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### Protected Area Update

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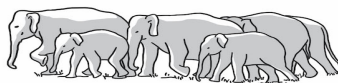
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## EDITORIAL

### **The news ecosystem and its implications for conservation action**

The last two months have seen an interesting completing of the circle where media reporting on the environment and wildlife is concerned. Many things appeared skewed in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic and the resultant lockdown. The wildlife and conservation related reporting as we saw in the last - June 2020 - issue of the *PA Update* had a distinctly Covid-19 related tint to it. Half that issue had news related to pandemic - fears of more poaching, increased sighting of wild animals in unexpected places, special efforts by the authorities to deal with the challenges and also the thrust by the central government on faster clearances of big bang projects with huge potential impacts on diverse ecosystems, wildlife and communities.

The news cycle is a particular kind of creature and often criticized for its short attention span and quick move to the next big issue. (The status of the tiger on account of 'International Tiger Day is the big thing in media just as we go to press with this issue). This limited attention span is quite clearly reflected in the crop of stories that we carry in this issue of the *PA Update*. It has only been two months and yet there are very few reports that have a direct link to Covid-19. None appear to follow up on the stories the media was reporting with such enthusiasm just a few weeks ago and one is left wondering on whatever happened to all those issues.

One argument often made is that the media is the first port of call - the first quick account of what is happening in the present and for that reason it has no choice but to move on. In this, the media does play a very important role because what it records today

bookmarks the history of tomorrow. There is a crucial and yet unresolved question that is very relevant - is something reported because it is important or does it become important because it is reported? And questions also of who decides what is important, where are the resources for this, who is the gate-keeper? These conundrums are all the more relevant today because of the rapidly changing nature of the media, serious financial challenges and exponential and far reaching technological shifts. Not to mention the fact that large parts of the media don't play the role of the watch-dog anymore like they used to in the past.

It is here, probably, that other players become more relevant. Conservationists, researchers, forest officers, activists, academics - all need to understand how mainstream media works, what are its challenges and limitations and what opportunities it offers. Also, what new channels are available what new innovations in communication are being attempted. Controlling the narrative may not entirely be possible, but understanding how it works and how to make it work for oneself certainly is.

This is particularly relevant in relation to the current trajectory where environmental governance in the country is concerned. From putting up more coal blocks for auction, to clearing big ticket projects, to shutting down websites opposing the amendments to the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, the central government continues unabated and unhindered. Ecological sensitivity, climate change concerns, an unprecedented pandemic, livelihood security, endangered species - are all important but only till they don't come in the way...

This is a juggernaut that roles on callously and dangerously and one can only imagine what it will leave behind in its wake. Sections of the media have been active here and so have sections of the public, but what impact this will eventually have is something only time will tell.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ASSAM

#### **NGT seeks explanation on drilling for oil in Dibru-Saikhowa NP**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Environment Ministry, Oil India Limited (OIL), Assam State Pollution Control Board and the Assam State Biodiversity Board to explain how the proposed drilling of seven oil wells was permitted in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (NP) in eastern Assam.

The NGT directive on 20 July 2020 was based on a petition by Assam-based conservationists Bimal Gogoi and Mridu Paban Phukan against the environment clearance to OIL on May 11 for drilling in the park in violation of a Supreme Court order of September 2017.

The petitioners' have contended that OIL did not carry out a biodiversity assessment study for the seven-well exploratory drilling project besides not conducting a public hearing as mandated by the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006. They further noted that the EIA report grossly undermines the risk of the project by stating that the threat due to "blowout" was "negligible". The NGT noted that the report "only considered the blowout risk applicable to the U.S. and did not give data from India in general". The petitioners also said that OIL had suppressed the recent blowout of Baghjan Well No. 5 that has resulted in massive irreparable injury to the environment and the people of the surrounding villages.

The respondents were given 30 days by the NGT to file their responses. OIL, battling to cap the natural gas well at Baghjan that had burst into flames a fortnight

after undergoing a blowout on May 27, had clarified that its exploratory drilling project was "under" and not "in" the 765 sq km Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. OIL noted that it had obtained permission for the seven wells in 2016 on the basis of the sophisticated ERD (extended reach drilling) technology that will enable them to explore hydrocarbon deposits horizontally, from beyond the park.

The ERD was extensively used to intersect hydrocarbon targets far from the surface or areas of the reservoir that otherwise were difficult to access. This technology enabled drilling of wells up to a depth of approximately 4 km from an existing well plinth without entering the protected area, OIL officials said. It was noted further that the drilling will take place at an average of more than 1.5 km outside the demarcated area of the national park where OIL already is carrying out hydrocarbon exploration since the last 15 years.

On July 20, the NGT had also ordered the formation of a committee to probe allegations of large-scale illegal coal mining by North Eastern Coalfields inside Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve in Assam's Tinsukia district (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 3 and Vol. XXIII, No. 5).

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'NGT seeks explanation on drilling for oil in Assam national park', [www.thehindu.co.in](http://www.thehindu.co.in), 22/07/2020.

#### **Complaint filed against construction in Kanchanjuri corridor near Kaziranga NP**

A right to information and environment activist from Assam has filed a complaint with the central empowered committee of the Supreme Court (SC) against construction in the Kanchanjuri wildlife corridor close to Kaziranga National Park (NP). It has been alleged that the construction is illegal and in violation of an SC order of April last year.

The SC had, in its order, banned all mining related activities along the park and catchment area of rivers/streams/rivulets originating in Karbi Anglong hills and flowing into the park. The order also stipulated that no new construction shall be permitted on private lands which form part of the nine identified animal corridors.

The complainant mentioned that though the matter of the construction was brought to the notice of the state's chief secretary in early June, no action had been taken. The petition has sought orders to demolish the construction and restore connectivity of the animal corridor.

Source: Utpal Parashar. 'RTI activist flags construction in Kaziranga animal corridor in violation of SC order', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 30/06/2020

## CHHATTISGARH

### **Nine IFS officers transferred over elephant deaths in Chhattisgarh**

The Chhattisgarh Government transferred the principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF), wildlife and reshuffled the posts of eight other Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers following the death of six wild elephants in the state in a span of 10 days in early June. PCCF wildlife, Atul Kumar Shukla has been replaced by the 1987-batch IFS officer PV Narsingh Rao.

The animals killed included a male elephant that was electrocuted at Girisha village of Dharamjaigarh division in Raigarh. A live wire that killed the elephant was being used for an illegal power connection at a farm. Earlier, an elephant calf died after it got stuck in a marshland at Mongri in Dhamtari district. Before that, the carcasses of two elephants were recovered in the forest range of Surajpur district and a tusker was found dead on June 11 in the adjoining district of Balrampur.

Source: 'Nine IFS officers shunted out over elephants' death in Chhattisgarh', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 20/06/2020.

