

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XIX No. 6

December 2013 (No. 106)

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

A falcon and an elephant

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Arunachal Pradesh

Red panda photographed for the first time at
Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary

Assam

KMSS to move NGT against cement plants near
Amchang, Pobitara WLSs
NGT directions on highway inside KNP
MoEF seeks a detailed report on army occupation
of land inside Sonai-Rupai WLS

Delhi

BNHS to set up CEC inside Asola Bhatti WLS

Goa

ESZs notified for six PAs
Rare tree found in Mhadei WLS

Gujarat

Number of tourists double up on the first day of
new season at Gir
No CDV infections in Asiatic lions
Experts recommend shifting of 12 lions in first
phase
Gujarat to prepare health report for Marine
National Park

Karnataka

FD to capture at least 25 wild elephants from Alur
in Hassan district

Madhya Pradesh

NHAI lowers land demand for widening of NH7
near Pench TR

Maharashtra

Panel to get views on ESZ status for the
Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor
New rescue centre for leopards at the Sanjay
Gandhi NP
Deer from Maharaj Bagh Zoo to be released in
Pench TR

Odisha

Forest range office, boats set on fire in Gahirmatha
Marine Sanctuary
Odisha issues SOP to curb man-animal conflicts

Rajasthan

Rajasthan completes numbering of tigers in
Ranthambhore TR

Tamil Nadu

Cracker-free Diwali in eight villages surrounding
Vellore Bird Sanctuary
Drive to remove lantana, plant native trees inside
Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife
Sanctuary
Forester suspended for using explosives inside
Kalakad-Mundanthurai TR
Granite quarries affecting wildlife of KMTR
Soligas fined for clearing forest, expanding
agriculture in Sathyamangalam TR
Tamil Nadu notifies Gangaikondan Spotted deer
Sanctuary

Uttarakhand

Expert group to study environmental impacts of
hydropower projects in Alaknanda and
Bhagirathi basins

Uttar Pradesh

Dudhwa TR prepares for the upcoming tourist
season

West Bengal

NTCA demands photographic evidence of tigers in
Buxa TR
Concerns over ambitious tourism project proposed
in the Sunderbans
State notifies West Sunderbans WLS

SOUTH ASIA

Bhutan

Training for Bhutanese foresters to prevent
wildlife crime

INTERNATIONAL NEWS	17	Nagaland	
First International Meet on Elephants postponed		Satellite tags, rings for Amur Falcons	
IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE	18	The FRA, PAs and Wildlife Conservation	20
Assam		National Consultation on Forest Rights Act and Protected Areas – A Brief Report	
Deepor Beel festival from December 23		Amendment to the WLPA does not acknowledge FRA – Submission by Kalpavriksh	
Low oxygen level causes fish deaths in Deepor Beel			
Gujarat		A DECADE AGO	23
Part of Thol WLS declared eco-sensitive zone			
Himachal Pradesh		PERSPECTIVE	24
Bird ringing station set up in Great Himalayan National Park		Giving fresh water fishes their due	
Manipur			
Civil Society Organizations in Manipur discuss livelihood impacts of power project and law on Loktak			

Protected Area Update
Vol. XIX, No. 6, December 2013 (No. 106)

Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

Editorial Assistance: **Reshma Jathar, Anuradha Arjunwadkar**

Illustrations: **Madhuvanti Anantharajan, Peeyush Sekhsaria**

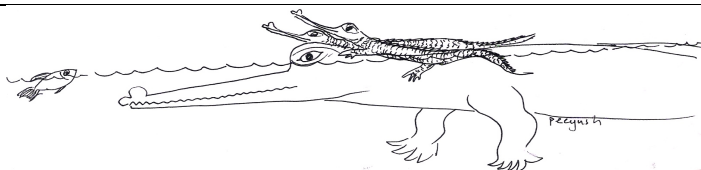
Produced by

The Documentation and Outreach Centre
KALPAVRIKSH

Apartment 5, Shri Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004, Maharashtra, India.

Tel/Fax: 020 – 25654239. Email: pseksaria@gmail.com

Website: <http://kalpavriksh.org/protected-area-update>



Publication of the PA Update has been supported by

Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)

<http://fes.org.in/>

Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, C/o FES

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India

Bombay Natural History Society

Action Aid India

Donations from a number of individual supporters

Information has been sourced from different newspapers and from

<http://indiaenvironmentportal.org.in>; www.conservationindia.org

EDITORIAL

A falcon and an elephant

The months of October and November saw what was, arguably, one of the most intense conservation campaigns in recent times – NGOs, the media, the Nagaland government and local communities came together in a high decibel, high visibility effort to protect the migratory Amur Falcons as they transit through Nagaland, across to the continent of Africa. The campaign that was a combination of enforcement and awareness was fuelled by reports from previous years that 1000s of these birds are hunted during their stay in Nagaland. And if available information is anything to go by, it has been considerably successful with the hunting threat having been successfully mitigated this year.

