

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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## EDITORIAL

### Who will police the enforcement agencies?

There has been a clutch of stories in recent issues of the *PA Update* (including this one) that raise uncomfortable questions about the role of government agencies like the Forest Department (FD) and the Police. In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, a beat officer was alleged to have hunted birds in the Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary while in the Kaziranga National Park, arrested rhino poachers said that they had bribed a police official so that they could continue with their activities.

It might be argued that these are isolated events or then, just the behaviour of deviant individuals who cannot be stopped from abusing the power that the state vests in them and that the problem, therefore, does not necessarily lie in the system itself.

The reality, as we know, is much more complex than that. There are many in the field who will argue that the involvement of enforcement agencies, be it the Police or the FD, in malafide and corrupt practices like those mentioned above are much more common than we are willing to accept. Importantly, developments like this need to be seen in the context of loud and regular demands of more and better policing, more enforcement, more arms and more powers to enforcement agencies for protecting our wildlife. For those amongst us who believe that a move towards a police state or even a more policed state has the solutions to our problems this should come as a sobering softener. And one is not even getting into the innumerable cases of police excesses and human right violations that litter our landscape today.

The February 2009 issue of the *PA Update*, for instance, reported the acquittal of 14 fishermen who were arrested in 2006 for trespassing the boundaries of the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. The Orissa Forest Department (FD) had claimed in January 2006 that the fishermen were Bangladesh nationals, that they were fishing illegally in the waters of the sanctuary and that they had attacked patrolling staff. In the exchange of fire one of

the intruders was killed and subsequently 14 others were also arrested. Enquiries and legal proceedings that followed revealed that the fishermen, firstly, were not Bangladeshi but residents of Kakdwip from West Bengal and that indeed they were not guilty at all. Three years later the local court pronounced them innocent and all those arrested were acquitted.

There are many questions that inevitably arise. Was it the failure of the Police and the FD to convince the court, or is the acquittal symptomatic of the problems with our judicial system? More fundamentally, were the accused really guilty of trespassing in the first place? How does one explain the killing of one of the fishermen? Was the entire operation a frame-up by the enforcement agencies?

We also reported last time of a rather bizarre development in Madhya Pradesh where the Forest Department and the Police are accusing each other of neglecting their duties of tiger protection in the Kanha Tiger Reserve. In a letter to the National Tiger Conservation Authority in December 2008, the Kanha Director listed a number of concerns related to the working of the police: interference in the booking of forest rest houses inside the tiger reserve; not providing information about investigations into tiger poaching incidents; and even that the police seemed more interested in getting rewards for skins seized from poachers. He also expressed apprehension that informers used by the police to fight naxalism in the region might actually be directly involved in cases of poaching.

There are many other cases where NGOs or vigilance agencies within the government have exposed cases of serious negligence and corruption in the FD. The culpability of the FD in hiding the truth about tiger numbers in Sariska and Panna TRs till it was no longer possible to hide it is also well known.

Larger and very important issues arise from all this. Can conservation succeed if the agencies responsible for it fail in such a manner? How realistic is it in a situation like this to expect local communities to trust enforcement agencies, leave alone co-operate with them? Is the larger wildlife conservation community's overarching faith and trust in the apparatus of the state fully justified?

This is not a call for doing away with enforcement or the agencies themselves, but to remind ourselves that policing and force can only be one component of a bouquet of steps that are taken to deal with a problem. Lack of transparency or accountability has become the hallmark of the operations of our agencies and this is a systemic flaw that needs immediate attention. Agencies with power have to operate with additional responsibility, both, to avoid misuse and also to ensure that the citizens maintain their faith. The edifice of conservation can only be built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect and we don't seem anywhere close to reaching it.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ANDHRA PRADESH

#### **Contour +3 fixed as boundary of Kolleru lake WLS**

A committee of officials drawn from various departments has decided to fix the contour + 3 of the Kolleru Lake as the boundary for the wildlife sanctuary here. In a unanimous resolution passed a few months ago, the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly had reduced the size of the Kolleru WLS from Contour + 5 to Contour + 3 (see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, No. 5 & Vol XII, Nos. 4, 55 & 49).

An inter-departmental meeting was called to come to a consensus on the contours of the lake, as there was a lot of variation in the contour maps available with the Departments of Forest, Revenue, Irrigation, Fisheries and Land Records. The committee, comprising Chief Wildlife Warden of Andhra Pradesh; West Godavari District Collector and Joint Collector; Krishna District Revenue Officer; Irrigation Deputy Chief Engineer and Drainage Executive Engineer, in a meeting in Eluru in February finalised the Contour + 3 in the map prepared by the Kolleru Development Authority in 1981 and Contour + 5 in the Fish Tank Demolition Map prepared at the advent of Operation Kolleru.

Activists say that the contour map of Kolleru Development Authority is itself a combination of contour maps available with the different departments and lacks legal sanctity. It has been alleged that rich fish tank owners would benefit the most by the decision of the committee and bird life and the rich biodiversity of the lake will suffer.

Source: GV Ramana Rao. 'Kolleru activists working to save the lake allege foul play, *The Hindu*, 18/02/09.

Contact: **Divisional Forest Officer**, I/c Kolleru WLS, Eluru, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. Tel: 08812-232356.

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## ARUNACHAL PRADESH

### Conditions diluted for project that submerges part of Tale Valley WLS

The 2000 MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project coming up on the Arunachal Pradesh – Assam border is to submerge a part of the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary and had therefore required a clearance from the Standing Committee (StC) of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL). In 2002-3 the Supreme Court (SC) had observed that the project would impact important wildlife habitats and species well beyond the Tale Valley WLS in both the upstream and downstream areas.

Despite opposition of non-governmental members the project was granted clearance but with the imposition of stringent conditions. These included the declaration of the Reserved Forests in the catchment area of the dam as a sanctuary or national park and imposed a restriction on construction of dams in the upstream stretches of the Subansiri river. These were also then reiterated by the Supreme Court (SC) in April 2004.

Dam proponents raised no objection till construction on the project reached a point where it could not now be cancelled. With this fait accompli in hand, in May 2005 they asked the SC for a review of the conditions which were the very basis of granting of the original

clearance. The SC had referred the matter back to the StC and in a meeting held in December 2008 the StC agreed to dilute the two conditions imposed by it while granting clearance to the project in May 2003.

The committee has diluted the 'no dams upstream' condition and said it would consider upstream projects on a case to case basis. This decision ignored the opinion of non-governmental members in the committee as well as civil society groups in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh which asked for a cumulative impact assessment of upstream projects and a carrying capacity study of the Subansiri river basin before deciding whether to dilute this condition. The protected area condition has also been changed so that the Arunachal Pradesh government now needs to declare a smaller area of 168 sq. km. as a sanctuary and only "make serious efforts" to bring an additional 332 sq. km. reserved forest under the category of Conservation Reserve (CR) in consultation with the MoEF.

The diluted conditions will now be placed before the SC for passing final orders. Conservationists have argued that granting conditional clearance to mega dams in ecologically sensitive areas and then diluting these conditions after construction work has begun is a mockery of environmental governance procedures.

(Also see *PA Update* 49)

Source: Neeraj Vaghlikar. Email dated 18/03/09.

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**CWLW**, Forest Department, Itanagar – 719111. Arunachal Pradesh. Tel: 0360 – 222310 (o)/ 224370 @. Fax: 0360 – 222351/223556

## ASSAM

### Earth cutting continues at Deepor Beel WLS

Despite government prohibition, local traders continue to cut and transport soil from the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary.

Trucks, reportedly, run day and night to cart away soil from Azara and the Assam Engineering College. This soil is then sold in nearby areas at high rates. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XII, No 4 and No. 43)



Source: 'Earth cutting on the rise at Deepor Beel,' *The Assam Tribune*, 29/01/09.

Contact: **Divisional Forest Officer**, Assam State Zoo Division, I/c Deepor Beel WLS  
R.G. Baruah Road, Guwahati - 781 024,  
Assam0361-261363(O), 263331(R)

### MLAs enter Kaziranga NP illegally; attack forest staff

Two Members of the Legislative Assembly of Assam, Mr. Jiten Gogoi, MLA from the Bokakhat and Mr. Kushal Duori, MLA from Thowra illegally entered Kaziranga National Park on March 17 with automatic weapons including AK47s for fishing in the central range of the park.