## GUJARAT

### **Central team fails to pinpoint reason behind 30 Asiatic lion deaths**

A four-member central committee has failed to reach a conclusion about the cause of deaths of 30-odd lions in the two-month period upto May 2020. The central team including representatives from the Union environment ministry, the Wildlife Institute of India, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Indian Veterinary Institute had visited Gujarat May end to ascertain if the deaths in the preceding months had occurred due to canine distemper virus (CDV).

The report submitted by the team stated that the deaths are being investigated by the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre and the results are still awaited. It recommended that any lion rescued for treatment should be checked for all viral loads prevalent in the area, including Covid-19 and other infections. It has also recommended that in case of lion deaths, Gujarat follow the protocol laid down by the NTCA.

The tiger death protocol mandates that every death be recorded and a post-mortem carried out in the presence of non-government organizations and volunteers with samples sent to laboratories for further investigation.

An official who was part of the team noted that CDV as the cause could not be confirmed. He, however, questioned why the samples from the dead lions had not been sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) for testing. The principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and chief wildlife warden of Gujarat, said that this time samples could not

be sent to NIV in Pune due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In 2018, the state government had accepted that 27 lion deaths took place in Gir due to CDV after it was confirmed by NIV. (Also see PA Updates Vol. XXVI, No. 2; Vol. XXV, No. 1).

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, Moulik Pathak & Nimesh Khakhariya. 'What killed 30 lions? Probe inconclusive', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 18/06/2020.

### **MoEFCC committee reveals presence of CDV in Gir while FD denies it; state fails to utilize funds to protect Asiatic lions**

Various diseases including Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and multiple organ failure caused 44 of the 85 lion deaths in the Asiatic Lion Landscape (ALL) between January and May 2020, according to a government report. Also, the report has revealed that the Gujarat government has not spent Rs. 26 crore since 2018-19 that was meant for the lion conservation in the ALL, despite 331 deaths in 2018-19.

ALL includes Gir National Park and Sanctuary and covers eight districts of Gujarat, including Junagadh, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Rajkot, Gir-Somnath, Botad and Jamnagar.

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had formed a committee to look into lion deaths in the landscape on May 29. It included representatives from the wildlife division of MoEFCC, National Tiger Conservation Authority, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly and Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun. The committee visited the region on May 30 and June 1. Its report submitted to the MoEFCC and the Prime Minister's Office in the first week of June, showed that in 2018 and 2019, respectively 112 and 134 lions died in the area. The draft

report prepared by the committee also states that 92 lions had died between January and May 2020.

The report lists diseases including rabies, pneumonia, hepatitis, CDV as the causes of death for 44 lions that died in January-May 2020 period; snake bite, electrocution and drowning in wells as the reasons for death of 24 lions and natural causes in 17 cases. Further, it states that the highest number (59) was reported from Gir East Division, which saw an outbreak of CDV in 2018.

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has, however, denied the presence of CDV even though two lions shown to the central committee at the FD's Jasadhar rescue centre were seen suffering from CDV. According to the chief conservator of forests, Junagadh Wildlife Circle, only 46 lions have died here since January. The number according to the FD was 13 for the month of May and 15 for April. Of these, some died of old age, some drowned, some suffered snake bites and some died of electrocution. Only 17-18 have died because of disease and 20 samples have been sent in April for testing. The results were awaited.

At the same time, a lion expert has pointed out that while there is no baseline data for lion mortality in the landscape, the Gujarat government had said in March 2018 that 184 lions had died here in two years. Other experts including a disease ecologist have pointed out that the cause of death and the post-mortem reports pose more questions than they answer.

#### Regarding Funds

It has also been noted that the state government has utilised only Rs. seven crores of the total Rs 38 crores that was sanctioned by the Centre for the two-year period 2018-20 for the Asiatic Lion Conservation Project under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Development of Wildlife Habitat. The state government has also not filled vacant positions. Of the 681 sanctioned positions of

forest guards in the Junagadh Wildlife Circle and Gir East Division, only 360 positions have been filled. Similarly, in the two forest administrative units, only 138 of the 250 sanctioned positions of foresters have been filled. 20 positions of veterinary doctors were sanctioned by the government after the 2018 CDV outbreak, but they too remain vacant.

Source: Ishan Kukreti, 'Govt report blames half of Gir lion deaths in January-May this year on diseases', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 13/07/2020.  
Ishan Kukreti, 'More than Rs 25 crore for Asiatic lions unspent despite 331 deaths', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 13/07/2020.  
Ishan Kukreti, '92 lions already dead in Gir this year, report flags', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 12/06/2020.

### **Wildlife trackers in Greater Gir awaiting their dues since March**

The service contract renewal and salary payments to wildlife trackers working in the Greater Gir area have been delayed as the Gujarat State Lion Conservation Society (GSLCS) has been unable to hold its annual meeting to discuss the same due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

There are 160 wildlife trackers working in Gir and other protected areas where lions are found. The trackers who assist the forest department (FD) are local people and are engaged by GSLCS on 11-month contracts. These are usually signed/renewed in May and expire in March. The trackers continue to work in April but in the absence of a formal contract, they get paid their wages through vouchers. This time, however, they have not been paid since March and their service contracts have not been renewed till date.

The trackers also noted that their salaries have not been increased for the last four years and that they are not paid petrol

allowance for the two-wheelers they use during duty.

Shyamal Tikadar, principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), chief wildlife warden of Gujarat and GSLCS chairman, said that the FD has issued a circular as an interim arrangement and besides Shetrunji division, trackers in other divisions have been paid their salaries with arrears. He added that payments were still pending in Shetrunji division as it is a newly-created division and there is a shortage of staff.

Officials also rejected allegations that salaries had not been increased, pointing to the fact that there was an increase of 10% last year.

Source: Gopal B Kateshiya. 'Gujarat: With lion society meet postponed, salaries of wildlife trackers delayed', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 29/06/2020.

### **JAMMU & KASHMIR**

#### **Hanguls photographed in Shikargarh WLS in Tral**

The wildlife department has, for the first time, camera-trapped 10 hanguls in the Shikargarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the Tral area of South Kashmir. Field staff had reported sightings here but there had been no photographic evidence until now.

According to the 2019 census, the hangul numbers have declined sharply here with the male-female and fawn-female ratios being 15.5 males and 7.5 fawns respectively per 100 females. The census, however, showed a marginal increase in the overall hangul population from 214 in 2017 to 237 in 2019.

The sanctuary that was created in 2019 is spread over an area of 154.15 sq km. It falls in the Pulwama district of south Kashmir and was created by merging Chached, Panyar-Shikargah and Khiram Conservation Reserves (CRs) and few other

forest compartments of Awantipora forest division. It functions as an important corridor for the hangul population between the southern parts of the Shikargah-Panyer and Khiram CRs and the Dachigam National Park in the north.

Source: 'Wildlife department lens captures 10 majestic Hanguls in Shikargah Tral', [www.greaterkashmir.com](http://www.greaterkashmir.com), 25/06/2020.