Then on November 6, in what was a fitting culmination to the campaign as also the short stay of these millions of birds in Nagaland, three falcons were fitted with satellite transmitters to help track their monumental onward journey. At the time of writing this editorial, about two weeks after the fitting of the transmitters, the birds are very much in the middle of their spectacular journey. From Nagaland they travelled south to somewhere along the east coast, then turned west, flying across the Indian subcontinent, past the west coast of India and across the oceans to Africa. It's a voyage that has enthralled bird lovers in India and across the world. It's helped keep alive the magic of nature's wonder and a sense of achievement in an otherwise beleaguered conservation scenario.

The respite, however, was only momentary because on November 13 came the tragic news of another train accident in North Bengal involving an entire herd of elephants. In what is by far one of the most ghastly such accidents ever, a train running at nearly 80 kmph thundered into a herd of nearly 40 elephants as they were crossing the tracks near the Chapramari WLS. Seven animals including

a pregnant female were killed and several others were left injured.

There really are no words to describe what happened and the criminal callousness with which these accidents continue to occur. Perfunctory noises are being made as always – charges are being traded, an FIR has been filed and there have been reports of some technological solutions being put in place to avoid another such disaster. We have to wait and watch to see what will finally happen and what solutions will finally work, but if history is anything to go by, we can only continue to expect the worst.

A falcon soaring high across the Arabian Sea; an elephant dangling lifeless from a railway bridge¹ – one we can only imagine, the other brings us back hard and painful to solid reality. Moments of hope continue to be drowned out in oceans of despair and we continue with a death wish we've made out for the other denizens who came to this planet much before we did. We are surely capable of much better than this!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Red panda photographed for the first time at Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary



Though there had been reports of Red panda *Ailurus fulgens* sightings at the Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, it is only recently that it has

¹ For that photo see <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2507093/Seven-elephants-killed-passenger-train-ploughs-herd-40-India.html>

been photographed for the first time. It was photographed by one of the camera traps laid by wildlife biologist Nandini Velho as part of her PhD project for James Cook University, Australia.

Velho was assisted by another wildlife biologist from the Wildlife Institute of India and park authorities. Despite the vast diversity of wildlife here, there has been no documentation on the mammalian fauna of the sanctuary and the surrounding community forests. In 2006, a new bird species, *Bugun liocichla*, was discovered at Eaglenest. The Tibetan brimstone, a butterfly subspecies, seen just once before in history, in China, was also spotted in the sanctuary recently.

Source: Pullock Dutta, 'Camera traps red panda in Arunachal', *The Telegraph*, 08/10/13

Contact: **DFO, Seijusa, I/c Eaglenest WLS**,
Dist. West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh

ASSAM

KMSS to move NGT against cement plants near Amchang, Pobitora WLSs

The Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) had decided to move the National Green Tribunal (NGT) against Assam government's alleged inaction on a central directive to close down three cement plants situated close to Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The KMSS and some citizens' groups have been demanding closure of the cement and coke plants operating in the proximity of the Amchang WLS and also the Pobitora WLS.

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests had asked Assam principal secretary (Forests), in a letter dated August 27, 2013, to close down Raksha Cements, AG Cements and CMCL Cements. On the basis of the letter, the secretary asked the Divisional Forest Officer of Kamrup (East) division, on September 26, to take immediate steps for closure of the three plants but the order has not been enforced.

The three cement companies were inspected by the Chief Conservator of Forests and a scientist on August 20, 2013. They have reported that these companies are situated

within a 10 km radius of Amchang WLS, which is the eco-sensitive zone.

KMSS has also alleged that the Assam Pollution Control Board had given no-objection certificates to these cement units. As the state Forest Department is yet to close down the three cements plants, KMSS has decided to move the NGT and launch an agitation for immediate closure of the units.

Source: 'KMSS to move green tribunal - Plea to close down 3 cement plants in Assam', *The Telegraph*, 17/10/13.

