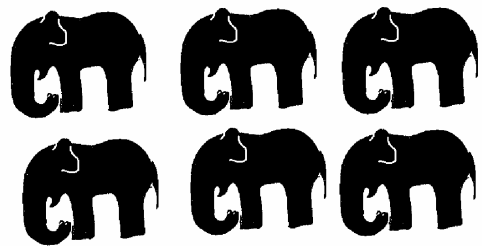
Contact: **Director**, Rajaji NP, 5/1 Ansari Marg, Dehradun – 248001, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-2621669 Fax: 2621669

Elephant population in state down by 250

Forest Department (FD) records reveal that Uttarakhand's wild elephant population has gone down nearly 15%, declining from 1,582 in 2003 to 1,346 in 2007. The details were tabled at a recent meeting of the State Wildlife Board.

Elephant numbers have fallen across the state except in the Corbett Tiger Reserve and two other forest divisions. The population has dipped from 68 to 27 in the Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary; and from 85 to 27 in the Dehradun Forest Division. Rajaji National Park's elephant figures declined from 469 to 418, and the Haridwar Forest Division also saw considerable reduction in numbers.

While some forest officials hold that migration accounts for this loss of nearly 250 elephants; other officers believe that the decline may be ascribed to a rationalisation in counting methods, which may have made the 2007 census more precise than the previous one.



Source: Prithviraj Singh, '250 tuskers go missing,' *The Pioneer*, 18/12/08.

Contact: **CWLW**, 5, Chandrabani, Mohobewala, Dehradun, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-2644691

UTTAR PRADESH

Efforts to protect Gangetic River dolphins

Scientists from Japan, IIT-Delhi and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India are to soon use advanced acoustics technology to study the behavioural patterns of the Gangetic Dolphin. In enabling the scientists to keep track of the dolphins during their seasonal migration, the technique would help further conservation efforts aimed at this fresh-water mammal which is on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species.

Meanwhile, the local residents of Narora are also pitching into WWF's river dolphin conservation programme being undertaken here. Their efforts are bearing fruit as dolphin numbers have doubled from the 1994 figure of 20 in the 165 km stretch of the Upper Ganga between Bijnor and Narora.

Karnawas village residents have stopped throwing polythene into the river; and have also set up a sewage treatment plant to ensure that the river is not further polluted. At least 85 families of the village use this plant, which was set up without the help of the government. The farmers here have also stopped using chemical fertilisers; reverting instead to using cowdung and compost to manure their fields.

The long term survival of the dolphins however is still threatened by the declining water levels of the Ganga. Siltation and to an extent, the construction of the Tehri Dam directly undermines the future prospects of these endangered deep water swimmers. The dolphins now depend almost solely on water from the Ramganga river which is being released to meet the needs of the nearby Narora nuclear power plant.

Source: 'River dolphins getting a new lease of life,' *The Hindu*, 18/11/08.

'Scientists launch rescue ops for Ganga dolphins,' *The Asian Age*, 24/11/08

Contact: **DFO**, WL, National Chambal Wildlife Division (I/c Okhla WLS), Mau Van Block, Agra, Uttar Pradesh. Tel: 0562-2320091

263 ghariyals to be released into the wild from Kukrail

The Ghariyal Rehabilitation Centre, Kukrail is to soon release 263 young ghariyals into rivers flowing along Katarniaghat and Hastinapur.

131 ghariyals will be released in the Gerua river in Katarniaghat. The crisis management group, which was set up after the mass mortality of ghariyals a little more than a year ago (see *PA Update* Vol XIV, No. 2, Madhya Pradesh), has suggested that releases should also be made in River Ganga along Hastinapur and 132 reptiles are to be released here. On an average, 150 ghariyals are released into the wild annually but this time the number is slightly more.

The Kukrail centre alone has so far released some 5,000 reptiles into the wild. While the Centre generally has between 400 and 500 ghariyals with it any given time, it currently has over 1000 reptiles, many of which were rescued during last years floods.