## **JHARKHAND**

### **Camera traps for monitoring wildlife at Dalma WLS to be installed soon**

With naxalite activities no more a matter of concern, authorities of the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) have decided to go ahead with the installation of trap cameras for monitoring wildlife here. The Dalma divisional forest officer (DFO) said that three cameras have been installed on a trial basis recently and the project will go ahead in October or November.

The cameras were to be installed last year but the plan was shelved for fear of their being stolen or destroyed by naxalites. Long range patrolling (LRP) by paramilitary forces at Dalma and on its periphery last year had made foresters believe that the extremists were wary of cameras, lest their activities be filmed. The LRP was undertaken after rebels killed five policemen at Khokro Haat in Seraikela-Kharsawan on June 14 last year. Moreover, the Dalma hills had witnessed an encounter between Maoists and paramilitary forces at Konkadasa in 2018.

In recent months, however, the rebel threat has almost ceased to exist in the sanctuary, and foresters are confident that they can go ahead with the installation of cameras. These will be set up at strategic locations across the 192 sq km sanctuary. The cameras, it is hoped, would be helpful in keeping a tab on the animals including

elephants and also in minimising poaching and tree felling.

Source: Jayesh Thaker. 'Trap cameras to be set-up at Dalma wildlife sanctuary this winter', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 12/07/2020.

## **KARNATAKA**

### **Construction work threatens Bannerghatta National Park**

The construction work of the 2nd campus of the Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru (IIMB) at Mahanthalingapura village, Jigani Hobli near Bannerghatta National Park (NP) has been a cause of worry for forest officials and conservationists. Despite the ground staffers of the park objecting to the work, the former principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) is said to have given permission just before he retired.

The deputy conservator of forests said that they had rejected the proposal as the Hebbhalla stream would be affected due to IIMB's construction work; besides, IIMB did not share details of the work with the park authorities. They found out that the construction will be at a 40-degree elevation and this will have negative impacts. Conservationists have also pointed out that the area where the construction is going on is part of a crucial elephant corridor.

IIMB officials have said, however, that all clearances were obtained from the forest department before commencing construction. They also noted that the built-up area is 1.84 acres, which is less than 2% of the total land allotted.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'IIM-Bangalore, forest department in zone of contention over eco sensitive zone', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 21/06/2020.



## **KERALA**

### **Karimpuzha to be Kerala's 18th wildlife sanctuary**

Kerala has announced the creation of a new wildlife sanctuary (WLS) - the 18th in the state. Spread over 227 sq km the Karimpuzha WLS comprises the new Amarambalam reserve and adjoining forests currently under the Karulayi and Kalikavu forest ranges of the Nilambur South Division in Malappuram.

The sanctuary has all the seven forest types found in Kerala - evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, sub-tropical hill, sub-tropical savannah, montane wet temperate forests and montane wet grasslands - and covers altitudinal gradients ranging from 40 m to 2,654 m above sea level. It also helps create a contiguous protective area stretch linking two national parks - Mukurthi in Tamil Nadu and Silent Valley in Kerala.

The sanctuary is home to all the mammals that are endemic to the Western Ghats found in the state besides 226 bird and 213 butterfly species.

The forest area is also a home of the Cholanayikka tribe.

Source: KR Rajeev. Karimpuzha to be Kerala's 18th wildlife sanctuary, [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary ESZ to be increased by 10.59 sq km**

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has proposed to increase the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the 16.90 sq. km Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS) by 10.59 sq km. This is being done by increasing the originally proposed buffer area from 0 to 3.5 km to 3.89 km thereby offering protection towards the eastern end of the sanctuary covering the strip

of mangrove forests towards Navi Mumbai. The revised proposal was recently approved by the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) wildlife. Once approved by the state government, it will be sent to the Centre's ESZ committee and the union environment ministry.

If the revised proposal is accepted, the ESZ will cover an area of 44.64 sq. km including 0.3 sq. km mangroves belonging to government agencies. The original ESZ extended on the eastern and western boundaries of the sanctuary and included nine villages. Inclusion of mangrove forests in the buffer zone (in the latest proposal) will cover an additional nine villages towards Navi Mumbai. The total ESZ area, as per the revised draft, comprises 18.48 sq km reserved forest area, 9.13 sq km private mangrove forests, and 17.02 sq km includes private land and creek area.

The PCCF wildlife said that the expanded area is an already notified reserved forest. The decision was taken after the Centre's ESZ committee in February directed the state to include adjoining reserved forests, home to mangroves and mudflats, towards Airoli and Vashi for 'better protection and fortification from a legal standpoint'.

The proposal is expected to be cleared by the Centre during the next meeting of its ESZ committee.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'State expands ESZ to protect 10.59 sq. km more forests around Thane sanctuary', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 18/07/2020.

### **New State Board for Wildlife formed**

The Maharashtra government has formed a 29-member State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) eight months after the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi came to power. The announcement was made in the second week of July. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray would be the chairman of the SBWL while forest minister

Sanjay Rathore would be the vice-chairman. Nitin Kakodkar, the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), was appointed member-secretary of the board, which has a fixed three-year tenure, starting July 7.

Other members of the board include minister for environment and tourism, Aditya Thackeray, minister of state (forests) Dattatraya Bharane, and Dheeraj Deshmukh, a member of the Maharashtra legislative assembly. Bittu Sahgal from Mumbai, Kishor Rithe from Amravati, Anuj Khare from Pune, Vishwas Katdare from Ratnagiri, Kundan Hate from Nagpur, Suhas Waingankar from Kolhapur, among others, are the non-governmental members of SBWL.

Additionally, the board also has a representative each from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Maharashtra Police, Indian Army, Zoological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Bombay Natural History Society, Wildlife Institute of India, Wildlife Conservation Trust, and commissioners of both – the state fisheries and animal husbandry departments.

The SBWL's final recommendations on key development projects such as Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train, wildlife mitigation measures for Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg, Virar-Alibag multi-modal corridor, Delhi-Mumbai freight corridor, Goregaon-Mulund tunnel, which will pass through the boundaries of Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, and two interstate irrigation projects between Maharashtra and Telangana - Pranahita Chevella and Chanaka-Korata – have all been pending since December 2018, when the last meeting of the board had been held.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Maharashtra wildlife board reconstituted 8 months after new govt formation', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 08/07/2020.

## **Tillari declared as a conservation reserve**

The forests of Tillari in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra have been declared a conservation reserve. Located in Dodamarg tehsil, Tillari connects Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Kolhapur with Bhimgad WLS in Belgaum, Karnataka.

Tillari has a breeding population of tigers and is a crucial corridor for the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and Radhanagari WLS. It is also important for elephants which come from Karnataka.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has directed the concerned departments to prepare an eco-tourism proposal for the region on a priority (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 5; Vol. XXI, No. 3 and Vol. XX, No. 5).

Source: 'Konkan's picturesque Tillari is now conservation reserve', [www.outlookindia.com](http://www.outlookindia.com), 24/06/2020.

