

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XV No. 3

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Protected Area Update

Vol. XV, No. 3, June 2009 (No. 79)

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EDITORIAL

Bees in the Nilgiris

For a long time forests in India were looked upon, primarily, as sources of timber, and everything else was concerned only a 'minor' forest produce. It took a long time to realize that forests give us a lot more – non timber forest products (roots, fruits, bark, flowers, seeds, honey etc.) that were far from minor. Importantly these were renewable resources, were vital for millions of people who depended on these resources and even from an economic point of view their value was huge; much larger perhaps than the timber that could be got only once. NTFPs or non wood forest produce (NWFP) as they are also called, have slowly but surely come centre-stage and that is a certainly welcome step.

A parallel in the field of wildlife studies can perhaps be drawn in the case of smaller fauna - smaller mammals, rodents, insects and the like have long lived in the shadows of the charismatic species like the tiger, elephant or the rhino. Research has been limited or is rarely heard about. Little, therefore, is known about many of these species, the threats they face or the opportunities they offer. The good news, however, is that this is also beginning to change and an illustration of is the conference held recently on Bees, Biodiversity and Livelihoods in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (see news from Tamil Nadu).

The honey bees are something so ubiquitous, we don't actually realize how little we know about them - their ecology, their behaviour, their migration patterns or even the different species that are found in the wild. Most of these aspects have simply never been studied and we are little aware of how seriously obliged we should be to the bees and millions of other similar insects. The pollination services that they provide, for instance, are absolutely invaluable.

The forests of the Nilgiris are an excellent example of this. Bees are crucial for the health and regeneration of the forests,

provide us with invaluable pollination services (pollinating coffee and cardamom for instance) and are intricately linked with the tradition and culture of the many indigenous communities that live here. And then there is honey, the golden liquid that everyone loves to love.

Bee researchers and enthusiasts are extremely excited that the landscape of the Nilgiris is perhaps the only one left in the country where the exotic European bee *Apis mellifera* has not managed to establish itself yet. There is also serious worry that this could change sooner rather than later if we are not careful about introductions of the exotic variety. There are other threats too – loss of forest cover and increased use of pesticides are only two of the most obvious ones and there is some evidence that bee populations and honey production has indeed fallen in the last few decades. The story, we have to realize, is bigger than just the fate of the bees. The implications, too, could be much larger and more serious than we presently understand.

The faster we recognize this, the better it will be.

IN MEMORY

SMITU KOTHARI: One of the most well known figures in movements for social and environmental justice in India passed away suddenly following a massive cardiac arrest on April 23, 2009.

He inspired and initiated a number of path breaking initiatives; was a big advocate and supporter of indigenous knowledge systems and was a founder member of Lokayan in Delhi.

ALAN RODGERS: A biologist and official who worked at the Wildlife Institute for many years passed away after a protracted illness on March 31, 2009.

He was co-author of the voluminous "Planning a Protected Area Network in India" and was the moving spirit behind the MSc Wildlife program at the Wildlife Institute of India. He had also worked extensively in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Four Andaman elephants for Kanha NP

Four elephants of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department that were earlier used for logging activities have been gifted to the Kanha National Park. The elephants are likely to be used for patrolling and tourist activities.

The animals left Port Blair in the first week of May by ship and have been presently housed in the Arignar Anna Zoological Park at Vandalur on the outskirts of Chennai. They will be moved to Kanha shortly; after a period of rest and completion of formalities.

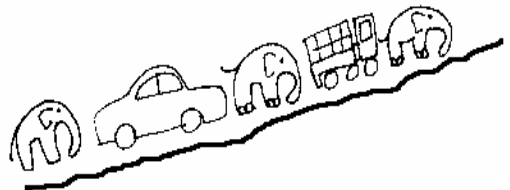
The Andaman islands have an excess of domestic elephants now that logging here has been considerably reduced.

Source: 'Elephants from Andamans transported to Kanha National Park', www.andamanchronicle.com 08/05/09 D Madhavan. 'Andaman jumbos at Vandalur for rest', *The Times of India*, 12/05/09.

Contact: CF, Wildlife, Van Sadan, Forest Department, Port Blair – 744102.

ASSAM

Road proposed through reserved forests, Dehing-Patkai Elephant Reserve



A road (NH 38) to bypass Digboi Town is being laid through the Upper Dehing (East) RF that is an extremely important elephant habitat. Upper Dehing (East) RF, is a part of the Digboi Forest Division and also the Dehing-Patkai Elephant Reserve in Tinsukia district and

hosts what is considered the most viable elephant population at the extreme North-eastern end of India.

The forests here also have habitat for many other critically endangered species such as the White winged wood duck, tiger, Marbled cat, Hoolock gibbon and the Clouded leopard. The Upper Dehing (East & West) RFs hold the largest known population of the white winged wood duck, and also the second largest population of Hoolock gibbon.

The habitat has however been seriously fragmented over the years due a host of activities that includes oil drilling stations, tea gardens, encroachments and coal mining. Human elephant conflict too is severe and the proposed road will only worsen the situation. Researchers have reported that vegetation (about 20-25 feet wide and about six kms long) to mark the route for the bypass within the Upper Dehing (East) RF had already been cleared in violation of both, the Forest (Conservation) Act and the Wildlife Protection Act.

In another development the Assam Oil Division of IOC is reported to have purchased a large tract of land here for construction of an oil terminal in the middle of a corridor used regularly by elephants.

Source: Email from A Christy Williams.
Contact: **A Christy Williams**. Email:
acwill69@yahoo.com

Rise in rhino population in Kaziranga NP

A two day census conducted in the Kaziranga National Park in April has counted 2048 rhinos here. This is considerably more than the figure of 1855 rhinos from the earlier census of 2006. Some of those who participated in the survey have also suggested that the number could be higher than 2048 because grass burning was not perfect this year and therefore visibility was limited.

The highest number of nearly 700 rhinos was spotted in the Baguri range of the park and it has been estimated that mothers and calves now constitute about 39 per cent of the total rhino population in Kaziranga.

The count this year was conducted by members of several conservation groups, local

residents, and journalists apart from forest department personnel including two former park directors.

Source: 'Rhino population rises in Kaziranga',
Assam Tribune, 18/04/09

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

Rs. 646 lakh relocation package for Manas TR

The Central Government is reported to have sanctioned Rs. 646 lakh to relocate people from inside the Manas Tiger Reserve. A total of 912 families have been identified for the relocation.

The reserve authorities have said that each family will be paid Rs. 10 lakhs as part of the relocation package.

Source: 'Delhi move to save tigers', *The Telegraph*, 16/04/09

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

GOA

Mining approved within one km of Bhagwan Mahavir WLS and Mollem NP

The Goa State Government is reported to have approved mining leases within one-km of the boundary of the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park. The leases were granted despite a Supreme Court Ban and the recommendations of a state government task force.

The state government cleared the proposals based on the contentions of the Chief Wildlife Warden of the state that these were old leases of the Portuguese period, and also that the lease operators had ensured enough safeguards to prevent adverse environmental impacts here.

Three firms, the Hede Groups, Achuta V S Velingkar and V M Salgaocar & Brother

Pvt Ltd had asked for the leases to be allowed. The lease sought to be operated by the Hede Group is 650 metres from the boundary of the Mollem NP and requires the felling of 2,128 trees in nine hectares of land. In the case of Velingkar, the lease is located within 400 metres from the sanctuary limits while the third lease is on land 550 metres from the sanctuary boundary. It seeks to mine in 8.627 hectares of area in addition to 49.735 that has already been mined.

A State Government Task Force had recommended that a one-km zone from the boundary of the parks be treated as an ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ-1). The final report on forests submitted by a state level expert committee had also revealed that a total of 1110.81 hectares of forest land has been diverted for mining and 547 hectares more as a buffer for mining activity. It had also recommended that all mines operating in ESZ - 1 or 2 be mandatorily phased out within five years.

Local NGOs, meanwhile have said that they would challenge the granting of the mining leases in the Supreme Court.

Source: 'Nod to mining leases despite apex court ban', *The Times of India*, 03/04/09.