Source: '263 ghariyals to be released into the wild', *The Times of India*, 28/11/08.

Contact: **DFO**, Katarniaghat WLS, Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. Tel: 05252-232498

WEST BENGAL

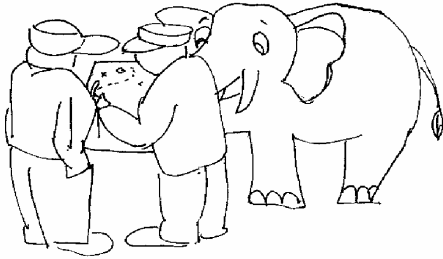
Mobile veterinary service for North Bengal wildlife

Following a surge of elephant deaths, the state Forest Department has extended its mobile veterinary service covering Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary to encompass the rest of north Bengal's forests as well. Vets and their assistants will now cover all the forests of the region in order to provide immediate primary treatment to the injured wild animals that they find. 28 elephants have died in the state's jungles in 2008.

Source: 'Vets go mobile!' *The Statesman*, 17/11/08.

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

Proposal for new rail line to avoid elephant deaths in Dooars



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways has suggested that a new railway track on the New Jalpaiguri (NJP) - New Bongaigaon section would help avoid the regular deaths of elephants and other wild animals in train accidents in the Dooars.

As per the suggestion, all goods trains running on the killer NJP – Alipurduar route through the Dooars could then be shifted to the new track. The Committee has also asked the Railway Board to ensure that the trains maintain the necessary speed limit while passing through these forests.

In the last eight years, over 39 elephants have been killed after being hit by trains between the Siliguri and Alipurduar stations of the North East Frontier Railway. The rate of deaths increased alarmingly from 2003 onwards when the track was converted from meter to broad gauge.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIV, No. 5; Vol XIII, Nos. 6 & 3; Vol XII, No. 3 and Nos. 49, 47, 43, 39, 36, 34, 32 & 29)

Source: 'New track to save Dooars wildlife,' *The Times of India*, 28/12/08

'Railway committee wants new tracks to arrest jumbo deaths,' *The Statesman*, 29/12/08

Contact: **CF (Wildlife)**, North Bengal, West Bengal Forest Dept., Aranya Bhawan (Near Court) Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Tel: 03561–25627(O) 25596 (R)

FD, villagers trade charges over tiger attacks in Sunderbans

Five incidents of tigers straying into villages in the Sunderbans were reported in the last three months of 2008. The worst hit areas include

Kultali, Gosaba and Basanti – two cases near Gosaba had involved the loss of human lives.

In an effort to deal with the issue, the Forest Department had put up nylon rope-fencing around vulnerable villages. The fencing however was found in tatters in the Deulbari village of Kultali and in the Ambikanagar village of Gosaba. Residents have alleged that the nylon ropes used were of inferior quality and that stronger fencing was required.

Forest officials were of the opinion, however, that the villagers themselves had cut open the nylon fencing for domestic purposes. They said that barbed wire fences could not be used since these would be fatal for the tigers. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XIV, No. 6)

Source: Abhisek Roychowdhury, 'Forest dept blames villagers for tiger menace,' *The Statesman*, 16/12/08

Contact: **Director**, Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve, Bikash Bhavan, 3rd Floor, North Block, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700091, West Bengal. Tel: 033-3211750. Fax: 3211529

Chief Wildlife Warden, Vikas Bhawan, North Block, Salt Lake, Calcutta - 700091, West Bengal. Tel: 033-3346900/3583208. Fax: 3345946. Email: wildlife@cal.vsnl.net.in

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Sanctuary Wildlife Awards 2008

The 9th Sanctuary Wildlife Awards - 2008 for service to wildlife were announced recently. This year the awards were jointly presented by Sanctuary Magazine and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

The Lifetime Service Award was given to Fateh Singh Rathore for his contribution to the protection of the tiger and for the creation of the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve. Wildlife Service Awards were given to Dr. YV Jhala and Dr. Qamar Qureshi, both of the Wildlife Institute of India; the Ranthambhore – Sariska Tiger Relocation Team; Vishwas Dattatray Katdare of the Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra; Sevaram Malli Parihar for protecting the

Demoiselle Cranes of Kheechan in Rajasthan and forest officer from Karnataka, AT Poovaiah.