## **Five tiger deaths in 10 days in Maharashtra**

Five tiger deaths, four of which were under unusual circumstances, were reported in Maharashtra in a 10-day period in June. An initial inquiry by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) revealed lapses by the forest department (FD).

Between June 10 and 14, the putrefied carcasses of a tigress and her two cubs were found in the buffer zone of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). Three arrested locals confessed to poisoning the tigers. According to the NTCA investigating officer, there was a delay by the FD in identifying the carcasses and also lack of seriousness in the entire investigation. The tigress' death was detected late even though it was close to a road. The carcasses of her cubs, which were lying 200 m away, were only detected after three days.

On June 22, 12 days after being captured for killing five people in

Chandrapur, an adult male tiger (KT-1) died at Nagpur's Gorewada rescue centre. The post-mortem report mentioned a specific bloodstream infection as a cause of death. The NTCA officer's investigation however revealed that the exact cause of death was unclear and that the tiger may not have died due to infection because there were no corroborative symptoms of the particular infection. The rescue centre officials said that they had not assessed the tiger's health based on blood reports post-capture as the tiger was extremely aggressive and they had failed to collect its blood samples. This was noted in the NTCA enquiry report, and the officer said that identifying the tiger's condition based on a blood test post-capture could have determined details about when the infection happened.

In the final incident, an adult male tiger was found dead in Chatgaon range of Gadchiroli. The animal was eight years old, and died in an infighting incident with another tiger. The NTCA enquiry found no lapses in this particular case.

A parallel internal investigation by the state FD confirmed carelessness in the case of TATR and action against the responsible staff has reportedly been taken.

Of the nine tiger deaths reported in Maharashtra since January 2020, six have been in the TATR landscape.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Five tiger deaths in 10 days in state, NTCA enquiry reveals lapses', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 25/06/2020.

### **Poachers caught on camera traps in Melghat TR arrested**

Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) officials arrested six persons - all residents of Salona village in Chikhaldara range - after they were caught on camera traps while entering the MTR with hunting dogs, apparently with the intention of poaching. The camera traps had been installed

between May 5 and June 5, 2020, as part of the tiger monitoring programme.

The accused were found moving in Ghatang range in Masondi beat. Earlier, in 2013, organized gangs of poachers from the Baheliya community had killed a sloth bear, tigers and leopards in this beat. Several of them were arrested and convicted while a number of them are still absconding (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 2).

Source: 'Camera traps 'catch' poachers in Melghat', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

### **Wildlife tourism opens in TATR amid confusion due to Covid-19 restrictions**

Though wildlife tourism was opened in the buffer of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) from July 1, there was uncertainty and confusion due to the Covid-19 related restrictions and the lockdown that was extended till July 31 in Maharashtra.

Part of the problem was related to the restrictions on inter-district travel, including that the e-pass is available only for medical emergencies and health related reasons. There is no tourism related column in it. Secondly, online booking for visiting TATR has still not been opened leaving tourists without proof that they are really heading towards the reserve. Resorts and restaurants also remain closed making it impossible for tourists to get accommodation and food during their visits.

Only two parties were able to visit Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in Yavatmal since June 19, when the park opened. District collectors of Yavatmal and Chandrapur admitted that tourism had failed to pick up because of issues related to the restrictions.

Reports from neighbouring Madhya Pradesh suggest that better coordination between district and wildlife officials saw a much better response and success of wildlife tourism activities there.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Buffer tourism opens but tourists can't cross dist. border', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

## **MAHARASHTRA/KARNATAKA**

### **Tiger travels 300 km from Sahyadri TR in Maharashtra to Kali TR in Karnataka**

T-31, a tiger that was camera trapped in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (TR) in 2018 was camera trapped again in April-May 2020 in the Kali TR in neighbouring Karnataka. The tiger is estimated to have travelled nearly 300 km between the two sites in two years.

A senior wildlife official noted that the finding reinforces the fact that the tiger corridors in Central Western Ghats are still viable and that the Kali TR is emerging as a significant source population for tigers in the connected landscape of North Karnataka-Goa-Southern Maharashtra. In 2020, about 25 adult tigers have been recorded in camera traps in Kali Tiger Reserve.

Source: Amit Upadhye. 'Tigers from Maharashtra make Uttara Kannada their home', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 29/07/2020.

## **ODISHA**

### **Fishing cat conservation project at Bhitarkanika NP**

The Odisha Forest Department has started a two-year conservation project for fishing cats in the Bhitarkanika National Park (NP). A new management plan including mapping and survey of the cat population has been devised and a night-time census to find out their exact numbers is to be carried out. Ecological data on the fishing cat in the park is extremely limited. A day time census carried out in 2019 had reported 20 fishing cats here, but the actual number is expected to be higher

because the animal is a nocturnal one and a day-time census was inadequate for the purpose.

Fishing cats hunt fish and crustaceans and also hunt livestock and poultry in villages near forests. Abundant fish in rivers and creeks due to a fishing ban and relatively larger distances from human habitation, however, have seen reduced conflicts around Bhitarkanika.

A major threat for fishing cats is the destruction of wetlands mainly by the prawn mafia, which has been active in areas such as Satabhaya, Bagapatia and other water bodies within the park.

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Odisha starts project to conserve Bhitarkanika fishing cats', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 24/06/2020.

### **Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Palur canal connecting Chilika lake after decades**

Irrawaddy dolphins were sighted again after a few decades in the Palur canal, which connects Chilika Lake with the Rushikulya river-mouth off Ganjam coast. The Chilika Development Authority (CDA) said that dolphins might be back in Palur canal due to clearance of khanda and gherries (illegal pen culture) upstream of the canal in the lake's lagoon helping increase in level of water and food for the dolphins. Removal of 167 sq km of encroachment in the lagoon in the last three years has resulted in an increase in seagrass cover and the re-appearance of sponges here.

During the annual dolphin census in January earlier this year, dolphins were sighted at Magarmukh, Jahnikuda, Mahisa, Rajhans, Nalabana, Kalijugeswar, Malatikuda, Pathara, Samal Island, Kalijai Island, INS Chilika, Krishnaprasad Gada Jetty and Satapada Jetty in Chilika lagoon. As many as 156 dolphins were sighted in Chilika. Movement of dolphins towards new areas in central and southern sector near Kalijai island

and Rambha areas after removal of illegal prawn gherries was also recorded.

The dolphins counted in the lagoon in the 2019 census were 113, while the number in 2018 was 162.

Source: 'Odisha: Dolphin sighted in Palur canal in Ganjam after few decades', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 30/06/2020

## **RAJASTHAN**

### **Tiger' presence in Ramgarh Vishdhari WLS confirmed once again**

Tiger movement and presence has been confirmed once again in the Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), which is proposed to be the state's fourth tiger reserve (TR). Pug-marks of a tiger were first found here by forest staff in June, following which a wildlife official visited the area and confirmed the presence of a tiger in the sanctuary.