NGT directions on highway inside KNP



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has restrained the Assam government from widening National Highway (NH) 37, which passes through Kaziranga National Park (KNP). The NGT, after hearing a petition filed by a resident of the Bokakhat area in Golaghat district, said NH 37 passing from Jakhalabandha to Bokakhat, cutting through KNP is a violation of the conditions imposed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). This section of the highway divides the landscape into the low-lying grasslands of KNP in the north and the elevated Karbi Anglong hills in the south. The highway also cuts across four wildlife corridors between the park and the Karbi Anglong hills.

The petition was filed to draw attention to the non-compliance of the environmental clearance conditions imposed by the MoEF order - dated May 31, 1991 - granted to the Numaligarh Refinery for setting up its project in Golaghat. One of the conditions relates to

denotification of the stretch of NH 37 from Jakhalabandha to Bokakhat and the diversion of the highway away from the KNP.

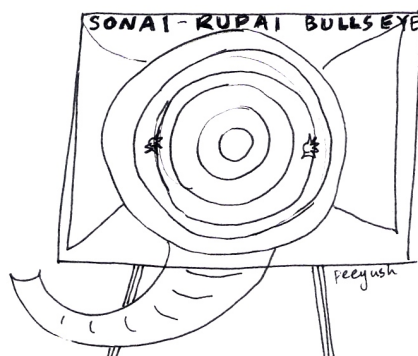
The petitioner has pointed out that despite the passage of two decades, neither had the highway been diverted from the park nor was any step taken for either handing over the same to the KNP authorities or de-notifying the road from the highway records.

The NGT has granted a week's time to the Assam government to prepare the complete project report in consultation with the MoEF and to place the same on record. It has also asked the government to state the steps that have been taken in furtherance of the order of the MoEF dated May 31, 1991. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 5; Vol. XVI, Nos. 5, 4 & 1; Vol. XIV, No. 6; Vol. XIII, Nos. 6, 2 & 1 and Vol. XI, Nos. 6 & 4).

Source: 'Green tribunal stops highway widening', *The Telegraph*, 10/10/13.

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

MoEF seeks a detailed report on army occupation of land inside Sonai-Rupai WLS



The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has asked the Assam Forest Department (FD) to send a detailed report on the occupation by the army of land inside the Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary

This was recommended by the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the MoEF in a meeting in September held to discuss an army proposal for diversion of 481.566 hectares of

forestland for construction of ammunition depot in Charduar Reserve Forest under Sonitpur West division. The area is separated from the sanctuary only by a road of only about 12 to 15 feet width. According to the FAC the army already has about 200 acres of the sanctuary land under its occupation.

The MoEF has also sought comments from the Chief Wildlife Warden on the project site and the opinion of the National Board for Wildlife, as the site is close to a protected area. An environment clearance will be required as the built-up area proposed for the project is more than 20,000 sq metres and 72 trees will be felled.

The regional office of the MoEF had stated in its site inspection report that the proposal for diversion of 481.566 hectares in the adjacent area for the same purpose was accorded "in-principle approval" by the MoEF in 2005. The report has asked the FD to submit a revised compensatory afforestation plan after identification of a new site, which is free from encumbrances along with a site-suitability certificate from a competent authority.

The FD had recommended the proposal in view of the importance of national security and strategic location of the identified site, which is near the road/foothills of the Arunachal Pradesh border and has the barest minimum forestland with little vegetation. Sonai-Rupai WLS is reported to have lost 85 sq km out of its 220 sq km area to encroachment before 2007.

The MoEF, in 2011, had asked the army not to practise at the firing range until it had obtained the necessary clearance. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XVII, No. 4)

Source: 'Delhi frowns on army in Sonai', *The Telegraph*, 10/10/13.

Contact: **DFO, Sonai-Rupai WLS**, Sonitpur West Division, P.O. Tezpur, Dist. Sonitpur - 784 001, Assam. Tel: 03712-220093(O), 220091 (R).

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

DELHI

BNHS to set up CEC inside Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

A proposal has been cleared for the setting up of a Conservation Education Centre (CEC) in the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). It would be modeled on an existing CEC in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai. The BNHS already has a small centre inside the sanctuary in Delhi that organizes walks on two nature trails and a few other activities. There will now be funds to conduct these and related activities on a larger scale.

The CEC will be an eight-member team functioning with support from the Forest Department (FD). The centre manager and education officer have been hired for the project and they will be trained in Mumbai. The Chief Wildlife Warden and the FD staff of Asola Bhatti will be overseeing the activities of BNHS. The BNHS will also initiate a three-year biodiversity survey of the Asola Bhatti WLS.