Mr. Gogoi, reportedly, also attacked the Range Officer Mr. Dharani Dhar Boro when he and his staff tried to stop the MLAs. The duo then left the park in their vehicles and broke the Mihimukh forest gate as they drove through it. They then also damaged the Divisional Forest Office of the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division at Bokakhat.

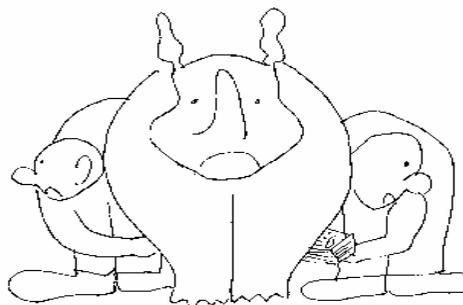
This is not the first time that the two have been involved in illegal fishing in Kaziranga. Local NGOs and conservationists have protested against this criminal behaviour of the MLAs and have written to the Prime

Minister to ensure that the state government takes suitable action.

Source: Bibhab Talukdar. Email dated 18/03/09.

Contact: **Bibhab Talukdar**, Aaranyak, 50  
Samanwoy Path (Survey) PO: Beltola,  
Guwahati - 781 028, Assam. Tel: 0361-  
2230250 (off). Fax: 2228418. Email:  
[bibhab@aaranyak.org](mailto:bibhab@aaranyak.org)

### Kaziranga rhino poachers bribed police official, villagers



Two poachers who were arrested from Aphala village near Kaziranga NP for killing a rhino in December 2008 said that they had bribed a police official and a few villagers to allow them to continue their activities in the area. The village of Aphala is located 25 kms from Kaziranga and is under the jurisdiction of the Kamargaon Police Station in Golaghat district.

The duo said that Rs. One Lakh was paid through a middleman to an officer of the Assam Police Battalion who was in Charge of the Kamargaon Police Station. He, in turn was supposed to hand over the money to his senior. The poachers said that they had fired three bullets to kill the rhino and then sawed off its horn, nails and the tail before burying it in the backyard of a resident of Aphala.

The carcass of the killed rhino was dug out in the last week of December and the owner of the house was taken into custody. The poacher duo that was arrested in January confessed to being part of an 11 member gang, the rest of whom managed to escape arrest. They also revealed that the rhino horn had been sold for Rs. 12 lakhs to a buyer at Pisola in Sonitpur district.

The Golaghat Superintendent of Police subsequently directed the Sub-Divisional Police Officer of Bokakhat, Nobin Singh, to conduct an inquiry into the matter

Kaziranga has seen a spate of rhino poachings in recent months with poachers killing 10 animals in 2008 alone (see *PA Update* Vol XV, No. 1) and the All Assam Students Union (AASU) that has been protesting against the poaching of the rhinos has said that their claim of police involvement in the killings has now been proved.

Source: 'Poachers claim nexus with cop- Gang sells rhino horn for Rs. 12 lakh', *The Telegraph*, 22/01/09  
'Probe into bribery slur', *The Telegraph*, 23/01/09

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

### **Nine tiger deaths in Kaziranga NP in three months**

Authorities at Kaziranga National Park have admitted to the deaths of nine tigers in the three month period from November 2008 to January 2009. This is the biggest casualty of tigers ever in Kaziranga over such a brief period.

While the park director has said that the reasons for the deaths ranged from poisoning by villagers to infighting among tigers and old age, others have said that several deaths had occurred due to poaching. They have also alleged that the actual number of deaths was higher and that forest officers were deliberately quoting a lower figure to avert a full-blown investigation.

Source: Naresh Mitra. '9 tiger deaths in Kaziranga in 3 months', *The Times of India*, 06/02/09

### **Kaziranga receives funds from Project Tiger**

The Kaziranga National Park has received nearly Rs. One Crore as funds from Project Tiger. The money was recently released by the State government to the park authorities. The Central Government has said it could release more funds depending on how this first installment is utilized.

A senior Forest Department (FD) official, however, pointed out that the amount released to KNP was less than that given to the

State by the Centre. Moreover, even though Delhi had duly assigned the funds in time to Assam, the State's finance department had delayed passing on the funds to the park.

The Park Director has said that the money will be used mainly for work involving non-recurring expenditure, like infrastructure development. Repair work for roads and bridges would also be undertaken, as their dilapidated state was seriously hindering park management. New anti-poaching camps may be built in strategic areas and the funds would also be used for acquiring arms and ammunition for anti-poaching and frontline personnel.

Additionally, the funds would help train field personnel in tiger-conservation skills through orientation camps and trips to well-managed Project Tiger sites. The need for training has gained added urgency with nine tiger deaths reported from the park within the last three months (see story above).

Source: 'Funds for Kaziranga tiger project,' *The Assam Tribune*, 11/02/09.

### **Kaziranga NP estimated to have 16 tigers per 100 sq. kms**

An ongoing survey being undertaken by the conservation group Aaranyak has suggested the presence of 16 tigers per 100 sq. kms in the Kaziranga National Park (KNP). This is being considered as a population that is both, healthy and stable.

Camera traps installed in 50 locations in the Kohora and Bagori ranges have so far recorded more than 400 images. The final estimate from the survey would be ready by the end of April and it would lay the foundation for the final census to be conducted later this year. The endeavour is supported by the David Shepherd Foundation, Rufford Small Grants and the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation.

Source: Prabal Kr Das, 'KNP has healthy tiger population, says survey,' *The Hindu*, 15/02/09.

### **Erosion threat to parts of Manas NP**

The Beki River is reportedly eroding vital areas of the Manas NP. Only 12 – 15 feet now remain

between the river and the well-known Mathanguri tourist bungalow. The land beneath the bungalow is also leaning onto the river. Forest officials have reportedly not yet undertaken any erosion-control measures here.

The lower Assam districts of Barpeta and Baksa had sustained heavy damage in 2004 and then again 2007, when the Beki broke its embankment in Narayanaguri. Although the breach was plugged last year, the erosion has continued and the Tinmail area of the park is also threatened.

Source: 'Manas Tiger project threatened by erosion,' *The Assam Tribune*, 17/02/09.

Contact: **Director**, Manas NP, PO Barpeta Rd. Dist. Barpeta – 781315, Assam. Tel: 03666 – 261413. Fax: 232253 / 260253

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

## GUJARAT

### Dolphins, sea turtles killed in dynamite explosion in Gulf of Kutch MNP



Three dolphins and two sea turtles were killed in the Gulf of Kutch Marine National Park when a contractor used dynamite to extract the wreckage of a ship that sank 30 years ago near the Jamnagar coast.

The contractor, had reportedly been given the job of removing the wreckage a while ago but he had not obtained the necessary permissions for dynamiting in the park. A case has now been filed against him.

Source: 'Dolphins, sea turtles killed in dynamite explosion,' *The Times of India*, 12/02/09.

Contact: **Conservator of Forests**, Marine National Park, Ganjiwada Nagar, Nagnath Gate Police Choki, Jamnagar – 360001, Gujarat. Tel: 0288-552077. Fax: 0288-555336

### Fire over 300 hectares of Gir

Forest fires in early February gutted about 300 hectares of grassland in the Mitiala range of the Gir forest. The affected area is said to be home to about 18 lions. A team of around 1,000 forest officials, however, soon brought the fire under control, and ensured that it did not cause any loss of wildlife.

It has been suggested that the fire may have been caused by the Forest Department (FD) itself, in a routine exercise gone out of control – the FD regularly burns off the excess grass in the region during this time of the year.

The FD however maintains that it was either an accidental fire, or someone lit it to camouflage the sale of *saniyar* grass, a variety found in abundance in the region. *Saniyar* is used for wildlife and livestock fodder. The FD is currently investigating the incident.

Source: '300 hectares of Gir razed in fire,' *The Times of India*, 19/02/09.