It has been suggested that the animal was likely to be one of the two tigers that had over six months ago moved from Ranthambore TR into the forests of Kharayata, about 20 km from the sanctuary and forests of Kuwarti. At least two to three tigers are already present in forests near Lakheri in Bundi district.

Followed by the confirmation of tiger presence, safety and security measures have been increased in the sanctuary, tracking was intensified and camera traps were installed at various locations to get pictures for identification.

Source: 'Tiger moves into proposed big cat sanctuary in Bundi', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

## **TAMIL NADU**

### **Coimbatore APCCF defends staff in allegations over inefficiency and rise in elephant deaths**

"Anti-poaching watchers and guards have been working hard to protect the forest and conserve wildlife; it is not fair to criticise the department for elephant deaths, especially without knowing the efforts made", the additional principal chief conservator of forests (APCCF), Coimbatore, said recently responding to online criticism of the forest department's efficiency on account of a sudden rise in elephant deaths in the Coimbatore Forest Division (CFD).

Explaining the limitations involved in working with limited staff, the official said that with seven forest ranges under its ambit, the CFD is spread over 69,000 hectares. Considering the dense forest and low visibility, an anti-poaching watcher or guard or any other frontline staff would be able to cover 14 km (approximately 56 hectares) a day. However, the staff will not be able to walk alone in the thickets due to threats from wildlife, especially elephants. Such work is therefore carried out in teams of three or four members. It eventually takes a long time for a team to return to the same place they have surveyed before.

Noting that 61 elephant deaths have been reported in Tamil Nadu this year, the APCCF said that usually, elephant deaths increase during the summers. Although this summer was not as dry as the previous year, the number of deaths has increased and the cause is natural. Every time an elephant dies, the department follows the standard operating procedures and conducts the postmortem. He noted that there is transparency in the process and no room, therefore, for manipulation of any data.

In the wake of this issue, Osai, an NGO, has requested the State government to allot funds to appoint a biologist exclusively

to ascertain the reasons for the death of elephants in the CFD.

In Tamil Nadu, Hosur, Erode, Sathyamangalam, Coimbatore, Gudalur Mudumalai and Tirupur forest regions have witnessed a majority of elephant deaths in the recent past.

Source: 'Anti-poaching watchers, guards are not machines',  
www.newindianexpress.com,  
08/07/2020.

## TELANGANA

### **PCCF refuses permission for Uranium survey project in Amrabad TR**

The Telangana principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) has decided not to recommend the proposal of the Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMDER) of the Department of Atomic Energy for conducting a uranium survey and exploration in an 83 sq km area of the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR). The rejection comes after AMDER re-submitted the proposal in the necessary format. The previous Telangana PCCF had cleared the proposal in 2016 (*PA Updates* XXV, No. 4; XXIII, No. 3; and Nos. 71, 50 and 45) despite the fact that AMDER's submission was not as per the prescribed format of the Centre. The exploration would require the drilling of thousands of coring and non-coring boreholes.

Field reports by divisional forest officers from Nagarjunasagar and Amrabad divisions of the tiger reserve have pointed out that drilling would involve movement of men and machinery and also require felling of a large number of trees and forming at least five metre wide tracks. As a result, they did not recommend the project.

The reserve field director also did not recommend the project, noting that it would take five years to complete and would disturb the movement of wildlife. The project, if

taken up, would also cause pollution of "monumental proportions" of water resources and soil. The officer noted that the project aims at extraction of uranium from the catchment of the Krishna and Dindi rivers, and if allowed could lead to the leaching of the radioactive mineral into the ground and the rivers. This would have a disastrous impact on the drinking and irrigation water reaching Hyderabad, the adjoining districts and even certain areas of Andhra Pradesh.

The Telangana government had come under severe criticism from environmentalists last year, after it came to light that the State Board for Wildlife and the previous Telangana PCCF had cleared the proposal in 2016. Following this, even the Central government agencies — National Board for Wildlife and Forest Advisory Committee — had granted in-principle clearances.

Source: V Nilesh. 'Telangana forest official junks uranium mining proposal in Amrabad',  
www.newindianexpress.com,  
12/07/2020.

## TRIPURA

### **All elephants in Tripura to be collared**

All wild and captive elephants in Tripura would be 'collared' using satellite and very high frequency (VHF) collars to keep a track of their movements and drive them back to forests in case of any imminent conflict. This is in response to the fact that the state experiences 50 incidents of human-elephant conflict on an average every year.

The chief wildlife warden of the state said that elephant movements have become restricted in few parts of the state like Simna, Tulashikhar and Khawai due to habitat fragmentation by roads. The forest department (FD) recently placed a proposal to the National Highway Authorities of India to make elevated roads in certain patches prone

to elephant movement and leave underpasses for elephants. It has also requested all municipal self-governance bodies to avoid dumping urban waste near the highway or forests.

As part of setting up defense mechanisms for villagers, the state government has started projects for beekeeping in agricultural fields and also for growing elephant fodder in the forests.

As per an old FD report, Tripura has 102 elephants including 42 wild elephants. A new elephant survey was undertaken in March this year but the report could not be finalized due to the Covid-19 related lockdown and restrictions.

Source: Debraj Deb. 'Tripura to radio collar elephants to minimize human-jumbo conflict', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 20/06/2020.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### **Elevated road to pass through recently proposed TR in Sivalik Forest Division**

Uttar Pradesh (UP) officials have started working on a proposed elevated road that will pass through the reserved forests of UP and Uttarakhand to connect Saharanpur with Dehradun. The forests through which the road will pass are part of the recently proposed tiger reserve (TR) covering the forests of the Sivalik Forest Division in the state.

The elevated road is a part of the Delhi-Dehradun four-lane project. According to the National Highways Authority of India, the 19.6 km project would be completed at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,500 crores in around three years. 12 of the 19.6 km - from Mohand till Dak Kali Temple near the tunnel - will be elevated. It will be built alongside the rivulet at a height that allows free movement of elephants. State authorities have claimed that no cutting of trees will be needed since the

road would run along a rivulet and will also be elevated.

The Saharanpur divisional commissioner has, reportedly, written to the UP Public Works Department that the best way to construct a road is by not expanding the existing road, but by taking a detour into Mohand Rau (a seasonal rivulet) and taking an elevated road along the river. This, he has claimed, shall save the cost of a tunnel and provide safe passage to wild animals between the contiguous forest of Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand and Sivalik Forest Division in Saharanpur, UP thereby reducing man-animal conflict.

Source: Sandeep Rai. 'Now, elevated four-lane road in recently proposed tiger corridor', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

## UTTARAKHAND

### **Elephant dies in Corbett TR a day after radio-collaring**

Corbett Tiger Reserve's (TR) most aggressive elephant was found dead in mid-July near Mohan range of Almora Forest Division just one day after it was radio-collared. Officials ruled out the cause of death due to an overdose of a tranquiliser saying that the elephant was on the move the whole day after it had been collared. The Uttarakhand chief wildlife warden noted that it appeared, *prima facie*, a case of death due to in-fighting. The viscera sample is to be tested at the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Bareilly, for further investigation.