Source: Jayashree Nandi, 'Asola Bhatti to welcome students, nature lovers', *The Times of India*, 20/10/13.

GOA

ESZs notified for six PAs

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has notified eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) for six protected areas (PAs) in Goa. For five PAs, the ESZ will include an area of one km around their respective boundaries while for the Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) it would cover a radius of three kms from the boundary.

The demarcation of the ESZ envisages a ban on mining and other activities in the case of four protected areas, Mhadei, Bondla, Cotigao and the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary effective from January 2014. All the activities listed in the notification will be banned after a 60-day period of the notification.

The ban extends to existing mining of minor and major minerals, stone quarrying and crushing units. Mining will however continue in

the Netravali WLS and the Bhagwan Mahaveer National Park (NP) and the state government has been given five to 10 years to phase out these activities.

Four villages, Govanem, Assode, Sirsode and Surla will be completely within the ESZ of the Bhagwan Mahaveer NP and Molem WLS while 14 other villages including Shigao, Colem, Codli and Sangod will be partially in the sensitive area. In the case of Neturlim WLS, five villages, Nundem, Dongar, Viliena, Bati and Cumbari will be totally in the ESZ and 13 other villages, including Selaulim, Tudov, Potrem and Gaondongorim will be partly in it. In the case of the Cotigao WLS, three villages, Poinguinim, Gaondongorim and Cotigao will be in this sensitive zone.

Eleven villages, including Govanem, Sirsode and Choraundem will be completely in the ESZ of the Mhadei WLS while 23 other areas including Copardem, Ambeli and Bhuimpal will be partially in the ESZ. In the case of Bondla WLS, four villages, Darbandora, Usgao, Gotaikhadiwada and Melaulim will be totally encompassed by the one-km zone while seven villages, including Pissurlem will be partly within it.

Source: '1km ESZ for 5 wildlife sanctuaries notified', *The Times of India*, 08/11/13.

Rare tree found in Mhadei WLS

Researchers from the Sirsi Forest College along with Goan researchers have discovered the critically endangered tree, *Semecarpus kathalekanensis*, inside the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

Professor Vasudev of Sirsi Forest College with researchers Shivprakash and Shrikant Gunaga, along with M K Janarthanam of Goa University and researcher Ashish Prabhugaonkar found the trees in the Bibtyan of Brahma Karmali area of the sanctuary.

Semecarpus kathalekanensis is an evergreen tree, which grows generally up to 20 meters high. It belongs to the Anacardiaceae family. Its bark is smooth, greyish brown and mottled with numerous prominent warts. Its branchlets are stout, smooth and hairless. Leaves are simple, alternately and spirally

arranged and carried on stalks 5-10 cm long. The tree bears fruit which are bigger than the size of a *chikoo* and have *jamun* colour nuts in them.

Brahma Karmali locals call these trees as *Bibti* and the area as *Bibtyan*. There are estimated to be only about 200 individuals of this tree species. All its five known habitats are in the Western Ghats, four in Uttar Kannada of Karnataka and the one in Mhadei WLS which was recently confirmed.

Source: Rajendra P Kerkar, 'Critically endangered trees found in Sattari', *The Times of India*, 15/10/13.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Wildlife Wing, Junta House, Panaji 403001, Goa. Tel: 0832 – 224747 / 223508 / 278891. Fax: 224747.

GUJARAT

Number of tourists double up on the first day of new season at Gir

On the first day of the new tourist season, as many as 1,785 tourists visited Sasan Gir to watch the Asiatic lions. This is almost double the number of 935 reported last year.

Forest officers said that as many as 9,000 persons have sought permission online for safaris this season and safaris till January had already been booked. 4.16 lakh tourists had visited Gir during the 2012-13 season. The sanctuary remains open for tourists from October 16 to June 15.

Residents of Sasan Gir and two nearby villages had threatened last month to boycott tourists in protest of inclusion of their villages in Mendarda taluka after pulling them out of Talala taluka of Gir Somnath district. The protests ended after local politicians gave an assurance that the three villages would go back to Talala.

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

Source: 'Record tourists flock Sasan Gir to watch lions as new season begins', *The Indian Express*, 17/10/13.

Experts recommend shifting of 12 lions in first phase

Six months after the Supreme Court ordered the translocation of lions from Gir in Gujarat to Palpur Kuno in Madhya Pradesh, an expert committee has recommended that the process should begin with the shifting of 12 lions.