Contact: **CF (Wildlife)** Junagadh, Sardar Bag, Junagadh, Gujarat. Tel: 0285 - 631678/630051. Fax: 631211. Email: [cfwildlife\\_ad1@sancharnet.in](mailto:cfwildlife_ad1@sancharnet.in)

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

## HARYANA

### Area within five km radius of Sultanpur NP proposed as Eco-Sensitive Zone

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has issued a draft notification proposing the declaration of an area within a five km radius of the Sultanpur National Park as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ).

The notification that was issued on January 29, 2009 lists the villages that will be included in the ESA. It also says that the state

government will prepare a Zonal Master Plan within a year of the final notification and lists out the activities that will either be restricted or regulated in the ESZ.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol XII, No. 5)

Source: Draft notification issued by the MoEF on 29/01/09.

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**Divisional Inspector, Wildlife**, Sultanpur National Park, Dist. Gurgaon. Tel: 0124 - 26322057  
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## HIMACHAL PRADESH

### Over one lakh birds counted in Pong Dam WLS this season

Over one lakh migratory birds of 95 species were counted in the Pong Dam wetland area in the first week of February. The count was carried out by 23 teams of 130 persons from the Forest Department, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Himalayan Environment Preservation Society and the Pong Birding Society.

Source: 'Over 1 lakh migratory birds sighted at Pong,' *The Tribune*, 08/02/09.

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

### Forest official caught poaching in Pong Dam WLS; now absconding

Beat officer Des Raj was caught red-handed in February while poaching in the waters of the Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary. Two Wildlife Department personnel arrested Raj after they found him in the Haripur area, near Nagrota Surian, with two dead bar headed geese and a 0.12 bore gun that he used for killing the birds.

He went absconding soon after, albeit on an 'official leave.' The officer is to be

produced in court as soon as he is caught. The Conservator, Wildlife, Dharamsala, said that a case under the Wildlife Act has been registered against the beat officer. He added action against the accused official is still pending because the wildlife department had not yet sent in any official information on the case.

The post-mortem examination of the dead birds has established that the birds were killed by gun shots; though it remains to be seen whether the birds were killed by the same gun found on the beat officer.

Source: 'Forest official held for poaching,' *The Tribune*, 09/02/09

Lalit Mohan, 'Poaching Case/Wildlife official goes absconding,' *The Tribune*, 10/02/09.

## Protests against Dhauladhar WLS

Hundreds of farmers from the Baijnath and surrounding areas organised a protest rally in February to oppose the recent notification of the 944 sq. kms. Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary. A charter of demands has also been submitted to the state Chief Minister and the district administration.

The farmers are worried that they will be barred from entering forest areas adjoining their village and curbs will be imposed on their use of natural resources like firewood.

The protesting farmers said that had in the past submitted a number of memoranda to the government against the creation of the sanctuary. They have now threatened to intensify their agitation in case the notification is not withdrawn.

Source: 'Baijnath farmers rally against wildlife sanctuary,' *The Tribune*, 11/02/09.

Contact: **CWLW**, Talland, Shimla – 171001. Tel: 0177-2624193. Email: [Vtandy@gmail.com](mailto:Vtandy@gmail.com)

## JAMMU & KASHMIR

### State submits annual plan under Project Snow Leopard

The Jammu & Kashmir Department of Wildlife Protection has sent its annual plan of operation

under Project Snow Leopard to the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests. This comes almost immediately after the Centre's announcement of initiating Project Snow Leopard (see National News from India), The 2008–09 works proposal for the Leh Wildlife Division has been estimated at Rs 2.42 crore.

The plan includes proposals for the construction of an office-cum-nature interpretation centre at Leh; staff-training and the recruitment of additional personnel; and the printing of publicity material. In addition, the project would also require the purchase of vehicles and cranes, still and video cameras, high-altitude equipment, and communication equipment like walky-talkies.

The Snow Leopard Project proposes to support alternative income generation activities for the local community. An effort will be made to develop an intelligence network for wildlife protection with the help of local communities. Local military establishments and labour camps in wildlife areas will be engaged to curb hunting and poaching. Alpine pasture/rangeland management strategies to focus research and experimental studies in order to understand pastoral production, optimal stocking densities and pasture improvement are also being planned.

Further, the Department will also support scientifically well-designed research projects by reputed governmental and non-governmental research institutions. Economic and other service benefits will be extended to staff working in the project areas.

The Department is currently looking for land to house the Project.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, No. 3 and Vol XII, No. 5)

Source: 'Wildlife Dept plan awaits Forest Ministry's approval,' *The Tribune*, 01/02/09.

**Contact:** CWLW, Government of Jammu & Kashmir, Tourist Reception Centre (TRC), Srinagar – 190001. Tel: 0191-544575, 0194-452469/ 476261. Fax: 0191-544575, 0194-4524690

## **Radio collar for Asiatic black bear in Dachigam NP**

The Wildlife wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department has recently collared an Asiatic black bear in the Dachigam National Park as part of an ongoing research project to understand reasons for the escalating human-bear conflict here. It is hoped that this will also help study and understand the home range of the bears, their seasonal movements, habitat use, breeding and behaviour.

The bear that was collared is a six year old animal that is in semi-captivity at the Animal Rescue Centre in Dachigam.

Source: 'Wildlife rangers in Kashmir tackle man-animal conflict' *The Economic Times*, 05/01/09

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Dachigam NP, J&K State Tourist Reception Centre Srinagar – 190001. Tel: 0194-2492627

## **Eight lakh migratory birds visit Kashmir**

Nearly eight lakh migratory birds were counted in the three famous waterfowl habitats of Haigam, Hokersar and Shalibugh in Kashmir this season.

The increase has been attributed to the Forest Department's efforts to improve water level at the wetlands, to intensify patrolling and to make available artificial feed for the birds.

Over four lakh migratory birds were seen at Haigam in Sopore. This is more than double the number of two lakh birds that were counted here during the last season.

Source: 'Eight lakh migratory birds visit Kashmir, creating record,' *The Economic Times*, 22/01/09.

## **KARNATAKA**

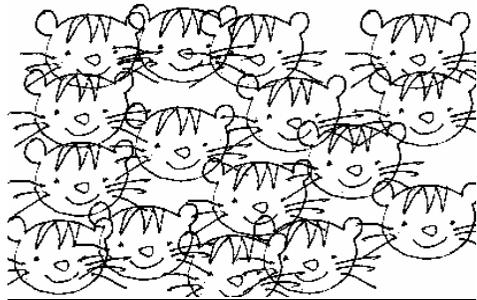
### **Study: Tiger population in Karnataka healthy and stable**

A recent study conducted in Karnataka has shown that the tiger population here is both healthy and stable. Entitled 'Distribution and dynamics of tiger and prey populations in Karnataka,' the study was carried out by the

Wildlife Conservation Society and Centre for Wildlife Studies.

Covering an area of over 22,000 sq km, the study counted about 200 adult and juvenile tigers in the Malenad – Mysore Tiger Landscape (MRTL). A tiger abundance index was derived which shows there are about 200 adult/juvenile tigers in the MRTL region. Intensive monitoring in prime tiger habitats indicated a tiger density ranging from 11 – 15 adults per 100 sq km in the Nagarahole and Bandipur NP's; and 2 – 3 tigers per 100 sq km in Bhadra TR. Densities of large ungulate prey were also high: ranging between 17 and 25 animals per sq km in Bandipur and 23 and 42 animals per sq km in Nagarahole.

The study found that there was a rebound of prey densities in the Bhadra region after villages on the forest fringes were relocated a few years ago and that the combined prey density has increased from 12 per sq km (prior to relocation in 2000) to 23 animals per sq km in 2007.



Source: 'Tigers shining in Karnataka: Study,' *The Times of India*, 22/01/09.

Contact: **Dr K Ullas Karanth**, Wildlife Conservation Society, India Programme, 403 Seebo Apts, 26/2 Aga Abbas Ali Road, Bangalore - 560042, Karnataka. Tel: 080-5591747 / 5591990. Email: ukaranth@vsnl.com

### **Elephants, leopard found in areas adjoining Bannerghatta NP**

In early February, a herd of seven wild elephants from Bannerghatta National Park was found in the adjoining Electronic City and the village of Hulimangala. A village resident was injured when one of the elephants flung him in

the air. Forest officials later used crackers to drive the elephants back into the forests.