An official said that the tusker had created panic among the public in the Corbett landscape and Ramnagar region. It was very aggressive and had attacked many people in the past two years. The animal had a habit of vandalising moving vehicles on the Ramnagar-Almora highway, which lies on the



border between CTR and Ramnagar Forest Division. It had also killed a person in Mohan range.

This is the fourth death of an elephant in Corbett landscape this year. Earlier deaths were reported from the TR's Dhela, Jhirna range and the Kalagarh area.

Source: Ankur Sharma. 'A day after Corbett's rogue elephant was radio-collared, carcass spotted in jungles', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 15/07/2020.

### **Elephants killed by tigers not to be cremated in Corbett TR**

The Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) is planning to not cremate elephants killed by tigers in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR); instead they will allow tigers to feed on the pachyderm carcasses. The FD will send a proposal regarding this to the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Many elephants get killed by tigers in the reserve and existing norms stipulate that these elephants have to be cremated after their autopsy is done. However, if a tiger hunts a deer, the carcass is allowed to be left for the tigers to feed on. The proposed change is on similar lines.

The reserve has around 260 tigers and if the elephant meat from the kills is left for them then the abundance of food will prevent tigers from infighting, some officials said.

A wildlife activist has pointed out in this context should the proposal be accepted special efforts will have to be made to monitor the kill site to prevent the elephant's tusks from being taken away by smugglers.

Source: Ankur Sharma. 'Uttarakhand forest dept mulls plan to not cremate elephants killed by tigers in Corbett Tiger Reserve', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 24/06/2020.

### **Transfer of land from Gangotri NP for border roads approved**

The Uttarakhand State Wildlife Advisory Board, in a meeting held at the end of June, has approved three proposals for transferring land from the Gangotri National Park (NP) for road construction near the China border for use by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). The total land involved is 73.36 hectares while the length of road to be constructed is 35.66 km. The first of the proposals is for a 11.85 km long road between Sumla and Thangla-1, the 2nd, 17.60 km from Mandi to Sangchokla, and a third, a 6.21 km stretch proposed from Tripadi to Rangmachgaad.

These proposals will now be sent to the National Board for Wildlife for approval.

Source: Lalmani Verma. 'Uttarakhand okays forest land transfer for roads to China border', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 30/06/2020.

### **Elephant population rises in Uttarakhand**

The population of elephants in Uttarakhand has risen from 1,839 in 2017 to 2,026 in 2020. The information was provided in the 15th State Board for Wildlife meeting held in June.

The count is the outcome of a three-day elephant estimation exercise conducted across the Corbett and Rajaji Tiger Reserves (TRs) and all the connected and associated forest divisions (FDs). The maximum 1,224 elephants were found in Corbett TR followed by 1,011 in the Ramnagar Terai FD. Rajaji TR was home to 352 elephants while the number for the Kotdwar was 213. No elephants were reported in Narender Nagar and Kalsi FDs. There were 285 young elephants below five years of age and 285 suckling calves. The male-to-female sex ratio of elephants in Uttarakhand is 1:2.5 (the gender of 47 animals could not be identified).



The All India Synchronised Elephant Estimation had, in its 2017 report noted that Karnataka had the largest number of 6,049 wild elephants in the country. This was followed by Assam with 5,719, Kerala with 3,054, Tamil Nadu with 2,761, and Odisha with 1,976.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'U'khand records over 10% increase in jumbo population in less than 3 yrs', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 30/06/2020.

### **Van Gujjar community members in Rajaji NP allege assault by forest officials**

In a complaint filed on 16 June 2020, a father-daughter duo from the Van Gujjar community in Aasa Rodi range of the Rajaji National Park (NP), has alleged that forest officials beat a woman with sticks, tore her salwar and dragged her on the floor by her hair. The alleged incident happened after this father-daughter duo resisted the officials' attempt to demolish their camps, claiming their forest rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) were still pending at the block level.

The complaint mentions that the woman presented references to the Supreme Court's stay on eviction and a high court order that recognises legal rights of the community over the land. The Nainital High Court had in a response to Writ Petition No. 998/2017, recognised in 2017 the rights of the Van Gujjars saying, "Until and unless the Van Gujjars are not settled under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, no eviction can take place".

The villagers in the Aasa Rodi range alleged further that the officials returned the next day, 17 June, with at least 30 others and assaulted women. According to the complaint letter, as women lost consciousness and were bleeding, they were taken to Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya government hospital in

Dehradun. The villagers further alleged that they tried to lodge two first information reports (FIRs) in the matter. The station officer (SO) of the Clementon Town police station, however, denied having received any such complaints/requests to register FIRs.

FIRs were, however, lodged against the villagers under as Sections 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapons), 504 (provocation and disrupting public peace), 506 (criminal intimidation), 333 (voluntary causing grievous hurt to public servant during the discharge of his duties) , 353 (grievous hurt to public servant, obstructing him to discharge his duties), 307 (attempts to murder) of Indian Penal Code. The SO is reported to have said that some people from Aasa Rodi range were arrested after the police received a call and were informed that the Van Gujjars were encroaching the land and had attacked forest department officials there.

The chief conservator of forests said that some Van Gujjars in the area have been relocated and rehabilitated according to the FRA. Some, however claim that they have been left out of the process. Their claims need to be verified and investigated.

Following the FIR, seven villagers, including the father-daughter duo, were arrested on June 18, informed the Uttarakhand Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha. The relatives who visited them alleged "torture to the duo in detention". A relative alleged that two women including the daughter were hit by the officials; the medical certificate, allegedly prepared by the police, however, shows them as being 'fit'.

Four arrested women had been released as on July 4. However, three people, including the father, was still under arrest on June 30.

Activists meanwhile met Uttarakhand Governor Baby Rani Maurya on June 24 and demanded an enquiry into the matter and withdrawal of all cases against the villagers.

Activists have also requested Uttarakhand's forest minister to investigate the incident.

Source: Sushmita. 'Uttarakhand Van Gujjars allege forest officials assaulted women; probe underway', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 30/06/2020.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### 68 dolphins in Chambal River sanctuary: census

According to the latest census report of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD), there are 68 dolphins in the 435 km long Chambal River sanctuary which passes through three states – Madhya Pradesh (MP), Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Rajasthan. The report, which came out in last week of June, states that the dolphin number has reduced by 13 per cent in four years and that the decreasing trend is continuing from 2016 when their number was 78.

The dolphins were first spotted in 1985 in the Chambal River near Etawah. The number then was more than 110 but has been reducing ever since, with poaching said to be the main cause.

Research by the Wildlife Institute of India has suggested that the maximum carrying capacity of the Chambal is 125 dolphins. The animal needs at least three metre depth and approximately 266 to 289 cubic m per sec. flow of water as a suitable habitat. Perennial problems like illegal extraction of sand from the river bed and water withdrawal projects in Morena, Dholpur and Kota are disturbing the whole ecosystem of the river and decreasing the water level and flow.