Contact: **Director** (Wildlife & Eco-Tourism) In-Charge Mollem NP, IV Floor, Junta House, Panaji – 403001, Goa. Tel: 0832-229701 (O), 226051(R). Fax: 0832-224747

GUJARAT

Gujarat again opposes plan to relocate lions to Kuno WLS in Madhya Pradesh

The Gujarat State Government has once again opposed the proposal of the Central Government to move a few lions from Gujarat to the Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh (see *PA Updates* 50, 46, 43, 34, 33, 32, 26, 22 & 20).

Arguing before a bench of the Supreme Court, the Gujarat government's advocate said the state's opposition to the plan was based on solid environmental grounds. He said even the wildlife experts feel that lions could not be relocated to experimental

surroundings already inhabited by tigers. He further said that the number of Asiatic lions was increasing in Gujarat whereas the number of tigers in the MP forests was steadily decreasing and also that the poachers being caught in Gir were, in fact, all coming from MP.

The court has asked the Gujarat government to now place the new objections it had raised before the National Board for Wildlife, which would take a fresh decision on the contentious issue.

Source: 'Gujarat opposes Centre's plan to relocate lions', *The Times of India*, 23/04/09

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

Task Force recommendations for lion protection in Gir

The Task Force set up in 2007 after eight lions were poached in Gir (see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, No. 3 and Vol XIII, Nos. 5 & 4) has made a series of recommendations for the protection of the big cats here. Most of these are technological in nature and have been suggested for implementation in three phases

In the first phase 500 GPS enabled hand-held communication devices are to be supplied to protection staff. The VHF network is to be augmented with additional towers and repeaters to provide coverage in the entire Gir area. A sensor grid of 10 automatic sensors has been suggested for testing in field conditions and if found useful a grid of 50 automated sensors is to be operationalised. Long range night vision equipment is also to be supplied to mobile patrolling squads and the creation of breeding and exchange protocols for gene pool of lions has also been suggested.

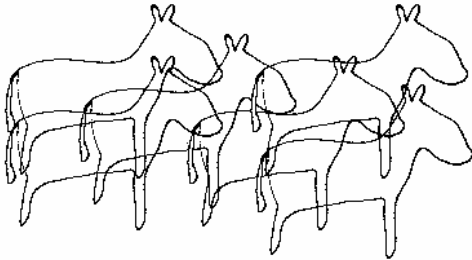
In the second phase, the report suggests that another 500 communication devices should be deployed. A VHF network for voice and data communication should also be augmented to cover the entire lion habitat. Night vision equipment should be provided to cover all patrol vehicles. It has also been proposed to fit 10 animals outside Gir with GPS collars to track and understand their movement patterns.

In the third phase, which has to be completed in five years from 2009, the VHF network should be replaced by a 3G-compliant broad bandwidth wireless network to enable image transmission. GIS and camera interface on hand-held devices and GIS application availability on the move even within the forest area should be available.

The first phase would be devoted to Gir, the second to rest of the lion habitat in Brihad Gir and the third to upgrade communication network technology.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Bell the big cat', *The Times of India*, 13/05/09.

Increase in wild ass population in Gujarat



A two day Wild ass census conducted in April has revealed that the population of the animal in the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat has increased by about 10%. The population in the last census of 2005 had been put at 3860 while the lowest it had dipped to was 700 about a decade ago.

The rise in the population can also be gauged from the fact that a few groups have been spotted in farms surrounding Nal Sarovar and some even as far as the Great Rann of Kutch. While 50% of the asses were found in the Rann, the rest were reported from the fringe areas. The main reason being suggested for this is the changing habitat. Several groups were sighted on the southern fringes because of the Narmada Canal, which provides them water and better food.

There are 107 villages dotting the fringes of the sanctuary. Complaints of crop damage have increased in recent times, but forest officials say that there has been a deadlock because some farms are an encroachment in the sanctuary.

Source: Jumana Shah. 'Rise in Gujarat's wild ass population', *DNA*, 13/04/09.

Contact: **Asst. Conservator of Forests**
/Sanctuary Superintendent,
Dhrangadhra Wild Ass Sanctuary,
Dhrangadhra, Dist. Surendranagar –
363310, Gujarat. Tel/Fax: 02754-23716

SC allows removal of flowered dead bamboo from Purna WLS

The Supreme court has allowed the Gujarat State Forest Department (FD) to remove flowered dead bamboo from the Purna Wildlife Sanctuary. The State accepted the conditions laid down by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) and that was followed by the nod of the apex court.

The conditions the CEC laid down are as follows:

- i) the removal and use of the dead bamboo should be done strictly in accordance with the provisions of Section 29 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972;
- ii) the gregariously flowered dead bamboo should be felled and removed from the sanctuary through the Eco-development Committees under the strict supervision of the FD without causing damage to the new and regenerating clumps of bamboo;
- iii) strict protection from fires and grazing should be undertaken along with proper soil and moisture/ water conservation measures to ensure regeneration of the young bamboo in the sanctuary; and
- iv) the area from which dead bamboo has been removed should be regenerated by allowing natural regeneration of bamboo mixed with other associated miscellaneous species of trees to prevent recurrence of vast area of mono-culture i.e. spread of single type of vegetation- bamboo.

Source: *Forest Case Update*. Issue 51, February and March 2009

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

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Opposition to dam project on Renuka River; Renuka WLS to be impacted

A group of researchers, people's organizations and NGOs have sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Himachal Pradesh State government and other relevant government agencies and departments asking for the scrapping of the Renuka Dam Project in Sirmaur.

The demand is based on three basic grounds - technical/conceptual issues, environment implications and the social impacts of the project. More than 700 families who are presently earning a good income from NTFPs and their agricultural lands will be impacted by the project. The dam is also expected to submerge nearly 2000 hectares of forest and agricultural land including 49 hectares within the boundaries of the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary.

Concerns have also been expressed about the impacts on the nearby Renuka Lake, a religious symbol for the people, a National Wetland and a Ramsar site. Serious flaws have also been pointed out in the Environment Impact Assessment Report submitted by the project proponents.

The organizations that signed the memorandum include the Jan Ekta Samiti, Sirmaur; Himalaya Niti Abhiyan; Renuka Bandh Sangarsh Samiti, Lok Vigyan Kendra, Environment Research and Action Collective (all from Himachal Pradesh) and also the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People and Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, New Delhi.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, No. 1, Vol XII, No. 6 and Nos. 55 & 32)

Source: Scrap Renuka project', Press Note issued on 06/05/09.

Contact: **Subodh Abbi**. Tel: 09816008399.

Email: subodh.abbhi@gmail.com

Himanshu Thakkar.

Tel: 09968242798.

Email: ht.sandrp@gmail.com

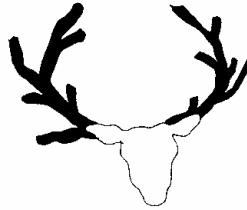
DFO (Wildlife) In Charge, Renuka WLS, Shimla Division, Talland, Shimla – 171001, Himachal Pradesh. Tel: 0177-223993

CWLW, Talland, Shimla – 171001. Tel: 0177-2624193. Email:

Vtandy@gmail.com

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Rise in hangul population in Dachigam NP



A joint count carried out recently by the Jammu & Kashmir Wildlife Department and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has found an increase in the population of the

Hangul in and around the Dachigam National Park. The estimated population of 217 animals is significantly higher than the figure of 160 for last year (see *PA Updates* Vol XIV No. 4, Vol. XIII, Nos 6 & 1; Vol XI, No. 4 and No. 47)

The increase in the population appears to be due to effective protection, check on poaching and various conservation measures taken by the department, apart from lending more credibility to the census operations through the involvement of independent volunteers, researchers, students and NGOs. The male-female ratio and female-fawn ratio have also exhibited a better trend in the current census.

The State wildlife department had prepared a Rs. 22 crore species recovery plan for the hangul in collaboration with the WII and submitted it to the Central Government for funding. Rs. 99 lakh were released in March 2009

The department has simultaneously also started the census and survey of Hangul all over the state in collaboration with the WII and the Wildlife Trust of India and several other research and academic institutions. The purpose is to get a sense of the distribution and trend of Hangul population in the relic habitats in addition to that in the Dachigam NP. A conservation breeding centre for the Hangul is also being constructed at Shikargarh with financial assistance from the Central Zoo Authority.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'Endangered hangul's population shows growth', *The Tribune*, 22/04/09.