In another incident, a leopard was spotted in front of the National Law School of India University campus at Nagarbhavi. Cages were placed near NLSIU to trap the leopard and the police and FD officials used megaphones to alert students and residents in the area not to venture out till daybreak.

Source: 'Elephants, leopard spread panic,' *The Hindu*, 15/02/09.

Contact: **CF**, Bannerghatta NP, Bannerghatta, Dist. Bangalore – 560083, Karnataka. Tel: 080-28428540(O), 28428572(R). Fax: 28428540

## **KERALA**

### **Proposal for relocation of human settlements from Wayanad WLS**

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has received a project proposal for 'Voluntary Relocation of Human Settlements in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary from the Kerala State Government. 983 families (593 tribal and 390 non-tribal families) from the sanctuary are to be relocated at a cost of Rs. 85 crores as part of the proposal.

The MoEF is reported to have requested the Government of Kerala to modify/recast the proposal in tune with the revised guidelines of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme - 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats' for further consideration of the proposal subject to the availability of funds and fulfillment of necessary procedural requirements. The response from the State Government is awaited.

This information was presented recently in the Lok Sabha by the Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Mr. S Regupathy in a reply to a written question in the matter.

Source: 'Voluntary Relocation of Human Settlements in Wayanad wildlife sanctuary', Press Release, Govt. of India, 25/02/09.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Wayanad Wildlife Division, P.O. Sulthan Bathery, Wayanad-673 592, Kerala. Tel: 0493-2620454

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

## **MADHYA PRADESH**

### **Two tigresses, one each from Kanha and Bandavgarh TRs, moved to Panna TR**

Two tigresses, one each from the Kanha and Bandavgarh Tiger Reserves (TRs) were moved to Panna TR in early March. This is part of the plan of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department to bring back the big cat to Panna after it has been virtually wiped out from the forests here (See *PA Update* Vol XV, No. 1). The initial plan was to relocate animals only from Bandavgarh. On March 3, a breeding tigress was moved from Bandavgarh's core area and a few days later, a breeding tigress was moved from Kanha's core area, in what is alleged to be a violation of the guidelines and in an apparent hurry to finish the exercise.

Local elected representatives, cutting across party lines protested the move of the animal from Kanha. Locals including villagers, tourist guides and taxi drivers also went on strike to protest the relocation. They questioned the logic of the translocation when resident tigers of Panna had been poached away with impunity and were also worried about the impact on their own business if tigers from Kanha were taken away to other parks.

In a related development eight prominent tiger conservationists of the country jointly released a statement expressing distress about the translocation carried out by the Madhya Pradesh authorities. The statement that was sent to the Prime Minister of India, the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Member Secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Principal Chief Conservators of Forests and Chief Wildlife Wardens of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and the Field Directors of five Tiger Reserves - Bandavgarh, Kanha, Panna, Ranthambhore and Sariska TRs pointed out that the translocation operation was carried out even before the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had completed the latest census report for

Panna; that advice from the NTCA, and IUCN guidelines (which stress the need to identify and eliminate previous causes of decline) were not adhered to; and there had been no reference to any of India's experienced and knowledgeable tiger scientists and experts. An application protesting the non-transparency of the relocation and the breaking of the NTCA guidelines is also said to have been filed before the Jabalpur High Court.

The statement has demanded an immediate high-level enquiry into the disappearance of tigers from Panna TR; the development of a translocation protocol by NTCA, WII and independent tiger experts; an emergency tiger protection plan for the entire country; the creation of state-level tiger steering committees and Tiger Reserve buffer zones in all the tiger bearing states and that during no vehicles or staff should be diverted from the task of protecting wildlife habitats for the upcoming elections, as per the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India.

It has also been reported that the FD is now planning to move a tiger to Panna as well because the lone male that had been found during Wildlife Institute of India's camera trapping in December 2008 had not been sighted for nearly a month. The Chief Wildlife Warden of the State said that the two tigresses would take about a month to adjust to their new environs and if the resident male was not spotted till then, other male tigers would also be brought in.

This move of the FD has also attracted attention and criticism. "We are deeply concerned," the earlier mentioned statement says in the matter, "that there has been absolutely no evidence of any tigers in Panna Tiger Reserve for over a month. The last lone male tiger was sighted in December 2008. If the safety of this single male tiger cannot be secured, then what is the future for any introduced tigresses?"

Source: Jitendra Verma. 'Kanha up in arms against tigress shift', *The Times of India*, 03/03/09  
Email from Belinda Wright dated 08/03/09

'Madhya Pradesh now plans to shift tigers to Panna Reserve', *The Hindu*, 10/03/09.

Tigress airlifted to Panna ignoring experts, guidelines, *The Indian Express*, 10/03/09

Contact: **Belinda Wright** (for the statement by eight experts), Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), S-25 Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110017. Tel: 09811190690. Email: belinda@wpsi-india.org  
**Field Director**, Panna National Park, Panna – 488001, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07732-252135. Fax: 07732-252120  
**Director**, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Mandla - 481661 Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07642-250760(O), 250761(R). Fax: 251266, 250830  
**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

### **Six gharial deaths reported from National Chambal WLS**

Six gharials have perished since December 26 in the MP stretch of the National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary. Of these, two were found dead in February in the Bhind district.

After autopsy reports revealed that most of the gharials had died of some disease, a team of wildlife experts started examining and counting the reptiles at the sanctuary. Samples were sent to Jabalpur and Bareilly and results of the analysis are still awaited.

While 37 reptiles died last year in MP, 76 were found dead on the Uttar Pradesh border. (Also see *PA Update* Vol XIV, No 2)

Source: 'Two more gharials found dead in Chambal sanctuary,' *The Pioneer*, 15/02/09.

Contact: **DFO**, National Chambal WLS, Morena Division, Morena, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07532-226742.  
**CWLW**, MP, Van Bhawan, Tulsi Nagar, Bhopal 462003, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 0755-557371/ 550391.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Deer from Powai park released in Tungareshwar WLS**

About 85 deer from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) Powai park were recently released in the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. The plan for their release had been finalized more than two years ago (see *PA Update* Vol XIV, No 2). The animals were transported to Tungareshwar in batches in special trucks as per the guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The animals were all medically tested and declared fit before their relocation. The animals were kept and fed in an enclosure at Tungareshwar for a few days before being finally released. NGOs had alleged that the deer were being kept illegally and in poor conditions.

In February 2006, the BMC had requested the forest officials to release the deer into Sanjay Gandhi National Park following which, the forest department seized the animals stating that the BMC neither had permission from the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) nor the Wildlife Authority to keep the deer in their custody and display them. Subsequent to the seizure the animals were handed back to the BMC to be kept in the same conditions 'till further instructions'.

Source: 'Finally, Powai deer breathe free', *The Indian Express*, 30/01/09.

### **Two tiger deaths in Tadoba Andhari TR in February**

Two tiger deaths, one in Bhanuskhindi and another in Dewada in Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) were reported in the month of February. The death of the tigress in Bhanuskhindi was, most likely, a case of starvation as the post mortem revealed that the animal's stomach was empty. Its body parts, skin and nails too were intact, ruling out the role of poaching in the death.

Poaching, however, was being suspected in the case of the other tiger death in compartment number 163 in the reserve's Dewada beat. Bones and a tiger skin were

recovered at the spot giving credence to the belief that the animal was indeed poached. Forensic and DNA tests were being done to understand the exact cause of death.