In 2006, the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) had ordered a ban on mining in the sanctuary area. However, according to the principal chief

conservator of forests (PCCF), wildlife, withdrawal of water from the river is a big concern. Illegal sand mining is also rampant in Bhind and Morena in MP and Dholpur in Rajasthan. Forest teams have experienced many life-threatening attacks while taking action against the sand mafia.

Source: Shruti Tomar. 'Dolphin number dips in Chambal river, experts raise concern', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 15/07/2020.

### PAs and zoological parks face financial crunch due to Covid-19 lockdown

Many protected areas and zoological parks (ZPs) in the country have approached the Centre for financial support as they are unable to generate resources for the staff in light of the Covid-19 related lockdown. Some have also sought permission to reopen for visitors to generate revenue.

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has received requests from some ZPs to be allowed to operate for they are finding it difficult to bear even the basic expenses with no income from ticketing. The CZA has reportedly allowed two ZPs, one in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and the other in Bannerghatta, Bengaluru to allow visitors. Many tiger reserves too have written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority for expediting release of central funding to meet the regular expenses.

While national parks and tiger reserves remain closed during the rainy season (June-September), they missed out on earnings from tickets and permits during the peak tourist season from March to May due to the lockdown.

Source: Richa Sharma. 'COVID-19 lockdown: Zoos, national parks face financial crunch; seek Centre's help for staff salaries', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 28/06/2020.

## **Five coal blocks including one near Tadoba Andhari TR removed from auction list**

The Union Ministry of Coal has decided to withdraw the Bander coal block located close to the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and four blocks in Chhattisgarh from the list of 41 coal blocks put up for auction on June 18. There was no withdrawal of blocks in Jharkhand leading the state government to challenge the Centre's decision in the Supreme Court. Union minister for coal, mines and parliamentary affairs, Pralhad Joshi, said that the five blocks, Bander in Maharashtra and Sayang, Madanpur (North), Morga (South) and Morga-II — all in Hasdeo Aranya area of Chhattisgarh, had been removed from the auction list following requests from the respective state governments.

The total mining lease area on offer in Bander was 1,643.67 hectares (257 hectares for open cast mine and 913.16 hectares for underground mining); 1,170.16 hectares of this area is said to be thickly forested. Based on camera trapping exercises conducted over several years, Bander block area is a well-established corridor which is used by tigers to move towards the protected areas of Bor, Umred Karhandla, Pench and Melghat. The area also has resident tigers.

The listing of the coal block was opposed by several wildlife activists. They said that it would further intensify the human-animal conflict in Chandrapur district. A public interest litigation had also been filed and the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court had sought replies from the ministries and related governments in the matter.

Former union environment minister, Jairam Ramesh, and Maharashtra environment minister, Aaditya Thackeray, had separately written to environment minister, Prakash Javadekar, seeking the removal of the Bander coal block from the

auction list. Ramesh, while working as the environment minister, had demarcated coal blocks into go and no-go areas in tandem with the coal ministry on the basis of ecological sensitivity. Earlier, the coal block was listed for auction in 1999 and 2009, but the proposals were shelved after similar opposition.

In his letter to Javadekar, Chhattisgarh forest minister, Mohammad Akbar, said that there had been an increase in the numbers of wild elephants in the coal block area between Hasdeo Aranya and Mand river area and 1,995 sq km of forests around Hasdeo river has been declared as the Lemru Elephant Reserve. It is necessary to stop mining in that region, he noted, to prevent escalation of human-elephant conflict and loss of human lives.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Min: On state request, no auctioning of Bander, 4 coal blocks in Ch'garh',

[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 01/07/2020.

Vivek Deshpande. 'After activists raise ecological concerns, Bander coal block struck off auction list',

[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 30/06/2020.



## NOW AVAILABLE

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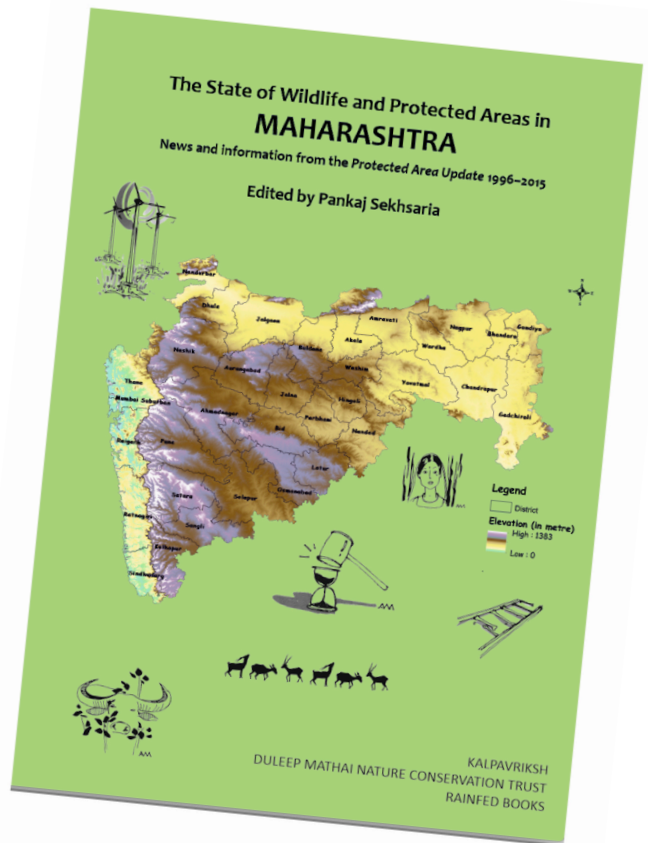
**- Section 1: News and Information from protected areas:** Bhimashankar WLS, Bhorgad CR, Bor WLS, Gautala Autramghat WLS, Kolamarka CR, Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Gyanganga WLS Jaikwadi Bird Sanctuary, Kalsubai-Harishchandragad WLS, Karnala WLS, Lonar WLS, Mahabaleshwar ESZ, Mahendri Reserve Forest, Mansingdeo WLS, Matheran ESZ, Muniya CR, Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Radhanagari WLS, Rehekuri Blackbuck Sanctuary, Sanjay Gandhi NP, Sewri Wetlands, Tansa WLS, Thane Creek WLS, Tipeswar WLS, Tungreshwar WLS, Umred-Karhandla WLS, Yawal WLS, Melghat TR, Nawegaon-Nagzira TR, Pench TR, Sahyadri TR, Tadoba-Andhari TR, Tigers, General News from Maharashtra

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## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

### RAJASTHAN

#### **FD requests WII to conduct GIB census in Jaisalmer area**

The Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) has written to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) requesting it to conduct a census of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in Jaisalmer area, an important GIB habitat. The last census was held here in March 2017.