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

Opinion divided over proposal to include Lachipora WLS in Qazinig NP

Local opinion is divided over the proposal for the inclusion of the Lachipora Wildlife Sanctuary in the proposed Qazinig National Park (see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, No. 6 & 3). While residents of Lachipora A are said to be in support of the plan, those from Lachipora B are opposing it.

The proposed national park would include areas from Naganari and also include the Limber WLS. Being close to the Line of Control (LoC), the wildlife officials do not visit the entire sanctuary. Entry, in any case, is subject to cumbersome procedures adopted by the Maratha Regiment. Natives of the place carry border cards issued by the Regiment, while outsiders have to get registered at the camp before they can enter.

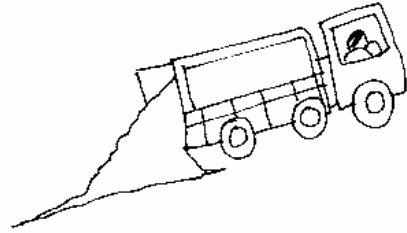
Lachipora comprises Loolosa (Reshwari), Bijhama, Gawaspati, Gyarnallah, Braripora, Mukampera, Khatel Hillpatri and Daznapati villages. The *kuccha* road leads to certain villages and most of the areas are non-motorable. The older generation is said to be opposed to the national park because they feel their movements will then be restricted and they would also not be allowed to graze their cattle here.

Source: Afsana Rashid. 'Residents divided over plan on sanctuary', *The Tribune*, 11/04/09.

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

KARNATAKA

Illegal sand mining in Nagarhole NP



Local tribal communities are reported to have informed the authorities of illegal sand mining in Hebballa, which comes under Sollepura division of Veeranahosalli range in Nagarhole National Park. The local administration then seized the tractors transporting sand and directed forest officials to stop mining activity immediately. The sand was being taken out for the construction of a retaining wall by the Bylakuppe Tibetan camp that is located adjacent to the park.

The tribal community said that they had informed the forest department of the sand extraction, but no action was taken. It was only then that they approached the district authorities. Forest officials, however, said that they were allowing the activity on humanitarian grounds as the wall was being constructed at a cost of Rs. Five crore, to stop elephants entering the area.

Source: Muralidhara Khajane. 'Tribal people complain of sand extraction in national park', *The Hindu*, 19/03/09.

Contact: **Dy. Conservator of Forests**, Nagarhole NP, Wildlife Division, Hunsur, Dist. Mysore, Karnataka. Tel: 08222-252041(O), 252070(R)

KERALA

Wayanad check-post plan may impede elephant movement

There are fears that the Kerala government plan for a check-post complex in Wayanad would impede the movement of elephants trying to reach the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in search of fodder and water in the summer months. During a recent visit to Wayanad, the State Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac had

mooted the idea of relocating check-posts located at different places on the Kerala-Karnataka border in one campus in Wayanad.

NGOs and nature lovers have written to the government to ensure that the proposed complex would not be in the elephant corridor. Hundreds of vehicles use the highway linking Bangalore with Kozhikode. Vehicles, especially goods-laden lorries, have to halt at four check-posts located close to Muthanga and similar check posts on the Karnataka side also. If located in this corridor, the check-post will result in long queues of vehicles waiting for clearance, and thereby cause an impediment to the pachyderms.

It has also been pointed out that there is already an enclosure around Ponkuzhi which is fast developing into a pilgrim centre and halt for travellers as the inter-State highway NH 212 cuts through this forest. The perennial Noolpuzha running through this corridor is the only source of water for a large population of elephants moving through this area for three to four months a year.

Source: EM Manoj. 'Wayanad check-post plan may put jumbo movement in peril', *The Hindu*, 28/02/09.

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

Tiger cub allegedly run over by tourist vehicle in Bandavgarh NP

In what can be considered a bizarre development, a male tiger cub was allegedly run over by a tourist vehicle in the Bandavgarh National Park on April 21. The animal was found dead in the park a few days later. The vehicle was being driven by resort owner Satyendra Tiwari and had foreign tourists in it.

The incident took place at Chakradhara on the B route at 6.30 am in the Tala Range of the park. According to one account of

accompanying tourists, a few vehicles had stopped, when they heard the roars of a tigress with a kill, presumably calling for her cubs from the other side of the road. The young cub then unexpectedly moved towards the tourists and slipped below the vehicle of Mr. Tiwari. It is alleged that the vehicle driver tried to move his vehicle forward and backward in an effort to scare out the animal so that the tourists would be able to see it. It is in this process that the animal was injured and was seen to be groaning in pain just 20 feet from the vehicle. The injured cub is also said to have charged a domestic elephant that then ran for about 100 meters. Another news report of the same incident has however indicated that the driver had panicked on realizing that the tiger was under his vehicle and this had caused the accident.

The Forest Department (FD) subsequently booked Tiwari on charges of poaching and arrested him. He was remanded to magisterial custody till May 11. An inquiry into the incident has also been ordered. Senior forest officials said that an SDO of the FD was at the spot when the incident occurred and had corroborated the sequence of events proving that Mr. Tiwari was indeed guilty.

A subsequent communication and clarification was also issued by the tourist, Nick Garbutt, who was in the vehicle that is said to have run over the tiger cub. He has stated that his examination of his photos of the cub before it slipped below the vehicle seem to show that the cub was injured prior to the incident. There seemed to be blood around its mouth and its jaw also looked swollen. The cub's peculiar and erratic behaviour, according to him, was consistent with a prior injury or trauma. "With hindsight," Garbutt's note says, "I am convinced the incident involving the cub on 21st April 2009 was no one's fault – it was a very unfortunate accident caused by a series of extraordinary circumstances. Satyendra Tiwari acted judiciously and impeccably during the incident, with both the tiger cub's and his client's welfare at heart. Neither he, nor anyone else present, should shoulder any blame or responsibility for this unfortunate sequence of events."

Another noted naturalist and wildlife film maker Ashish Chandola has also come out

in support of Mr Tiwari. In an email circulated on the internet Chandola vouched for Tiwari's integrity and commitment to wildlife conservation and protection.

Source: Rahul Noronha. 'Park driver runs over tiger cub', *Hindustan Times*, 29/04/09.
Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Cub hurt to please tourists?', *The Times of India*, 01/05/09.
Jayanth Sharma. Email dated 06/05/09
Ashish Chandola. Email dated 06/05/09

Contact: Director, Bandavgarh TR, Umaria – 484661, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07653-22214(O). Fax: 07653-22214/22648
Satyendra Tiwari,
Email: kaysat1@yahoo.co.in
Ashish Chandola. Email: chandola.ashish@gmail.com

No relocation of male tiger to Panna TR

The Madhya Pradesh government's plan to shift a male tiger to the Panna Tiger Reserve is not likely to take place for now, since the 'protocol' for tiger relocation is yet to be finalized by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The NTCA has said that no tiger-range state would be allowed to relocate any big cat unless the protocol detailing minute steps needed for the process was formulated. A committee of wildlife experts and NTCA officials has reportedly been constituted for the purpose.

The decision to chalk out a blueprint to relocate tigers was made in response to allegations by wildlife experts that the Madhya Pradesh Government had overlooked basic norms while shifting two tigresses from the Kanha and Bandhavgarh TRs to Panna in March (see *PA Updates* Vol. XV, No. 2 & 1)

A fact-finding team headed by PK Sen, former Director, Project Tiger and comprising of officials from NTCA and Wildlife Institute of India has been constituted to probe a claim by state government officials that there is just one tiger left in the reserve.

Source: 'Absence of proposed protocol stalls relocation of tiger in MP', Press Trust of India, 06/04/09

Contact: **Field Director**, Panna National Park, Panna – 488001, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 07732-252135. Fax: 07732-252120
Dr. Rajesh Gopal NTCA, Annexe No. 5, Bikaner House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi-110011. Telefax: 2338 4428. E-mail: dirpt-r@nic.in
CWLW, MP, Van Bhawan, Tulsi Nagar, Bhopal 462003, Madhya Pradesh. Tel: 0755-557371/ 550391.