Source: 'Two tigers die in Tadoba, one may be poached', *The Times of India*, 27/02/09  
Contact: **Field Director**, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Project, Mul Road, In front of Sanchiti Chamber, Chandrapur – 442401, Maharashtra. Tel: 07172-51414(O), 56382(R)

### **SC will not interfere in encroachment removal from Sanjay Gandhi NP**

In a significant development, the Supreme Court (SC) recently said that it will not interfere with the judgments passed by the Bombay High Court (HC) on the removal of encroachments in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

The apex court did not grant any stay on the demolitions but allowed the slum-dwellers to approach the statutory authority with their grievances. A bunch of special leave petitions had been filed by groups of slum-dwellers before the SC against the HC directives of 2000. They had objected to the classification of all occupants as being illegal and called for a re-survey of the forest boundary. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, No. 3; and Nos. 47, 45, 43, 41 & 39)

Source: Bombay HC free to decide on national park encroachment: SC, *The Times of India*, 06/03/09  
Contact: **DCF**, SGNP, Borivili (East), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-28860362, 28860389(O), 8862780(R)  
Email: [sgnpb@rediffmail.com](mailto:sgnpb@rediffmail.com)  
**Debi Goenka**, CAT, 6 E-1, Court Chambers, 35 New Marine Lines, Mumbai- 400 020, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-22006116/5/4. Fax: 22006115.  
Email: [debi.cat@gmail.com](mailto:debi.cat@gmail.com)

## **MANIPUR**

### **Fire destroys over 60% of Keibul Lamjao NP; many *Sangai* feared dead**



A huge fire is reported to have destroyed more than 60% of the Keibul Lamjao National Park, the only home of the Brow Antlered Deer or *Sangai*. Many *Sangai* were also reported to have perished in the fire incident that is the first of its kind here since the creation of the national park in 1977.

The fire was first reported on the morning of February 23 by locals. Till evening large portions of the park including the areas of Toya Ching, Kachin Achouba, Chingmei Natal, Khordak Maning, Khordak Echil, Nongmaikhong, Ngakha Pat, Keibul Lamjao Haorang had been destroyed. It has also been pointed out that the fire spread rapidly on account of the fact that work on the firelines by cutting the *phumdis* (floating biomass) had not been properly done by the Forest Department (FD). FD officials said that they were unable to do anything to stop the fire as it was raging out of control and they were ill-equipped to fight it.

The cause of the fire is still not known. Some locals expressed suspicion that the fire was lit by some individuals simultaneously from at least three to four points in the park. Others have also pointed to the possible role of the Assam Rifles (AR) as some of their personnel were seen in the area early in the morning on the day of the fire. Comments from the AR were not available.

Source: 'Several Sangais feared killed in Keibul Lamjao fire', Hueiyen Lanpao, 23/02/09.  
Contact: **Salam Rajesh**, Sagolband Salam, Leikai. PO: Imphal-1, Manipur. Tel: 0385-222395.  
Email: [salamrajesh@rediffmail.com](mailto:salamrajesh@rediffmail.com);  
[salraj\\_imp@yahoo.com](mailto:salraj_imp@yahoo.com);

DCF, Keibul Lamjao NP, Sanjenthong,  
Imphal - 795 001  
**Chief Wildlife Warden** - Manipur,  
Sanjenthong, Imphal - 795001, Manipur.  
Tel: 03852 - 220854 / 285385

## ORISSA

### 1572 crocodiles counted in Bhitarkanika NP

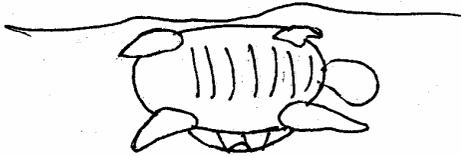
A census conducted in the Bhitarkanika National Park in the month of January has reported a total of 1572 crocodiles here. This is slightly higher than the 1,498 reptiles counted here in the 2007 census.

20 white crocodiles were also reportedly spotted during the census. (Also see *PA Update* Vol XIII, No 2; Vol XII, No 2)

Source: Akshaya Kumar Sahoo, '20 white crocodiles sighted,' *The Asian Age*, 26/01/09.

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

### Huge turtle mortality in Gahirmatha



Over fifteen hundred carcasses of the Olive Ridley sea turtles were reported in early February from the beaches in the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. Foresters buried the dead turtles under the sand after Satabhaya residents complained about the foul odour emanating from the carcasses.

Over 30,000 turtles have died here in the past five years, mangled by trawler propellers or trapped in fishing nets. The Wildlife Society of Orissa (WSO) estimates the turtle mortality rate to be over 10,000 per year in Orissa alone (also see *PA Updates* Vol XIV No 1 and No 59).

Source: Rajesh Behera, 'Gahirmatha turns graveyard for nesting Olive Ridley turtles,' *The Pioneer*, 12/02/09.

Contact: **WSO**, Shantikunj, Link Road, Cuttack – 753012, Orissa. Tel: 0671 – 334625.

Fax: 610980. Email:

[biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in](mailto:biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in)

## RAJASTHAN

### Another tigress shifted to Sariska from Ranthambore

A 2<sup>nd</sup> tigress was airlifted from the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve to Sariska in February, making it the 3<sup>rd</sup> animal to be moved here in this manner. A male and a female have already been translocated here last year as part of an initiative to bring back tigers to Sariska after poaching had wiped them out here.

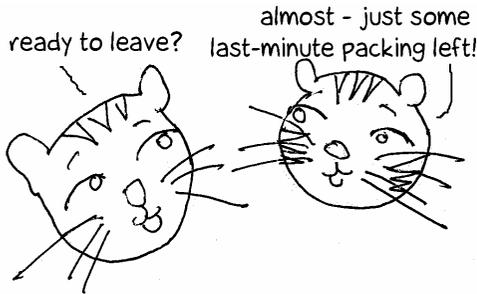
The young tigress, weighing 143 kg and in the age group of two to three-and-a-half years, was tranquilized at Guda in Ranthambore and shifted soon after into a specially made cage. The animal was then moved to Sariska in an Indian Air Force helicopter and was accompanied by Rajasthan's Chief Wildlife Warden R.N. Mehrotra, experts from the Wildlife Institute of India, the Field Director of Ranthambore NP, and member of the Rajasthan Wildlife Advisory Board, Mr. Rajpal Singh.

The tigress was released in the specially made enclosure and would be let out into the wild once it gets acclimatised to the new environment. The authorities plan to introduce two more tigers to Sariska as part of the present experiment, being carried out under the supervision of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) after a joint protocol was signed between the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the WII and the Rajasthan Forest Department.

Concerns have, however, been expressed over the fact that the translocation project is not following the terms of the protocol. The NTCA had, for instance, said that no animals could be moved from the core area of the Ranthambore TR and that only a 'young dispersing tigress who has not established her territory' could be translocated from here (see *PA Update* Vol XV, No. 1 and Vol XIV, No 5). The latest translocation, it has been pointed out,

was of a tigress that was well established in the Lahpur area of the park.

Forest officials, have said in response that the protocols are being followed and the particular tigress used to frequently visit the adjoining Sawai Man Singh Sanctuary.



Source: Sunny Sebastian. 'Another tigress for Sariska', *The Hindu*, 26/02/09

Contact: **Director**, Sariska Tiger Reserve, Sariska, Alwar – 301022, Rajasthan. Tel: 0144-241333 (O)

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

### **Planning Commission releases Rs. 56 crore for water pipeline for Keoladeo NP**

The Planning Commission is reported to have recently released a sum of Rs. 56 crore to lay a 17 km long pipeline linking the monsoon fed Govardhan drain to the Keoladeo National Park. The work will be carried out by the Rajasthan Irrigation Department and is expected to take 17 months to be completed.

Between July and August, the peak monsoon period, the Govardhan flood drain gets over 2000 million cubic feet (mcft) of water, whereas the Keoladeo NP requires only around 550 mcft of water. It is hoped that this project, once completed will be a permanent solution to the water crisis in the park (see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, Nos. 5 & 1, Vol XIII, Nos. 6 & 1 and Nos. 54, 53, 50, 43, 40 & 39).

Over 35,000 wetland birds were counted in the park in January 2009, thanks mainly to a good monsoon in 2008. The figure for the preceding season was only 5000 birds.

Source: Neha Sinha. 'Pipeline plan to bring water, new life to Keoladeo', *The Indian Express*, 25/02/09.