The Wing Under the Wings Award was given to Bahar Dutt and the television Channel CNN-IBN. The Young Naturalists Award was given to Haseena and Tajunnisa for their contribution to conservation work in the Lakshadweep islands and to the Mumbai based naturalist Santosh Lalji Yadav.

The Green Teacher Award was given to Chain Roop Dayma for his efforts to protect the Tal Chappar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Contact: **Bittu Sahgal**, Sanctuary Magazine
145/146, Pragati Inds. Estate, NM Joshi
Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 011.
Tel: 022-23016848/49 Maharashtra .
Email: bittusahgal@vsnl.com

Dr. Aparajita Datta selected for the 2009 Women of Discovery Award

Indian wildlife scientist Dr. Aparajita Datta of the Nature Conservation Foundation has been selected for the 2009 Women of Discovery Award for her contribution to wildlife conservation in North East India with the help of local communities.

The other awardees are American acoustical geophysicist Maya Tolstoy; Brazilian volcanologist Rosaly Lopes; Mongolian paleontologist, Bolortsetseg Minjin; and Egyptian wildlife biologist Leela Hazzah.

The awards acknowledge excellence in fields related to international exploration, and bring to light the research, adventures, and pioneering discoveries of women that have led to global and scientific advancement.

The awards will be presented in New York in April 2009.

Source: 'Award for Indian wildlife scientist,'
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>
20/11/08.

Dog squad to sniff out illegal wildlife trade

In a new initiative to deal with poaching and wildlife crime, the Forest Departments (FDs) of Haryana and Uttarakhand will deploy sniffer dogs to locate concealed tiger and leopard

skins, bones, bear bile and other illegal animal products.

Two German Shepherds began their training for the purpose in April 2008 at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police camp in Panchkula. Both passed the efficiency test in November at Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, Dehradun. The dogs are to help the FD locate the otherwise untraceable wildlife articles buried by poachers in dense forest areas. They will also work at the bus and railway stations and airports of Haryana, as the state forms a major conduit for the transportation of wildlife articles.

The project was supported by the NGO TRAFFIC.



Source: 'Dogs to sniff out illegal wildlife trade,'
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>
06/11/08.

Contact: **Samir Sinha**, TRAFFIC –India, WWF India, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003. Tel: 011-41504786, Fax: 43516200. Email: ssinha@wwfindia.net
Web: www.traffic.org

110 tigers dead in the last six years

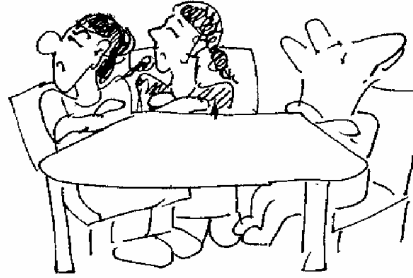
Government data made available in response to an application filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act reveals that India has lost at least 110 tigers in the past six years.

While 14 cats (including four tigresses and two cubs) died in 2008 alone, 30 tigers were lost in 2007 – the highest figure in the six year period. Of these, 16 animals died within tiger reserves while 14 deaths were recorded in non-protected areas. The latter included five cases of poaching, three cases of poisoning and one incident where a suspected man-eater was shot dead by the Forest Department in the Chandrapur region of Maharashtra (also see story on Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve above).

SOUTH ASIA

BHUTAN

Steps proposed to deal with farmer-wildlife conflict



The Bhutanese Agriculture Minister Lyonpo Dr Pema Gyamtsho revealed during a Parliamentary session in December that the Agriculture Ministry was working out different strategies to deal with the widespread human-wildlife conflict in the country.