MAHARASHTRA

Mining lease near Tadoba Andhari TR runs into trouble

The coal mining project of the Adani Power Limited (APL) in Lohara (west) in the vicinity of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) (*PA Update* No. XV, No. 1) appears to have run into trouble. It has been revealed that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had rejected the application of Nippon Denro Ispat Ltd (NDIL) for the same block about a decade ago on the ground that it was too close to the reserve.

The NDIL had set up Central India Coal Company and was allotted three virgin coal blocks in 1995 by the coal ministry, with a proven geological reserve of about 334 million tonnes of power-grade coal for its proposed power plant at Bhadravati.

In a letter written in this matter to the Maharashtra State Forest Secretary in April 1997, the then Additional Inspector General of Forests (AIGP) had, stated: "After careful consideration of the proposal, the central government conveys its inability to approve the proposal for diversion of 745.54 hectares of forest land for extraction of coal in Lohara (west) under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, since the proposal is not conducive to either environment or forest conservation."

In a further development, 61 members of the Maharashtra State Legislature have also jointly opposed the mining in these forests.

Source: 'Adani block too denied nod earlier', *The Times of India*, 26/03/09
'Tadoba Vyaghra Prkalpat Khan Nako', *Loksatta*, 01/04/09.

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

1067 sq. kms buffer zone for Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve

A special committee appointed by the Maharashtra State Government has identified an area of 1067 sq kms to be notified as the buffer zone of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). It will include a little more than 671 sq kms of forested area and about 394 sq kms of non-forested area. The area of the core zone of the TATR is 625 sq kms.

There are 79 villages in the proposed buffer zone. 66 of these are located in the Chandrapur Forest Division while the remaining 13 are in the Brahmपुरi division. It has been clarified that none of the villages included in the buffer zone of the tiger reserve will face displacement and that, in fact, funds for their development will be easier to access through centrally sponsored schemes.

Although the buffer includes 125 sq. kms hectare area of West Chanda division, not a single village falls in the proposed area. The proposal also includes compartment number 390, where coal mines of Adani Power Limited have been proposed (see *PA Update* Vol XV, No. 1). The buffer also includes some 7-9 compartments proposed for mining by the Maharashtra State Mining Corporation near Agarzari near Tadoba. These have been included in the buffer zone because they fall within 10 km of the boundary of the reserve.

The buffer zone proposal will now be sent to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) which will then refer it to the state government for notification.

Source: 'Now, Tadoba tigers to help villagers'
The Times of India, 10/05/09

Widening of NH 17 threatens Karnala Bird Sanctuary

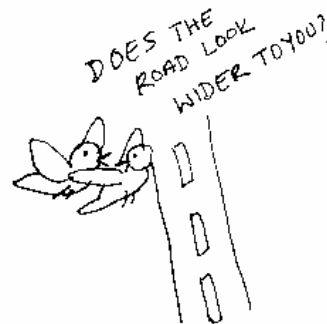
The Maharashtra State Wildlife Board has in a meeting held recently, approved the widening of the National Highway 17 (NH-17) in spite of

the threat posed to the Karnala Bird Sanctuary. A number of members of the board were opposed to the widening. They have said that a re-alignment was possible and would save the sanctuary as well. The State Forest Department too has registered its strong opposition but senior government officials said the widening was necessary and no options were available.

It is feared that the road widening will seriously impact the small sanctuary which is already facing serious pressure from encroachments, grazing and tree-felling.

Source: 'Karnala is on the verge of getting destroyed', <http://wildlifer-ashwin.blogspot.com/2009/03/karnala-is-on-verge-of-getting.html>

Contact: **Dy. Conservator of Forests** (Wildlife) Thane, L.B.S. Rd, Naupada Near Highway Naka Thane-400602. Tel: 022-25402522(O), 25421967(R)



Taxidermy centre in Sanjay Gandhi NP

Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) will have the country's first taxidermy centre. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Maharashtra recently approved the proposal that had been received from the SGNP authorities a few months ago. Grants are now awaited from the Central Government and it is

estimated that Rs. 10-15 lakhs will be needed for the same.

The centre will have provisions for skinning, tanning, moulding and casting of carcasses. It is hoped that the centre will play a useful role in education and creating awareness about wildlife and its conservation.

Source: Coming soon, country's first taxidermy centre at SGNP, *The Indian Express*, 14/04/09

Contact: **DCF**, SGNP, Borivili (East), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-28860362, 28860389(O), 8862780(R)
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MANIPUR

Joint military operation against militants inside Keibul Lamjao NP

A joint Army, Assam Rifles and the Police operation code named Summer Storm was launched on April 12 in the Keibul Lamjao National Park to flush out militants believed to be holed up there.

The operation had been launched after electronic as well as human surveillance confirmed the presence of militants. The army claimed that 12 militants were killed, five camps of the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangliepak (Prepak) were destroyed and 10 weapons, including six AK-series rifles, recovered in the operation that was still going on at the time of reporting. It was further stated that Summer Storm was the most successful joint operation in Manipur.

The army has also clarified that there have been no civilians or wild animals casualties, though other unconfirmed reports say that some *sangai* were indeed killed.

The announcement and clarification issued by the GOC 57 Mountain Division, Maj. Gen. Shakti Gurung came a day after displaced villagers held a rally in Imphal. They made a representation to Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh seeking an end to the operation as the life of nearly 2500 people settled on the fringes of the Loktak lake had been disrupted. They also threatened that they would boycott the ensuing 15th Lok Sabha elections, particularly the polling in Inner Manipur Parliamentary

constituency, if the operation is not called off. The displaced Nongmaikhong and Khordak villagers were taking shelter in Ithai and Laphupat Tera villages in Bishnupur district.

The GOC said that the army would compensate the villagers deprived of their livelihood after the operation was over and that relief materials were already being provided to the affected people.

The army and police have said that a Loktak Protection Force was being put in place and the Centre had sanctioned Rs. 5.5 crore for the purchase of hovercraft for the purpose. They expressed confidence that no militant would be able to enter the area once the force is formed. The army also said that they had no plans to open any army post inside the national park.

Source: 'Displaced villagers boycott polls', *Assam Tribune*, 17/04/09.

'Loktak operation to continue', *The Telegraph*, 18/04/09

Contact: **Salam Rajesh**, Sagolband Salam, Leikai. PO: Imphal-1, Manipur. Tel: 0385-222395.

Email: salamrajesh@rediffmail.com; 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

Maoist attack in Simlipal TR

In a major and first offensive of its kind in the Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Maoist extremists damaged three forest range offices, set ablaze at least two motorcycles and beat up tourists and forest staff inside the reserve in the month of March. Forest Department (FD) establishments at Chahala, Dhudruchampa and Upper Barahkamuda were burnt down and the VHF communication network at Meghasana was also destroyed.

It is believed that three groups of Maoists simultaneously attacked the three forest offices and assaulted the forest staff. They also beat up the tourists that were lodged

at Chahala mistaking them for forest employees. Later, they let off the tourists, with a warning not to visit the place again.

It has been suggested that the attackers had the tacit support of forest dwellers and tribals, who for long have been at the receiving end of the measures of the FD. The banning of *akhand shikar* (ritual hunting) that takes place in April every year is an example and the nature and timing of the attacks suggest that there was a link (see *PA Updates* 59, 55, 49, 43, 41, 27, 26 & 17).

The extremists, on their retreat, left posters and pamphlets demanding the rollback of Project Tiger. Forest staff is now reluctant to go back to their duty in affected areas of the reserve.

Source: Sandeep Mishra & Amarendra Bose. 'Red rampage in tiger reserve', *The Times of India*, 30/03/09

Siba Mohanty. 'Red alert in tiger country', *The Indian Express*, 18/04/09.

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

Increase in Irrawady Dolphin population in Chilka

The annual dolphin census that was conducted in Chilka in February, earlier this year, has revealed the population of the endangered Irrawady Dolphin to be 146. This is a significant increase from the 138 animals that were counted in the 2008 census. This is the largest population of the dolphin in a lagoon in the world. The number of dolphins recorded in 2006 was 131, which increased to 135 in 2007.