Contact: **Director, Keoladeo Ghana NP**, Forest Department, Bharatpur- 321 001 Rajasthan. Tel: 05644-22777(O), 22824(R). Fax: 05644-22864

### **ONGC plans for oil exploration in Desert NP hits a roadblock**

ONGC's plans for oil exploration in the Desert National Park have hit a road block. The government has decided to conduct a detailed environmental impact study before granting approval to the project.

Following a site inspection, the National Board of Wildlife noted that the exploration techniques could negatively impact the Park's vegetation. In a subsequent meeting, the Board resolved to conduct a detailed scientific study determining the possible impact of the survey on the wildlife in and around park.

The exploration was to be carried out in three zones spread over an area of 3162 sq kms of Desert National Park. The northern portion (765 sq. kms) was to be explored by Focus Energy Limited, the middle portion (400 sq. kms) by ONGC and Southern portion by the Italian firm ENI.

Source: 'ONGC plans for oil exploration in Rajasthan hits a roadblock,' *The Hindu*, 11/02/09.

**CWLW** Government of Rajasthan, Van Bhavan, Vaniki Path, JAIPUR - 302 005. Tel: 0141-2380832 / 2540531. Fax: 2380496/ 2380832

## **UTTARAKHAND**

### **State-of-the art technology to fight fires in Mussoorie Forest Division**

Incidents of forest fires in the Mussoorie Forest Division have reportedly dropped by 50% thanks to the installation of a state-of-the art fire-fighting system. The system — including a mobile van equipped with digital devices to record temperature, rainfall and relative

humidity — is managed entirely by the Forest Department (FD) staff.

The system works by receiving periodic updates of weather conditions in the forest areas from 12 crew and 26 sub-crew stations. These reports are collected by the master control room located at Malsi Deer Park which then uses the data to prepare a fire danger index for the next 24 hours. The control room also circulates a daily weather-bulletin to the 38 stations in order to preempt any outbreak of fire. A mobile van fitted with modern communication equipment and manned by forest personnel trained in fire-fighting is always on call.

The Mussoorie Forest Division covers almost 53,000 hectare of forest land under its jurisdiction. Taking cue from the initiative, the State FD has instructed all divisions to install similar systems in their areas as well.

Source: Prithviraj Singh, 'Mussoorie blazes a trail in fighting forest fires with new mechanism,' *The Pioneer*, 26/01/09.

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

### **Electric fences to prevent Rajaji NP elephants from entering villages**

In a bid to prevent elephants of the Rajaji National Park from entering and damaging rural habitats, the Chief Wildlife Warden of Uttarakhand has ordered installation of electric fences along the forest boundaries of Katarpur, Ajeetpur and Missarpur villages in Hardwar district.

The order follows an incident in mid-January, when an elephant killed one person and seriously injured three people in Katarpur village. Many villages in the Hardwar and Rishikesh region are affected when pachyderms raid crops and injure people who try to chase them away. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, No 4; Vol XIII, No 5)

Source: 'Electric fences along forest boundaries,' *The Hindu*, 21/01/09.

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

### **Rapid Action Team to protect tigers in Corbett NP**

A Rapid Action Team (RAT) comprising rangers, ex-army personnel and volunteers has been constituted for the protection of wildlife in the Corbett National Park. The RAT has, reportedly, been modeled on a similar force raised in the South Luangwa National Park in Zambia where poaching had reached alarming proportions five years back.

Corbett has seen a number of cases of poaching in the recent past and it is hoped that the RAT will help deal with this.

It has been suggested that RAT like squads could be raised in other reserves of the country, such as the Dudhwa National Park (Uttar Pradesh), Gir (Gujarat) and the Kaziranga National Park (Assam).

Source: 'Tapas Chakraborty. 'RAT to save big cats', *The Telegraph*, 26/01/09

Contact: **Field Director**, Corbett Tiger Reserve, Ramnagar –244715, Nainital, Uttarakhand. Tel: 05947 – 285489

### **'Best Maintained Tourist Friendly Park' award for Corbett NP for 2007-08**

The Corbett National Park was recently given the 'Best Maintained and Tourist Friendly Park' award for 2007-08. The award by the Union Tourism Ministry was given away on February 24, 2009 by the Union Home Minister, Mr. P Chidambaram and was accepted by Mr. Rajiv Bhartari who was Director, Corbett National Park for the period 2005-2008.

Source: Email from Krishnendu Bose dated 27/02/09.

## **WEST BENGAL**

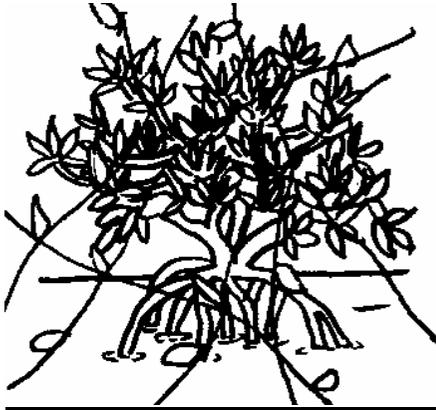
### **Invasive species threat to Sunderbans mangroves**

A study conducted by the Lead Institute, Sunderban Biosphere Reserve has identified four invasive plant species that are posing a serious threat to the Sunderban mangroves. These are *Acacia auriculiformis* (sonajhuri),

*Prosopis juliflora* (kabuli keekar), *Grangea maderaspatana* and *Mikania micrantha*.

Another study by the Botanical Survey of India has pointed out that the rapid spread of *Prosopis juliflora* in Bhagabatpur area seems a particularly alarming threat to Lothian Island, one of the wildlife sanctuaries in the Sunderbans. It has been seen that mangrove seedlings that are brought to the river banks by tidal currents are not able to establish themselves because of *Prosopis juliflora*. This has been reflected in the rapid erosion of the river banks in Bhagabatpur.

Another species *Grangea maderaspatana*, native to Africa, has been occupying a large area of Lothian Island. *Mikania micrantha*, a native species of Central and South America, was introduced in India after World War II to camouflage airfields. This species — known as a mile-a-minute weed has been found to be growing rapidly across the sheltered areas of Bhagabatpur.



Source: Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay. 'Alien Invasion In Sunderbans', *The Times of India*, 23/0209

Contact: **Director**, Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve, Bikash Bhavan, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto:wildlife@cal.vsnl.net.in)

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### Revival of National Coral Reef Research Institute mooted

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has been asked to revive the National Coral Reef Research Institute (NCRRI) in the Andaman Nicobar Islands; and also to set up four regional research institutes to monitor coral reefs in other parts of the country.

The recommendation were made at the conclusion of a three-day meeting of senior wildlife, forest officials and marine scientists held in Tuticorin recently.

The NCRRI was originally set up in 2001 under the Zoological Survey of India in order to study and preserve the nation's coral reefs. However, the institute could not function effectively due to lack of marine scientists and other administrative reasons.

Source: C. Jaishankar, 'Revival of National Coral Reef Research Institute mooted,' [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 01/01/2009

### No PA vehicles or staff for election duty

The Election Commission of India has in a communication sent on March 9, 2009 to Chief Secretaries and Chief Electoral Officers of all States and Union Territories of the country, said that vehicles or staff of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks cannot be requisitioned for election duty.

These instructions were first issued in January 1998 and were repeated during the General Elections in 1999 and elections to certain legislative assemblies in the year 2000. The letter also said that the instructions are to be treated as Standing Instructions of the Commission and will apply to all future elections as well.

Source: Letter from the Election Commission No. 437/6/2001-PLN-III, 09/03/09

## Major fires in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

There have been reports of a number of fires, particularly in the month of February across the landscape of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve that includes the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu, the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala. Most of the fires have been reported from the Kerala – Tamil Nadu - Karnataka tri-junction.

The problem has been compounded by the fact that the area experienced less than normal rain in the winter months. Dry bamboo groves, after blooming recently in a long time and dry undergrowth have also played an important contributory role.

**Kerala:** In a fire reported in the month of February, 75 hectares of grassland were burnt completely at the Chembra peak and on the Manikkunnumala hills in the South Wayanad Forest Division. Small fires were also reported at Moolaholle on the Kerala-Karnataka border.