The status and recommendation report compiled by the Ministry on the human-wildlife conflict here records an annual average crop loss of up to 18% of total household income. More expenses are incurred by farmers who spend about two months every year guarding their maize and rice against foraging wild animals. Around 97% of the 274 farmers in the Jigme Singye Wangchuck Park reported major financial loss due to wild animals.

Besides undertaking forest plantation to provide a viable food source for wildlife, the report's overall action plan is to enhance crop protection measures through subsidizing solar and electric fencing in high damage areas, raising alternate crops and buffer plant species, allowing undergrowth to be cleared around fields and through permitting licensed hunters to control the animal population.

The report also proposes to provide loans and crop and livestock insurance schemes involving financial contributions from the government, local community and external agencies. It suggests that jersey cows and brown Swiss bulls could be brought in exchange for unproductive local breeds to bring

Of the six tigers poached in 2008, three were killed in November alone – two in Madhya Pradesh and one in UP's Dudhwa tiger reserve. NGOs following issues of tiger conservation in the country have, however, pointed out that these are only the official figures, and the actual tiger mortality count may be much higher.

Source: '110 tigers lost in six years: Govt data,' *The Statesman*, 23/12/08

Central Assistance for relocation for villages from Tiger Reserves

Name of Tiger Reserve	Year and Money (Rs. In lakhs)	
	2007-08	2008-09
Sariska (Rajasthan)	50.00	1912.00
Ranthambhore (Rajasthan)	50.00	500.00
Satpura (MP)	76.00	1024.49
Panna (MP)	1577.53	300.00
Bandhavgarh	277.3668	-
Similipal (Orissa)	-	350
Bandipur/Nagarahole (Karnataka)	980.19	-
Corbett (Uttarakhand)	10	-
TOTAL	3021.08	4086.49

Source:

http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page.asp?relid=45855

India Biodiversity portal launched

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE) recently launched an interactive website called the India Biodiversity Portal, with the help of the Union Government's National Knowledge Commission.

The portal depicts the biodiversity areas of the country in layers of biogeographical maps; and is intended to develop into a community-based depository of information like Wikipedia so as to facilitate knowledge sharing. The portal can be accessed at <http://www.indiabiodiversity.org>

Source: K. Satyamurty, 'Biodiversity areas mapped online,' *The Hindu*, 16/12/08

down the cattle population. The report also proposes integrated conservation and development programs (ICDPs), environmental education measures and eco tourism initiatives like allowing regulated hunting of wild pigs in areas of abundance.

Source: T. Lamsang and P. Choden, 'Farmer-wildlife conflict comes to parliament,' www.kuenselonline.com, 01/01/09

Wangchuk Centenary Park inaugurated

The Wangchuk Centenary Park (WCP), in Nasiphel village of Choekhar Gewog, Bumthang, was inaugurated recently by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonchhoen Jigmi Y Thinley.

Covering about 3,736 km sq of north-central Bhutan, WCP forms the second largest protected area of the country. It connects the Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Park in the west and Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary in the east; and also includes the source of the rivers Punatsangchu, Mangdechu, Kurichu, and Chamkharchu, all of which are slated to support hydropower projects.

Apart from 23 mammal species including the endangered tiger, snow leopard, Himalayan black bear, Takin and Tibetan Wolf, the WCP also hosts 135 bird species and about 242 plant species belonging to 51 families.

The park is expected to help local communities economically through their participation in eco-tourism management. The famous hot spring Dhur tsachu is expected to be a major tourist attraction, and the park also has potential to offer tourists water-sports activities like boating, skiing, fishing and canoeing. Locals agree that eco-tourism would have its benefits, as it has already brought them a road in the park.

While the new park management will not restrict the 10,000 people who directly depend upon it for forest resources and their livelihood, it will be ensured that the resources are henceforth used in a sustainable manner.