The census was carried out by a team of experts by undertaking a head count as well as by using a system that records the sound of the dolphins. The entire lagoon was divided into 20 zones for the purpose.

The dolphin faces a range of threats in Chilka particularly from mechanized fishing trawlers and tourist boats with large propellers (see *PA Updates* Vol. XIII, No. 2; Vol XII, No. 2; and Nos. 57, 56, 54, 52, 49, 41, 36 & 29)

Source: 'Population of endangered dolphin rises in Orissa's Chilika lake', <http://pet.taragana.net>

Contact: **DFO (WL)**, Chilka Wildlife Division, At/PO Balugaon, Dist. Khordha – 752030, Orissa. Tel: 06756 – 211012 / 9437109889. Email: bravo_123@satyam.net.in

PUNJAB

Don't transfer Harike WLS land to farmers: FD

The State Forest and Wildlife Department has told the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of Taran Tarn, Ferozepur and Kapurthala districts not to give land to farmers in the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary (HWS).

The communication was a reaction to the recent announcement of the Punjab Chief Minister that farmers in Harike, which is spread over all three districts and along the 'mand' area of Beas and Sutlej rivers in Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Ferozepur districts, would be given ownership rights of the land at marginal rates. The government has proposed to give ownership rights to the farmers at the rates of Rs 25,000, Rs 50,000 and Rs one lakh per acre depending on the quality of the land.

There is pressure to charge even lower rates or then nothing at all with the Kisan Sangharsh Committee leader Satnam Singh Pannu arguing that the farmers had uprooted forests to make the area habitable and that they should be granted ownership rights for free.

Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) have, however, handed notes to the respective DCs pointing out that there is no surplus land at Harike and that land from the sanctuary cannot be transferred to farmers without the sanction of the National Board for Wildlife.

According to the Forest Department, 30 farmers of Behba, Bhuttiwala, Sodhian and Jogewal villages are tilling about 300 acres in the sanctuary and a case regarding this is already going on. The FD has also taken the view that farming in the sanctuary area is not conducive for the bird population particularly with increased mechanisation and fertilizer use. It also feels that if the ownership rights are

granted, it would encourage growth of more encroachments in the area.

Source: Jangveer Singh. 'Don't transfer land in Harike to farmers, dept. tells DCs', *The Tribune*, 27/02/09.

Contact: Wildlife Warden, Harike Lake WLS, Near Police Station, Harike, Dist. Firozpur, Punjab. Tel: 0181 - 248409
Chief Wildlife Warden, Punjab, SC No. 2463-64, Sector 22-C, Chandigarh - 160022. Tel: 0172-2705828(O), 2675661(R). Fax: 2705828

RAJASTHAN

Expedition to study status of gharial in the National Chambal Sanctuary

The 2nd Gharial Expedition to study the status of the critically endangered Gharial in the National Chambal Sanctuary was held from December 17 to 26, 2008. Organised by the NGO, Tiger Watch the expedition covered a 100 km stretch of the river from Pali to Rhondhai in Rajasthan.

The expedition identified four High Population Estimate Areas (HPEAs) as stretches where the gharial population was higher than in other parts of the river surveyed.

A total of 123 gharial including 11 males were spotted during the expedition while the number of muggers that were seen were 73. A number of other species of wildlife including birds like skimmers, ospreys, and terns and mammals including hyenas, jackals, and sloth bear (pugmarks) were also seen.

One dead gharial was also reported from near Banjari Village during the expedition.

A subsequent summer survey was conducted in April 2009 and it reported one dead gharial from Pali on the Madhya Pradesh side and a mugger at Tongni village also on the MP side. The animals were found wrapped in fishing nets; evidence that the activity which is illegal here is continuing unabated.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XV, No. 2 and Vol XIV, No. 2)

Source: Apoorva Joshi on email dated 27/04/09.

Contact: **Apoorva Joshi**. Tel: 0-9011515579

Email: apoorvanature@gmail.com

DCF (Wildlife), National Chambal WLS, Dist. Kota, Rajasthan. Tel: 0744-2321263(O). Fax: 0744-2322074

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

TAMIL NADU

Conference on Bees, Biodiversity and Forest Livelihoods in Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

□ A three day International Conference on 'Bees, Biodiversity and Forest Livelihoods'(BBL) was held in Coonoor in March 2009. It marked the conclusion of a three year project to elucidate the interdependencies between bees, biodiversity and forest livelihoods in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR).

The conference was attended by social scientists, biologists, ecologists and economists from India and abroad. the BBL project was funded by the Darwin Initiative, UK and was implemented by Kotagiri based Keystone Foundation in collaboration with the Overseas Development Group/School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia, Bees for Development and the Centre for Agri-Environmental Research, University of Reading, UK. □ □

The indigenous bees of the mountainous NBR are known to play an important role in local indigenous livelihoods (honey hunting is part of the culture), yet the bees have not been scientifically identified or classified, their populations and distributions under natural conditions relatively unknown, and their vital role in pollination and the maintenance of forest biodiversity under studied.

The BBL Project was aimed at combining scientific data about the status of these indigenous bees and their ecology, with participatory livelihoods analysis. it was executed over sixteen field sites in five locations in order to capture contrasts of biogeography, distribution and honey collecting practices of major tribal groups, as well as

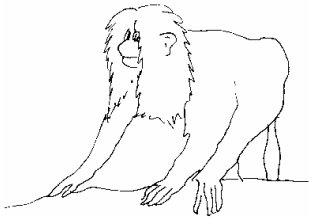
respond to practical and strategic considerations of coverage across the three Indian states (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala) that are contained within the NBR. □ □

A detailed proceedings of the conference is being compiled and will be made available shortly.

□ □

Contact: **Anita Varghese**, Keystone Foundation, Keystone Centre, PB 35, Groves Hill Road, Kotagiri 643 217, Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu. Telefax: 04266-272277, Email: anita@keystone-foundation.org

Increase in wildlife numbers in Srivilliputhur WLS



A recently conducted census has reported increased numbers of many wildlife species in the Srivilliputhur

Wildlife Sanctuary. These include the Nilgiri tahr, the Lion-Tailed macaque (LTM) and the Giant squirrel.

Wildlife officials said that the Nilgiri Tahr has been sighted in the entire division starting from Kottamalai in Rajapalayam to Perumal Malai in Sadhuragiri hills near the Sundara Mahalingam temple in Saptoor. While a group of 30 LTMs had been sighted in the sanctuary in the census last year, this year more than 45 animals including a sizeable number of young ones were sighted in a single group between the Nagariyar and Periyakavu part of the sanctuary.

Source: P Oppili. 'Wildlife numbers up in Srivilliputhur sanctuary', *The Hindu*, 23/03/09.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Srivilliputhur WLS, No.8 Kallikulam Street, Srivilliputhur – 626129, Tamil Nadu. Tel: 04563-60565

Field guide on flora and fauna of Gulf of Mannar BR

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve Trust (GoMBRT) have jointly produced a field

guide on the flora and fauna of Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. The guide covers all the plants and animals found in the Gulf of Mannar region and took about two years to produce.

There is also a plan to bring out the guide in Tamil that will also include colour photographs.

Source: Guide on flora and fauna of biosphere reserve released, *The Hindu*, 17/04/09.

Contact: CEE Tamil Nadu. Tel: 09443194272. Email: ceetamilnadu@ceeindia.org

UTTARAKHAND

Proposal to increase area of Corbett TR

A proposal is being mooted for the increase of the area of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Under the new plan, the reserve would comprise of the 521 sq km Corbett National Park, the 301 sq km Sonanadi WLS and 466 sq km of the buffer areas of Landsdown and Ramnagar Forest Division. The total area of the reserve would then be 1,288 sq km.

A high-level meeting of top officials, including Union Cabinet Secretary KM Chandrasekar, State Chief Secretary IK Pande and other forest officials, was held at Corbett recently to discuss the modalities of the same.

The State Chief Wildlife Warden Mr SK Chandola has said that consultations would be held with all the stakeholders and the inhabitants of the Ramnagar and Landsdown forest division before the decision on increasing the area of the reserve was taken. The plan is to be executed in two phases. The first would be the consultations to chalk out a concrete action plan that would then be implemented in the second phase.