A water hole census conducted on June 5 and 6 earlier this year in the Desert National Park and other areas counted a total of only 19 GIBs - four in the Pokhran and Ramdeora areas and 15 at the Sudasri range of the national park. One reason given for the low count was that it had rained a couple of days prior to the count and that this may have led the birds and animals to disperse as water was available over a larger area.

76 desert cats, 237 Indian fox, 2,553 chinkaras, 206 desert fox and 1,932 peacocks were also sighted during the count.

Source: 'Hold GIB census: Forest department to Wildlife Institute of India', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 18/06/2020.

### UTTAR PRADESH

#### **Uttar Pradesh to get its first vulture conservation centre in Maharajganj district**

The Centre has approved the proposal for setting up the first vulture conservation centre in Uttar Pradesh. It will be known as the 'Jatayu Conservation and Breeding Centre' and will be built on five hectares of land in Bhari-Baisi village in Farenda tehsil of Maharajganj district.

The facility will include a lab, residential complex for doctors and other related facilities. The infrastructure will be built in the first phase of the project and the breeding of the birds will only be done in the 3rd phase. Divisional forest officer, Gorakhpur, said that technical expertise for the project will be taken from the Bombay Natural History Society.

A detailed project report for the project that is estimated to cost between Rs. four to five crore is still to be prepared. The state government is reported to have already approved a budget of Rs. 82 lakh for the project.

Source: 'UP's first vulture conservation centre to come up in Maharajganj district', [www.timesnownews.com](http://www.timesnownews.com), 26/06/2020.



#### **Google-group for the *PA Update***

Readers who would like to regularly receive the electronic version of the *PA Update* can do so by to this mailing list by visiting:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/paupdate>

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago**

*PA Update 86, August 2010*

of it.

### **Satellite-collared leopard walks 120 kms to Sanjay Gandhi National Park**



A project involving satellite tracking of collared leopards has documented a case of a leopard that walked 120 kms to the forests of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai. The animal was released at Malshej Ghat in Pune district as part of joint effort between Project Waghoba and the Maharashtra FD.

The animal had been rescued from a well in Alephata near the Pune-Nashik highway about a year ago. It was fitted with a collar and released near Malshej Ghat. The collar had a Global Positioning System (GPS) and Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM). The readings of the leopard's position were stored in the collar and transmitted via SMS to the server whenever the animal reached an area that had mobile connectivity.

The animal took about 23 days to complete its journey. In the process it crossed the railway line close to the station at Kasara and headed towards the Tansa and Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuaries before finally reaching the Nagla block in the northern part of Sanjay Gandhi NP. It then swam across the Vasai creek, and crossed the busy Ghodbunder Road to enter the main area of the national park.

The tracking device reportedly malfunctioned when the animal crossed the creek and as a result the researchers lost track

Source: Simit Bhagat. 'Spotted: Ajoba's trek from Malshej Ghat to national park' *The Times of India*, 30/06/10.

### **Four policemen suspended for getting too close to tigress in Nagzira WLS**

Four policemen, all constables, were suspended recently for getting too close to a tigress in the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary. They were held guilty of violating forest and wildlife regulations including carrying weapons inside the protected area, entering the park without proper authorization, alighting from the vehicle, and stepping close to a protected and endangered creature.

The four, all attached to the Bhandara district police headquarters, reportedly left their official vehicles and went very close to a tigress in an attempt to get a picture on their mobile phone cameras.

The tigress was resting near a waterhole around 7 a.m. when a dozen policemen came to the spot in two vehicles. Some of them belonged to the security provided to Justice R.M. Borde of the Bombay High Court (Nagpur Bench), who had gone for a visit to the park. Four policemen from the group disembarked along with their weapons and cameras and moved towards the tigress. When they did not heed her angry warnings, she roared loudly and jumped towards them. Shaken, they scampered back to their vehicles.

A group of tourists, who were present at the spot, complained to forest officials about the incident.

Source: 'Cops suspended for getting too close to tigress', <http://sify.com/news> 16/06/10



### अनुक्रमणिका

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दोघांचा शोध सुरू		येऊर हिल्स परिसरात राजी क्रिकेट सामन्यांवर बंदी	
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संख्यावाढीला मर्यादा		धनी	१४

## New!

Kalpavriksh is very happy to announce the publication of the *Maharashtra Sanrakshit Kshetra Vartapatra* (Maharashtra Protected Area Newsletter), a new initiative in Marathi that will be focused on issues of conservation and protected area management in the state of Maharashtra. The 24 page newsletter is edited by Reshma Jathar and will be published four times a year. The first issue was published April 2020 and the second issue in July 2020.

If you are interested in receiving the newsletter either as a soft copy or in a print form, please write to us at

**marathipaupdate@gmail.com**



## **PERSPECTIVE**

### **Critical Wildlife Habitat: Another tool for eviction?**

The Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) attempts to put in place a new paradigm of forest governance and conservation in which forest dwellers are seen as “integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem”. Unfortunately, the ham-handed implementation of the Critical Wildlife Habitat (CWH) provisions of this Act have become another point of conflict between the Maharashtra Forest Department (MFD) and forest-dwellers. A public-interest-litigation (PIL) filed in the Mumbai High Court (HC), by a conservation group, Vanashakti, has triggered a process in 54 PAs that seems to be yet another excuse for evicting forest-dwellers.

The CWH provisions specify a detailed participatory process to explore whether the exercise of forest rights will lead to ‘irreversible damage and threat to existence of wildlife species’. In such cases, a modification of rights may be jointly proposed, including (if absolutely necessary) the resettlement of the rights-holders. Clearly, this first requires that rights be recognized. Then a participatory process follows, in which eviction is the last resort. But the MFD has cut corners at every stage.

First, they constituted committees that do not meet the norms set by MoEFCC. They even include folks who question the constitutionality of the FRA itself. Second, they have adopted criteria for ‘criticality’ that are neither scientifically settled, nor are they relevant to the real question of whether there is threat of irreversible damage due to forest rights. Third, the process of rights recognition, especially community forest rights (CFRs), is in fact quite incomplete in PAs. But instead, the MFD has claimed in a recent affidavit in the HC that there are no

human habitations in 25 of the 54 PAs, that no forest rights claims can therefore be made and so they can be declared as CWHs immediately. The situation on the ground is very different - habitations do exist inside some of the PAs and all have villages adjacent to their boundaries that could claim customary use rights within the PA. In one case, CFR rights have even been recognized!

in the case of Melghat where the CWH process has gone the furthest, the Expert Committee consultations were a travesty of the law, focusing simply on convincing forest-dwellers that they have to leave. Overall, it appears that the CWH provision in FRA is being used as another tool to evict local communities from the PAs. An opportunity to explore co-existence—which many PAs show is possible—has been turned into yet another excuse for evicting forest-dwellers and pursuing the unjust and unsustainable model of ‘fortress conservation’.

**- ATREE and Kalpvriksh CFR team**

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