Source: Tashi Dema, '2nd largest park inaugurated,' www.kuenselonline.com, 15/12/08

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

International Police Group to Tackle Wildlife Trafficking Crime Syndicates

Senior police investigators representing six countries from the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), China and the United States recently met in Bangkok to map out a strategy to uncover and dismantle the organized crime syndicates behind persistent illegal trade of pangolins (endangered scaly anteaters) and big cats (endangered and critically endangered tigers and leopards), which is pushing the species towards extinction.

ASEAN-WEN involves environmental, police, customs and judiciary agencies from all 10 ASEAN countries. ASEAN-WEN's first Special Investigation Group Workshop on Trafficking in Big Cats and Pangolins involved police investigators from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, China and the United States. Facilitated by the Royal Thai Police and INTERPOL, the workshop focused on ways to improve cross-border intelligence sharing and boost collaborative investigations to locate, gather evidence against and arrest the criminal ring leaders behind the illegal wildlife trade.

The meeting was organized by the Royal Thai Police Natural Resources and Environment Crime Suppression Division, and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID. The U.S. Department of State provide financial and logistical support for the development of the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network through a dedicated ASEAN-WEN Support Program.

Contact: **Aschta Boestani**, Assistant Senior Officer, ASEAN-WEN Program Coordination Unit, Email: aschta@asean-wen.org. Tel/Fax: +66-2-9406286. Mobile: +66-816 7290

OPPORTUNITIES

Call for proposals for conservation projects in the Western Ghats

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) have invited Letters of Inquiry (LoIs) from civil society organizations (such as non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, academic institutions and private enterprises) for biodiversity conservation projects in the Western Ghats. Applicants are expected to have adequate experience in implementing biodiversity conservation projects in the Western Ghats region of India.

Specific information on the grants, guidelines, instructions and formats for grant applications, and deadlines for applications are provided in the following webpage: ([http://www.atree.org/CEPF_WGhats/CallWeb Dec](http://www.atree.org/CEPF_WGhats/CallWebDec)).

Contact: **Dr. Bhaskar Acharya**, Program Coordinator, CEPF Western Ghats RIT.
Email: cepfwghats@atree.org

Openings at the BNHS

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has announced a number of openings for various projects:

- a) Research Fellow for Jerdons' Courser Project
- b) Education Officer (two posts) for the Conservation Education Centre, Goregaon, Mumbai
- c) Deputy Director – Conservation: Responsibilities will include the development of conservation policies for the Society which in turn will be used as a core advocacy tool with various governments, corporates and financial institutions.
- d) Project Manager for the Important Bird Areas Programme
- e) Project Officer for the Important Bird Areas Programme

- f) Publications Officer for the Society
- g) Research Fellow for Collections Department

For details and requirements check the BNHS website: www.bnhs.org

UPCOMING

National Symposium on Prosopis

The Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE) is organizing a national symposium 'Prosopis: Ecological, Economic Significance and Management Challenges' on 20-21 February 20 & 21, 2009 in Bhuj. The symposium will bring together researchers, managers, decision makers and stakeholders to a single forum to find out best suitable management strategies for the plant. It mainly aims at addressing the core issue of management for its economic utilities and effectively managing the invasion, while improving the overall biodiversity.

Contact: **Dr. B. Anjan Kumar Prusty**, GUIDE, PO Box # 83, Opp. Changleshwar Temple, Mundra Road, Bhuj - 370 001, Gujarat. Tel: 02832-329408 (O), Mob: 99748 43778. Web: <http://nspc.gujaratdesertecology.com/>

International seminar on Protected Area Management

The 10th annual International Seminar on Protected Area Management is being held from July 13 to August 1, 2009 at the University of Minnesota, USA. The seminar themes include Integrated Planning for Protected Areas; Community Involvement; Tourism, Concessions and Visitor Management and Transboundary Management in the Face of Climate Change.

Contact: Email: pam@cfc.umn.edu
Web: <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/is/ispam/welcome.htm>

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