Source: 'Centre plans to increase Corbett Tiger Reserve area', *The Times of India*, 12/04/09

Contact: **Field Director**, Corbett Tiger Reserve, Ramnagar –244715, Nainital, Uttarakhand. Tel: 05947 – 285489. Fax: 285376

Serious irregularities in use of funds for rehabilitation of Van Gujjars from Rajaji NP

A report submitted in March 2008 by the Additional Chief Conservator of Forests, Uttarakhand has confirmed serious irregularities in the utilization of funds for the rehabilitation of the Van Gujjars from the Rajaji National Park. Major shortcomings were also found in the construction of the rest house at the cost of Rs 24 lakh in 2006-07.

The inquiry had been initiated on the directions of the Prime Minister's Office after the receipt of complaints. A three-member technical committee headed by the then Director of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, Rajiv Bhartari, found "serious irregularities" in the works done for the rehabilitation and held the then director of Rajaji, GS Pandey as the person responsible.

The Central government had allocated Rs 9.57 crore to provide cattle sheds, toilets, hand pumps, roads, electrification, tubewells and levelling of plots in Pathar Gujri and Gaidikhata settlements. It was found that the quality of works was very poor and that the park administration failed in its duty to ensure regular monitoring of the works.

When contacted senior officials could not explain the delay in taking action though the report is more than a year old. Mr GS Pandey is presently posted as Additional Secretary, Horticulture and Medicinal Plants.

Source: Raju William. '11 months on, no action on Rajaji ex-chief', *The Tribune*, 07/02/09.

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

Rajaji NP to employ Gujjars for fire protection; others steps also being taken

Officials of the Rajaji NP have decided to employ local Gujjars for the work of creating fire lines and fighting fires this summer. The work was earlier being outsourced to contractors. In the first phase the Gujjars have been given work in the Haridwar, Motichur, Chila and Chillawali ranges of the park.

The community is reported to have been enthused by the opportunity. They said that they felt sidelined after they had been rehabilitated, but would now have a chance again of getting closer to the forests that were home for many years.

35 water holes have also been dug in different parts of the park to ensure that there is enough water for the wild animals. The digging was initiated in the wake of a report that half of the 221 water sources in the forest areas had dried up and that they would be an acute water shortage in summer. Shortage of water often forces the animals, particularly elephants to move out in search of water resulting in increased conflict with humans living in surrounding areas.

The absence of rains in winter has also compounded the problem. Many forest fires have been reported from different parts of Uttarakhand and 2000 crew stations have been created to ensure prompt action to deal with the fires. 1300 fire kits have also been distributed to local people for the purpose

More recent reports from April indicate that the water shortage and forest fires have also resulted in increased human-elephant conflict his year. Elephants from Rajaji NP have been moving to the river in areas of Haridwar and this is bringing them in direct contact with human settlements. Such incidents have been reported from Chandhighat Bridge. Significant crop damage by elephants was also reported from other villages including Jagjeetpur, Missharapur, Jamalpur and Katarpur.

Source: Sandeep Rawat. 'Rajaji Park to utilize Gujjar services', *The Tribune*, 16/02/09
Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'To combat drought, Rajaji digs water holes', *The Tribune*, 13/03/09.

Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Dry winter may fuel forest fires', *The Tribune*, 15/03/09.
Sandeep Rawat. 'Forest fires still smouldering', *The Tribune*, 08/04/09.

SC hears matter related to elephant overpasses at Rajaji NP

A bench of the Supreme Court recently heard the matter of the construction of two elephant overpasses at the Rajaji National Park. The

proposal was made a few months ago to create a corridor to ensure elephant movement across the railway line and roads which have otherwise resulted in a number accidents and deaths of the elephants (see *PA Updates* Vol XIV, No. 5 and Vol XIII, No. 5).

The proposed plan includes the construction of two such corridors for the elephants – each 1.2 kms long and 100 metres wide. They will be part of NH 58 connecting Meerut with Badrinath and NH 72 connecting Shyampur Tiraha with Premanagar via Dehradun. If the SC grants its permission it is hoped that the overpasses will be readied in time for the Kumbh Mela in 2010. The estimated cost for their construction is Rs. 64 crore.

Source: Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Flyover corridors for jumbos', *The Tribune*, 08/02/09.

Adventure tour operators unhappy with limited season for trekking in Gangotri NP



Adventure tour operators have said that the decision of the authorities to open the Gangotri National Park only from May 1 to October 15 would be detrimental to the promotion of trekking in the region. The decision to limit the period was taken by the Forest Department following mishaps involving foreign tourists last year. The decision was subsequently taken to keep the park open in tandem with the opening of the Gangotri Temple from May 1 to October 15. Till last year, the Gangotri National Park had its gates open for visitors beginning April 1.

Well-known treks to Gaumukh, Tapovan, Nandanvan and Kalindikhas Pass, pass through the Gangotri NP and are popular with both domestic and foreign tourists. It has been pointed out that trekking in the park starts

much before the pilgrimage and that October being the peak season for trekking, the new dates mean a crucial loss of many days for the activity. Tour operators, who had booked international groups for treks starting from the first week of April have had to cancel trips at the eleventh hour, something, they say, has affected their credibility.

Park authorities, however, say that safety of the tourists is their top priority and the period of the *yatra* season is most safe as logistic support of all kind is easily available during this period. They did not want a repeat of last year when an 11-member Indian team of trekkers and porters and another 35-member team from Australia was trapped in a blizzard in September. While all trekkers were rescued, five porters were killed in the incident.

Officials have said that the opening and closure of dates of the park were decided in consultation with local representatives and other stakeholders with the sole aim of regulating the flow of tourists.

The Adventure Tours Operators Association of India (ATOAI) is reported to have approached the tourism secretary to take up the matter with the Uttarakhand government.

Source: Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Govt. on wrong track, say trek operators', *The Tribune*, 09/04/09.

Contact: **I/c Gangotri NP, C/O Wildlife Warden,** Govind National Park, Purola, Dist. Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. Tel: 0137-22244

Van Gujjars denied access to their grazing grounds in Govind Pashu Vihar NP

The nomadic Van Gujjar community has been denied access to their traditional grasslands in the Govind Pashu Vihar National Park (GPVNP). The graziers who reside in the Shivalik forest ranges and the Rajaji National Park migrate to the higher reaches every summer. As a result of not being allowed entry to GPVNP this year they find themselves stranded on the banks of the Assan near Vikas Nagar with their families and cattle. With the temperature rising, their buffaloes are reported to be on the verge of starvation with no fodder

and water and family members too are falling ill.

The bureaucracy is said to be with holding the rights of the Van Gujjars on the pretext that they do not belong to the state of Uttarakhand. After Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, the Shivalik forest in close proximity to Rajaji National Park fell within the state of Uttarakhand while other parts of the Shivaliks are in Saharanpur district of UP. Many of these Van Gujjars migrate from UP to Himachal passing through Uttarakhand, but the FD is bent on stopping the Van Gujjars coming from UP. In fact, with the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act being eminent, it has been alleged that the move by the Uttarakhand FD is an attempt to deprive these 100-odd families of their migration and grazing rights so that they are unable to lay a claim to their traditional forest grazing land under the provisions of the act.

These Gujjars are said to have a legal and recognized right over forests as they pay a 'lopping tax' and a 'grazing tax' to the forest department. The community alleges that the move by the Uttarakhand government to deny them entry was pre-planned as no receipts were issued last year though they had paid all their taxes. NGOs working with them allege that this is a ploy by the Forest Department (FD) to deny proof to the Van Gujjars while making a claim to forest rights. An application has already been filed under the RTI Act to get these receipts.

Several delegations of the community have met the officials concerned, but it has been of no avail. (See *PA Update* Vol XIV, No. 3, for a similar situation that had arisen last year as well.)

Source: 'Van Gujjars in nowhere land', *The Tribune*, 02/04/09.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Govind National Park, Purola, Dist. Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. Tel: 0137-22244
CWLW, 5, Chandrabani, Mohobewala, Dehradun, Uttaranchal. Tel: 0135-2644691

WEST BENGAL

Proposal to re-introduce Pygmy hog into Gorumara NP



The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is reported to have approved a proposal of the West Bengal Forest Department (FD) for the re-introduction of the pygmy hog to the Gorumara National Park.