Kerala forest officials said that they have spent Rs. 23 lakhs and taken the help of forest protection committees to contain the fires. As many as 100 tribal watchers have been appointed to check wild fires and 110 km of fire lines were created in vulnerable areas on the borders with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The Sulthan Bathery block panchayat too has cut fire lines under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP). Similarly Rs. 25 lakhs have been spent for the creation of fire lines in the South Wayanad Forest Division.

A single instance of fire was also reported from the Ervikulam National Park.

**Karnataka:** At least 900 acres of forest were burnt completely in Nagarhole National Park, also in February. The fire was noticed at Metikuppe, Veerahosannahalli Muttigodu, Agarasasuli and parts of Antharasanthe in Mysore district and the adjoining Kodagu district. Forest officials said that a series of temporary measures had been taken to deal with the fires. Temporary recruitments had been made and more than 350 forest watchers had been appointed to keep a watch on the outbreak of fire in what is being considered one of the worst and longest dry spell facing Bandipur and Nagarhole.

Forest watchers have also been appointed in all the 12 ranges in Bandipur. The bigger divisions were given 30 watchers while 25 watchers each were assigned to the smaller ones.

Source: Roy Mathew. 'Forest fires glow in Nilgiri Biosphere area', *The Hindu*, 18/02/09  
EM Manoj. 'Forests turn a tinderbox in biosphere', *The Hindu*, 19/02/09  
R Krishna Kumar. 'Major forest fire in Nagarhole National Park', *The Hindu*, 19/02/09

## Special Tiger Protection Force in the offing

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) have formulated a proposal for the creation of a Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) under the aegis of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The force will be trained by Central Paramilitary Forces and recruited by local police familiar with difficult jungle terrain.

Each company of the STPF will be made up of 112 personnel, including a Deputy Superintendent of Police, three sub-inspectors, six head constables and 30 constables, divided into three platoons. Those recruited as members of the force will all be below 40 years of age.

The first companies of the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) are to be posted at Corbett TR (Uttarakhand), Ranthambhor TR (Rajasthan) and Dudhwa TR (Uttar Pradesh) with a total of 13 companies posted in 13 of the most "sensitive" tiger reserves in India.

Meanwhile letters have been sent to Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh governments to fill up the vacant posts with local police immediately, pending the raising, training and deployment of the STPF.

Source: Neha Sinha. 'Special force to protect tigers in the offing', *The Indian Express*, 16/02/09

## Pakshi Shree award for Dr. Ramana Athreya

Dr. Ramana Athreya, credited with the discovery of the first new bird species, *Bugun*

*liocichla*, in mainland India in the last 55 years was conferred the 'Pakshi Shree Award' during the 12<sup>th</sup> Birding Fair held recently in Jaipur.

Dr. Athreya, who is an astronomer by profession first spotted the bird in 1995 in the Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. It was, however, only a decade later that it was identified as a new species and named after the Bugun community as it was discovered in their community forest area.

Dr. Athreya has also taken up the work of the long term conservation of the area by launching the Eaglenest Biodiversity Project in 2003. An important component of the project is an eco-tourism initiative which now sees nearly 250 tourists and revenue generation of Rs. 50 lakhs annually.

Source: Sunny Sebastian. Many bird species waiting to be identified in eastern Himalayas, *The Hindu*, 11/02/09

Contact: Dr. **Ramana Athreya**. Kaati Trust, NCRA, Pune University Campus, Ganeshkhind, Pune - 411007, Maharashtra. Email: [rathreya@ncra.tifr.res.in](mailto:rathreya@ncra.tifr.res.in); [ramana.athreya@gmail.com](mailto:ramana.athreya@gmail.com)

### **Delhi High Court comes down heavily on MoEF and the NEAA**

The Delhi High Court has in its order dated 11.2.2009 come down heavily on the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) for not fully constituting the National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA) despite clear directions from the court more than three years back. The High Court was also critical of the manner of functioning of the NEAA which, in its 11 years of existence has dismissed all appeals filed before it. The Court observed that the NEAA in its present state was neither an effective nor an independent mechanism for redressing the grievance of the public in relation to the environment clearances granted by State or Central Government. The High Court also imposed a fine of Rs 20,000 on the MoEF in the matter.

The NEAA is established through an Act of Parliament (The National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997) and provides a forum to challenge the decision of the MoEF

granting environment clearance to various projects. A five member body, it consists of a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson and three technical member. At present there is no Chairperson, or Vice Chairperson but there are three 'technical members' viz. J.C Kala (former Director General of Forests), Kushalendar Prasad (former Principal Conservator of Forests, UP) and Dr I.V Mannivanan (Former Secretary to the Government of Tamil Nadu). The post of chairperson has been lying vacant for more than eight years and that of vice chairperson for the last three years.

The NEAA at present is hearing a number of appeals against various projects that includes three dams in Uttarakhand (Kothlibhel Projects), and a thermal power plant by Reliance Energy in Maharashtra. Except one case concerning the Polavaram dam project in Andhra Pradesh, it has dismissed every single appeal in the last eleven years of its existence.

The High Court had now directed the MoEF to appoint the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson within twelve weeks and ensure that while appointing technical members only people with technical expertise were chosen. The full judgement of the HC can be seen at <http://www.ercindia.org/node/197>

Source: Email posting by LIFE dated 14/02/09

Contact: **Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE)**, C-86, Lower Ground Floor, East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065. Telefax- 011-46570551-52. Email: [lifedelhi@gmail.com](mailto:lifedelhi@gmail.com)

### **Workshop held on Social dimensions of Marine Protected Area implementation in India**

A national workshop on 'Social dimensions of Marine Protected Area implementation in India: Do fishing communities benefit?' was held in Chennai on January 21 & 22, 2009. It was organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and was attended by representatives of artisanal and small-scale fishworker organizations, organizations in support of fishworkers, environmental groups, and the scientific community from around the country.

Case studies were presented from the

Gulf of Mannar National Park, Tamil Nadu; the Gahirmatha (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, Orissa; the Gulf of Kutch Marine National Park and Sanctuary, Gujarat; the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, West Bengal; and the proposed Malvan (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra.

A statement released at the end of the workshop called for the Integration of fundamental principles of participation, environmental justice, social justice, and human rights into the implementation of marine and coastal protected areas; the need to address threats to coastal and marine ecosystems from non-fishery sources; enforcement of the marine fishing regulation act in all the states and union territories; adoption of legislation to conserve and manage living resources of India Exclusive Economic Zone and adoption of an integrated approach for the management of coastal and marine living resources.

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### **70 birds in Chilika satellite tagged for study on Avian Influenza**

A new international study of migratory birds and their role in the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 has been initiated at the Chilika Lake. A team of international scientists captured, sampled, and marked 70 waterbirds with satellite tags here in December. The birds will be tracked over the coming months to understand whether relationships exist between the locations of these marked birds and HPAI H5N1 outbreaks along the birds' migratory pathways.

This strain of avian influenza has caused deaths in domestic poultry in India, and in domestic poultry, wild birds, and people in many other countries in Asia, Africa and Europe since 2003.

Additional research as part of the project is being conducted in southern India at the Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary and at wetlands near Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. Species that researchers have marked include

common teal *Anas crecca*, northern pintail *Anas acuta*, northern shoveler *Anas clypeata*, and bar-headed goose *Anser indicus*, all species that have been afflicted with HPAI H5N1 in the recent past.

The study in India is part of a global program to not only better understand the movement of avian influenza viruses and other diseases in the Central Asian Flyway, but also to improve the understanding of the ecological habits of waterbirds internationally, as well as the interactions among wild and domestic birds.

It is being conducted by the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and is the first of its kind in India. The other partners collaborating in the study include the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, Indian Ministry of Agriculture, the Bombay Natural History Society, Wetlands International, United States Geological Survey, the United Nations (FAO)-India and EMPRES-Wildlife Unit based at UN-FAO headquarters in Rome. In Orissa the collaborating organizations include the State Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department, the Chilika Development Authority, the Directorate of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, while in Tamil Nadu, these include the State Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department, and the Directorate of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS), on behalf of the partnership, has a website where people can follow the daily movements of the satellite-tagged birds, including maps in Google Earth. It is <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2140>

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## India launches Project Snow Leopard

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has launched Project Snow Leopard in the five snow leopard range states: Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. The project will be executed in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Mysore based Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF)

The snow leopard has been included in the list of species under the Recovery Programme to be funded through the umbrella scheme for the integrated development of wildlife habitats.