The animal was once found in the grasslands here and this has prompted the FD to take up the challenge. The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, has been engaged to conduct a feasibility survey for the purpose. They will also be visiting the pygmy hog breeding centre on the outskirts of Guwahati. It is from here that the successful reintroduction of the hog into the wild in the Sonai Rupai WLS in Assam was carried out recently (see *PA Update* Vol XIV, No. 3)

If the Gorumara re-introduction project is approved it would take three years for completion and would cost approximately Rs. 30 lakh.

Source: Sabyasachi Roy. 'Pygmy hogs get a new lease of life', *The Statesman*, 18/03/09
Contact: **DFO**, Gorumara NP, Aranya Bhawan, Old Court Campus, Jubilee Park, P.O. & Dist. Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Tel: 03561-224907(O), 222838(R).
Email: wild2@dte.vsnl.net.in

Tiger sighted in Gorumara NP after 25 years; vultures also sighted again

A tiger was recently seen in the Gorumara National Park for the first time in 25 years and forest officials say that the animal would have reached here from the Neora Valley National Park through Chapramari. The first hints of tiger presence were visible in the last week of March following reports of cattle lifting from Mouchaki in the Bhujelgaon area of the Neora Valley lower range. This area is merely 12 kms from the boundary of Gorumara. Several gaur

were also reported to have been hunted in Gorumara over the last few weeks.

It has been suggested that the tiger could have entered the Bamondanga-Tondu Tea Estate area where a five sq. kms grassland has recently been added to the park. Forest staff also say that successful conservation and protection activities have led to the return of spotted deer and the barking deer which, in turn has lured the tiger back.

Another survey by the Bombay Natural History Society has also confirmed the presence of the Long – Billed Vulture here. 18 birds were spotted at Goyradoba within the park. More than 96% of the vulture population here has been wiped out in the period 2000-2007.

Source: Gorumara prey base lures tigers back',
The Times of India

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TOFT to launch Wildlife Tourism Awards

Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT) which works to advocate, endorse and support more responsible use of wilderness areas in India has announced the launch of Wildlife Tourism Awards.

The awards which will be given in early 2010 intend to reward and encourage best practice operations in a number of categories: Most Inspired Eco lodge, Best Park Guide/Naturalist (carries Rs 25,000 cash prize), Best Park for Tourism (carries a cash prize of Rs 50,000 worth of equipment to be used in tiger protection/conservation projects), Best Destination Management Company, Best Tourist Related Community Initiative, Best Wildlife/Tourism Initiative (cash prize of Rs 50,000 towards equipment/services) and a Life Time Achievement award.

Source: <http://www.travelbizmonitor.com/>
Contact: **Abhishek Behl**, Executive Director,
TOFT India Wildlife Association. Tel:
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NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Fresh tiger census in the offing

An year after "scientifically" estimating the big cats' population at nearly 1,411 in the country, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is gearing up to revise the head count by conducting a fresh census later this year.

The census that will most likely be held in October will be carried out in association with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and will use a methodology similar to the previous count when camera traps were used extensively. The report 'Status of Tigers, Co-predators, and Prey in India 2008' had presented a grim picture with the tiger population being estimated at 1,411 with variation of 17.43 per cent.

Source: 'Fresh tiger census in the offing', *The Hindu*, 30/03/09.

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

First national park for Afghanistan

Afghanistan has announced the creation of its first national park at Band-e-Amir. The park will protect one of the country's best-known natural areas. It lies near the Bamyán Valley, where the 1,500-year-old giant Buddha statues destroyed by the Taliban once stood.

Band-e-Amir is renowned for its spectacular series of six deep blue lakes separated by natural dams made of travertine, a mineral deposit. Travertine systems are found in only a few places throughout the world. Virtually all are on the UNESCO World Heritage list and serve as major international tourist attractions.

Though Band-e-Amir had been a destination for travelers since the 1950s,

tourism slowed to a near halt during the war years of 1979–2001. Today, the region draws thousands of Afghan tourists and religious pilgrims annually, as well as many foreigners currently living and working in the country.

The creation of the park is based on the research work carried out by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Field scientists of the WCS conducted surveys, identified and delineated the park's boundaries, and worked with local communities and the provincial government. WCS has also developed the park's management plan and helped the Afghan Government hire and train local rangers. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided key funding for this work.

Though much of the park's wildlife has been lost, recent surveys indicate that it still contains ibex and urial, along with wolves, foxes, smaller mammals, and fish. It is also home to various bird species, including the Afghan snow finch, believed to be the only bird found exclusively in Afghanistan. Snow leopards were once found in the area, but vanished due to hunting in the early 1980s. The lakes' wildlife faces growing threats from pollution and other human-caused degradation to the fragile travertine dams.

It is being hoped that Band-e-Amir's new status will grant it recognition essential to helping the park become an international tourist destination and obtain World Heritage Status, which would also help provide additional protection. It also lays the groundwork for an Afghan Protected Area System that could include the wildlife-rich transboundary area in the Pamirs shared with Pakistan, China, and Tajikistan.

Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and the Band-e-Amir Protected Area Committee will collectively manage the new park. A protected area committee comprised of the 13 villages lying within the park has also been established to ensure that local communities play a key role in protecting the landscape.

Source: 'New park for Afghanistan', http://www.wcs.org/353624/wcs_new_park_for_afghanistan

BANGLADESH

Meeting on the Sundarbans in Bangladesh

A discussion on the Sundarbans in Bangladesh 'Unprotected Sundarban and our responsibilities' was held in Khulna in the month of April. It was jointly organized by The Unnayan Onneshan, Humanity Watch and Forest People Programme and attended by forest officials, civic group leaders, green activists, journalists and NGO personnel.

It was pointed out that the Forest Department has only 76 camps and 178 forest guards to guard a huge area of 6,017 square kilometre including more than 400 rivers in the Sundarban in Bangladesh. The FD also has only 61 water vessels to patrol the vast area in comparison to the total requirement of at least 120. The wireless communication system in the area had collapsed in Cyclone Sidr in November 2007 and it still had to be fully restored. A number of weapons used by the forest guards too are said to be out of order for a long time.

The participants in the meeting stressed that the FD should be properly equipped, that there should be an increase in the number of forest guards and vessels deployed for protection and urged the government to allocate a risk allowance for forest employees.

Source: Tapos Kanti Das. 'Call for strengthening forest dept', *Daily New Age*

Nearly 6000 Irrawady Dolphins found in Sundarban waters



The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has said that a survey using rigorous scientific techniques has discovered a population of nearly 6000 Irrawady dolphins in the fresh water regions of the Sunderban mangroves in Bangladesh.

This is the biggest known population of this endangered animal that was listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List in 2008.

These results were announced at the recently held First International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas in Maui, Hawaii and published in the Winter issue of the Journal of Cetacean Research and Management. Authors of the study include Brian D. Smith, Rubaiyat Mansur Mowgli, and Samantha Strindberg of the Wildlife Conservation Society, along with Benazir Ahmed of the Chittagong University in Bangladesh.

The WCS is also working closely with the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Bangladesh on plans for establishing a protected area network for both Irrawaddy and Ganges River dolphins in the Sundarbans mangrove forest.

Source: 'Huge population of rare dolphins discovered in South Asia',
<http://en.mercopress.com/2009/04/02/huge-population-of-rare-dolphins-discovered-in-south-asia>

SRI LANKA

Morningside Forest to be declared Forest Reserve for Biodiversity Conservation

The Government of Sri Lanka had decided to designate 1,000 hectares (10 sq. kms) of the Morningside Cloud Forest as a Forest Reserve for Biodiversity Conservation.

The IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group had identified the forest as a top priority area because a total of 11 globally threatened amphibians, three endemic lizards, and three species of endemic freshwater crabs that are found here. The forest, where Conservation International has also been working for the past five years, is located in southeast Sri Lanka just east of the Sinharaja World Heritage Site. An effort is also being made to finally include Morningside within the world heritage site.

Other organizations who supported the initiative include the Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka, IUCN Sri Lanka, and the Forest Department of Sri Lanka.