The project will be treated at par with other flagship programs like Project Tiger and Project Elephant. An important dimension of the initiative is the acceptance that in snow leopard country wildlife presence overlaps in a major way with human use and conservation will be successful only if local communities are made partners in the effort.

Source: 'India launches project to save endangered snow leopards,' *The Economic Times*, 22/01/09.

Contact: **Dr. Yashveer Bhatnagar**, NCF 3076/5, IV Cross, Gokulam Park, Mysore – 570002, Karnataka. Tel: 0821-2515 601. Fax: 2513 822. Email: yash@ncf-india.org

## WCCB launches website

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) recently launched its website, [www.wccb.gov.in](http://www.wccb.gov.in)

Apart from encouraging greater participation in checking wildlife crime, the website also aims at increasing awareness among law enforcers, developing links with all WCCB stakeholders and at encouraging international tourists to reduce the demand for wildlife products. The portal also seeks to generate greater awareness about banned wildlife products, purchase of which can lead to imprisonment.

Source: 'Website to disseminate info related to wildlife crime,' *The Times of India*, 11/02/09.

## SOUTH ASIA

### NEPAL

#### 14 radio-tagged gharials released in River Rapti

14 gharials fitted with radio tags were recently released into the Rapti River in Nepal in an attempt to identify the reasons for the alarming decline in population of this critically endangered animal. The tagging, carried out by Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in collaboration with WWF-Nepal and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, is also intended to study the movement pattern of the gharials, to assess its survival rate and find out about its preferred habitat in Nepal.

The reptiles will be monitored by Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology by a team from Chitwan National Park. Between 1981-2008, 691 gharials were released in the Narayani, Rapti, Karnali, Babai, Koshi and Kali Gandaki rivers but numbers continue to dwindle. A 2008 survey found just 81 individuals in the various rivers of Nepal. (Also see Madhya Pradesh above for continued gharial mortality in India)

Source: 'Radio tagging attempt to save critically endangered crocodile', <http://www.enr.com/wildlife/article/39313>, 13/02/09

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

#### Ninth COP meeting to Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species held

The Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) took place between 1 - 5 December 2008, in Rome, Italy. Participants say that the meeting covered important ground to promote the conservation of migratory species.

As the Convention covers all migratory species of wild animals, resolutions passed covered several groups of animals, in addition to migratory birds. The Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by are now available on

[http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/COP9\\_Pr\\_e\\_final\\_res\\_rec\\_en.htm](http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/COP9_Pr_e_final_res_rec_en.htm)

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## OPPORTUNITIES

### Summer internship in Forest Canopy Research

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) has announced Summer Internships in Forest Canopy Research.

ATREE has two ongoing projects in the forest canopies of Western Ghats in the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve supported by Dept. of Science and Technology. The internships offer an unique opportunity for students where they will be trained on single rope access technique and the sampling protocol. Part of this work could be presented in The 5th International Canopy Conference that will be organized by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in Bangalore, from the 25th to 31st of October 2009.

(See announcement in Upcoming section)

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## UPCOMING

### Symposium on Decentralization, Power and Tenure Rights of Forest-Dependent People

An international symposium on 'Decentralisation, Power and Tenure Rights of Forest-Dependent People' is being held in Gujarat on October 27 & 28, 2009. It is being organized by the Wageningen University, the Netherlands and the Sadguru Foundation

The topics that will be covered during the symposium are decentralization policies and local forest institutions; power and political position of forest-dependent indigenous peoples, pastoralists and tribals and legislative recognition of forest tenure rights.

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**Harnath Jagawat**, NM Sadguru Water and Development Foundation, PB No. 71, Dahod – 389151, Gujarat. Tel: 02673-238601/2. Fax: 238604. Email: [nmsadguru@yahoo.com](mailto:nmsadguru@yahoo.com) Web: [www.nmsadguru.org](http://www.nmsadguru.org)

### International Workshop on Preserving Mangrove Ecosystem Services

An International Workshop on Community Participation in Preserving Mangrove Ecosystem Services is being organized from June 4 to 6, 2009 by the Coastal Community Resource Centre in partnership with the Indian Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the KIIT University, Bhubaneswar. The workshop is being supported by the Bhubaneswar based Sandhan Foundation and will be held in Gupti Village of Bhitarkanika.

Contact: **Dr. Bijay K. Nanda**, Sandhan Foundation, K-7/141, Kalinga Nagar, Ghatikia-751003, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, Telefax: 0674-2360699 / 09938371960. Email: [bknanda@sify.com](mailto:bknanda@sify.com); [ccrc@sandhanfoundation.info](mailto:ccrc@sandhanfoundation.info) Web: [www.sandhanfoundation.info](http://www.sandhanfoundation.info)

## **CSE announces one-month course on environmental management**

The New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), has announced a month-long course on environment management in India. The course will be conducted by CSE's education and training unit – the Anil Agarwal Green Centre (AAGC) – and has been titled 'Agenda for survival: A certificate course on the policies and practices of environmental management in India'. It will be conducted at the AAGC's New Delhi campus from June 1-30, 2009.

The topics that will be covered in the course include an overview of India's environment; the environmental movement in India; poverty and the biomass economy; ecological rights and natural resource management; conservation and conflict: the wildlife management debate in India; urban growth challenges: water and waste management, air pollution and mobility; industrialization, public health and climate change; and global environmental governance

The course fee is Rs 5,000, and the medium of instruction will be English.

Contact: **Sharmila Sinha**, CSE. Tel: 011-29955124, 29951110 or 29956399.  
Email: [sharmila@cseindia.org](mailto:sharmila@cseindia.org) Web: <http://www.cseindia.org/aagc/agenda.asp>

## **World Ocean Conference 2009**

The World Ocean Conference (WOC) 2009 is being held from May 11-15, 2009 in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

For more details visit the official website: <http://www.woc2009.org>

## **International Course on 'Education as a tool for species conservation with a focus on the tiger in India'**

An International Course on 'Education as a tool for species conservation with a focus on the tiger in India' will be held from November 2 – 20, 2009 at the Amravati University in Amravati, Maharashtra. The course is being sponsored and conducted by the Satpuda Foundation, Environmental Education and

Conservation Global (EECG), Nature Conservation Society, Amravati, and S. G. B. Amravati University. It will be conducted with the support of and in collaboration with the Maharashtra Wildlife Department.

The course aims to demonstrate how environmental social marketing techniques can be integrated with overall education and communication strategies to produce focused campaigns that are effective and practical tools for solving environmental problems. The course will illustrate educational concepts and processes by demonstrating how they can be employed to assist in meeting the conservation needs of the tiger in India and the habitats on which they depend.

It has been designed primarily for people who develop, administer, or conduct education programs dealing with natural resource conservation, sustainable development issues, or environmental and wildlife concerns. Participants may work for government environmental or resource agencies, ministries of education, zoos, universities, non-government organizations, museums, and parks

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## **5th International Canopy Conference**

The 5th International Canopy Conference is being organized by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in Bangalore, from the 25th to 31st of October 2009. The theme for this conference is 'Forest Canopies: Conservation, Climate Change and Sustainable Use.'

The conference programme will include keynote and plenary speakers on critical topics, invited and contributed scientific symposia, methods workshops, a student symposium, poster sessions, field trips and a film festival.

The goals of the conference are to highlight the relevance of canopy research with respect to current global challenges of climate change, sustainability and biodiversity conservation. It will also see the integration of

canopy science with natural science, social science and information technology to address these challenges. The conference will also provide an opportunity to build networks across continents to facilitate capacity building and

foster collaboration across sites and disciplines within countries and across continents.

Contact: M.B. Prashanth, ATREE (see above).

Email: [secretary@canopy2009.org](mailto:secretary@canopy2009.org)

Web: [www.canopy2009.org](http://www.canopy2009.org)

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