A management plan is now being developed for the forest where the focus will be on cultivating cardamom efficiently, providing revenue to the local community without negatively impacting cloud forest trees and the threatened species that inhabit the forest.

It has been pointed out that nineteen species of frogs native to Sri Lanka have gone extinct due to continuing habitat loss essentially caused by smallholder farming activities and logging. Drought and the use of agrochemicals in cardamom cultivation are additional threats. No other country in the world has more documented amphibian extinctions.

Source : 'Fighting for forest frogs'
http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/news_events/?3061/Fighting-for-forest-frogs
23/04/09

UPCOMING

DST Research Workshop on wildlife in the North East

The Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India is organising a Research Workshop on Wildlife in the North East for young researchers and investigators working in Universities, Institutes and NGOs.

The workshop will be held in Guwahati from October 22-25, 2009.

The topics for discussion in the workshop will include but not be restricted to human-elephant conflict, population restoration, birds, small carnivores, habitat fragmentation, and grasslands.

Contact: **Prof DK Sharma**, Head, Dept. of Zoology, Gauhati University, Guwahati – 781014, Assam. Email: dksgu@yahoo.co.uk

5th Vatavaran Environment and Wildlife Film Festival

The 5th edition of the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) VATAVARAN – Environment and Wildlife Film Festival will be held from

October 27-31, 2009 at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi. The organisers have invited entries for the festival, the theme for which is 'Sustainable Technologies'.

The total prize money for the festival this year will be Rs. 20 lakhs. 25 awards are to be given away in 16 Indian categories while there will be 10 awards in nine international categories.

Contact: **Alka Tomar**, Festival Director, CMS Saket Community New Delhi 110 017 INDIA. Tel: 011-26522244. Fax: 26968282. Email: submission@cmsvatavaran.org; alka@cmsindia.org Web: www.cmsvatavaran.org

International Workshop on Community Forestry

An international Workshop titled 'Thinking globally – Acting locally: Community Forestry in the International Arena' is being held from September 15-18, 2009 in Pokhara, Nepal. The broad objectives of the workshop include Sharing and presenting Nepal's progress in Community Forestry with a wider international audience and sharing wider international ideas and experiences that can contribute to the future direction of Community Forestry in Nepal and also internationally.

There are four workshop themes:

- 1) State and Community Partnerships in Community Forestry;
- 2) Community Forestry, Biodiversity Conservation and Provisioning of Environmental Service
- 3) Community forestry, Social Inclusion and Democratic Governance
- 4) Community Forestry and Economic Development.

For more details visit

<http://www.communityforestryworkshop.com.np>

30th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation

The 30th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation will be held in Goa, India from April 27 to 29, 2010. The symposium which is conducted by the

International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS), will be coming to South Asia for the first time in 30 years. The theme of the symposium is 'The world of turtles'.

Pre-symposium events will begin on the 24th of April, 2010 and regional meetings, workshops and the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSGP) meeting will be held from 24th - 26th April.

Contact: **Dr. Kartik Shanker**, President ISTS. Email: kshanker@ces.iisc.ernet.in

IN THE SUPREME COURT

PA related matters in the Supreme Court in February and March 2009

- Application against widening of NH-7 through the periphery of Pench Mowgli Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh
- Proposal for laying of an underground gas pipeline through the National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary
- Regarding permission to remove flowered dead bamboo from Purna WLS in Gujarat. The Central Empowered Committee laid down certain conditions which were acceptable to the state government

In the Supreme Court' is based on the Forest Case Update, which is a web-based initiative to provide information and updates on developments related to forests and wildlife in the Supreme Court.

Contact: **Ritwick Dutta & Kanchi Kohli**. Forest Case Update Editors, E-180, Greater Kailash 2, New Delhi-110048. Email:

forestcase@yahoo.com Web:

www.forestcaseindia.org

Member Secretary, Central Empowered Committee, Room No. 106, Paryavaran Bhavan, CGO Complex, Lodi Road, New Delhi - 110003. Tel: 011- 4361297

READERS WRITE

The PA Update is very useful...

The Protected Area Update is doing a great job of monitoring the media and other sources for threats to and successes in conservation of the protected areas of India.

I am a member of the Protected Areas of India Working Group of Wikipedia and specialize in creating and editing articles on protected areas of Tamil Nadu. I have often used information, I first heard about in the *PA Update*.

I do believe that conservation movements, environmentalism and Internet activism can help alleviate some problems facing protected areas.

Marcus Sherman

Email: marcus334@hotmail.com

This office of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is receiving the *Protected Area Update* regularly. The compilation of news related to wildlife issues, concerns and conservation are well collected in the newsletter. It was good to see the report related to the WCCB website in the latest issue (Vol. XV No.2 April 2009 (No.78)).

You would be aware that Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt of India has constituted the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau under section 38 (y) with a mandate to combat the wildlife crime in the country.

Ramesh Pandey

Regional Deputy Director,
WCCB (Northern Region)

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A great loss...

I read the recent issue of *PA Update* (Vol. XV, No. 1, January 2009) with interest. I was also very sad to hear of the sudden demise of Ravi

Sankaran at such a young age. He was really a nice person and good company as well. We miss him tremendously.

I read about the controversies regarding the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. Another problem is the proposed INO observatory in the buffer zone of the Tiger Reserve. Many of the physicists including Dr. Abdul Kalam are pushing to locate this industrial scale project at the heart of a region that is already badly affected by unplanned growth. This is an issue of great concern.

Dr. Priya Davidar

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No hope without people's participation...

I was surprised to see the news item 'State-of-the-art technology to fight fires in Mussoorie Forest Division', in the latest issue of the *Protected Area Update* (Vol. XV, No. 2, April 2009). Most people in Uttarakhand will regard it as a cruel joke.

You may have already gathered from the national media that the forests of Uttarakhand are on fire, almost throughout the state. I saw this on my recent tour. Valley after valley is covered with a pall of smoke or haze.

The sad part is that almost nowhere do you see anybody -- Forest Department (FD) or the local people -- trying to put out the fires. The tremendous zeal of the people to protect forests, shown in the heydays of the Chipko movement, has died out. There are some isolated cases where voluntary organisations have been able to inspire people to protect forests, but otherwise the callousness of the FD has totally alienated them from protecting government forests.

The Forest Department's reliance on technology is just a money-making stunt of its officers. Without people's ownership of forests, there is no hope. It is high time that we took a good fresh look at the issue of managing forests and got the FD out of the forests. At least the degraded areas should be taken back from the FD and handed over to local communities. Can you imagine anyone taking

farm land from the farmers and entrusting it to the Agriculture Department in the hope that it will feed the nation?

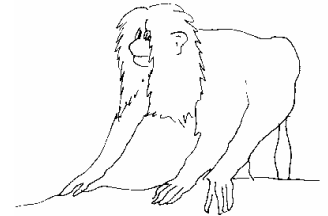
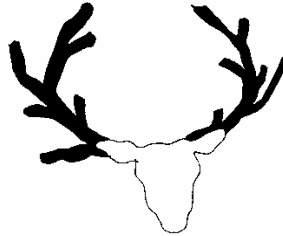
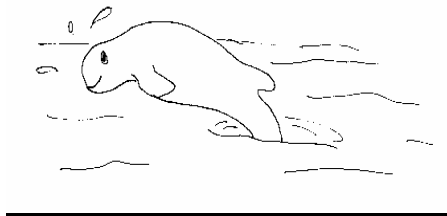
I would therefore request you to be a bit selective and sift real news from the press releases of government departments.

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THE LAST ISSUE OF THE PA UPDATE ?

The *Protected Area Update* has run into serious financial trouble and all efforts to raise the necessary resources over the last two months have been unsuccessful. It's an unexpected and unfortunate situation, but this could well be the last issue of the newsletter that we will be able to print and post.

Unless, of course, somebody comes forwards and supports us. This is an earnest and urgent appeal to individuals and organizations that find the Update relevant and useful to come forward with their assistance and support. Our attempts are continuing and in the meanwhile if you can contribute yourself we will be extremely grateful. To contribute or for more information on how you can help, please write to the editor at the editorial address or email: psekhsaria@gmail.com



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