The two-member expert panel comprising scientists Dr YV Jhala and Dr Ravi Chellam (*PA Updates* Vol. XIX, Nos. 5, 4 & 3) has submitted a report to the Supreme Court-appointed 12-member committee to monitor the translocation saying that 12 lions should be translocated in the first phase. The Palpur Kuno WLS, which is reported to have 69 chital per sq km and about 80 other animals, is ready to house the 12 big cats immediately.

It has also suggested that in all 30-40 animals from the wild be translocated to Kuno over a period of time. However, the final decision on the number will be taken by the 12-member committee. The committee has outlined the objective of the project which says that extensive presence of lions would help the local economy and boost eco-tourism.

While Madhya Pradesh is not likely to raise any objection to the report, senior forest officials in Gujarat are reported to have been preparing a detailed note to continue their protest against translocating of the lions.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, 'Kuno may get 12 lions in first phase', *The Times of India*, 22/10/13.



No CDV infections in Asiatic lions

It has been confirmed that the Asiatic lions in Gir are not infected by the Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) or Pestes Des Petitis Ruminants Virus (PPRV)

A study to check for the presence was taken up following an alarm raised by Dr Richard Kock of Britain's Royal Veterinary

College. He had warned that the lions in India are a small vulnerable population and widespread infection with such a virus can kill at least 40 per cent of Gir lions (*PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 4).

The Gujarat Forest Department had entrusted the job of screening the Asiatic lions for these viruses to Gujarat State Bio-Technology Mission (GSBTM) working under the state department of science and technology. The report of the GSBTM which is based on the examination of nearly 10 per cent of the total population of lions here, says it did not find any CDV or PPRV or carriers in the lions.

The animal tissue samples were collected opportunistically from lions and the sampling, therefore was quite random. The tests were conducted on animals that were brought for treatment after rescue from different parts of Gir and from the nearby areas.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Virus attack in Asiatic lions a hoax: Study', *The Times of India*, 18/10/13.

Gujarat to prepare health report for Marine National Park



The Gujarat Ecology Commission (GEC) in collaboration with the University of Maryland, USA, and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, Chennai, has taken up an initiative to develop a cohesive and comprehensive report on various parameters of the Marine National Park and the Gulf of Kutch.

Factors such as water quality, diversity of fish species and biodiversity are being graded on a scale of A to F. Experts are also looking at the pollution levels, extent of industrial activity and impact of human activity in the area.

A team of experts from the University of Maryland had participated in a workshop on

the initiative held at Jamnagar in September. Various stakeholders like representatives of industry, the Indian Coast Guard, the Indian Navy, representatives of the Fisheries Department, the Gujarat Maritime Board, the Gujarat Pollution Control Board and local communities participated in the deliberations and a draft of the report was prepared. It will be finalized after data collected on the various facets of the ecosystem has been interpreted.

Officials said once the report is ready by December this year, it will help in taking decisions on the development of the area in future and "the health of the area" can be checked on the same parameters at regular intervals.

More recent environmental threats to the Gulf of Kutch include the increased shipping and port development, a large evaporative salt industry on the inter-tidal flats, agricultural and sewage runoff, and suspended and deposited sediments.

Source: Rajeev Khanna, 'Marine National Park to get its health card by December', *The Times of India*, 13/10/13.

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

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

KARNATAKA

FD to capture at least 25 wild elephants from Alur in Hassan district

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has planned an operation to capture 25 wild elephants from the Alur taluk of Hassan district. The last time such a khedda (stockade traps) operation was carried out in Karnataka was in 1971, when 47 animals were captured. The Karnataka Elephant Task Force (ETF) in its report to the High Court in September 2012 had identified two regions — Alur and Tumkur district's Savandurga — as "elephant removal

zones” for the “unacceptable levels” of human-elephant conflict seen there.

The FD, however, places the outer limit for the number of elephants to be captured at 150 and hopes to extend the ‘removal zone’ to parts of Kodagu where human-elephant conflict is intense. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) has said, however, that the actual number will be much less as the FD will have to decide on areas such as in Kodagu based on an assessment of conflict levels and perceptions of people here.

Other expert members of the ETF have disagreed with the assessment of the FD. MD Madhusudan, scientist with the Nature Conservation Foundation and ETF member, said removing wild elephants from a natural landscape is “an extreme measure” and one that should be done with the “greatest judiciousness”. He has said that only two areas have been identified by the task force as potential “removal zones” and Kodagu is not one of them. According to him, Alur was an anomaly of sorts and justified the approach.

The conflict in Alur is intense, and the elephant population is believed to be ecologically unviable. Here, a herd of 25–30 elephants inhabits a tiny five-sq km forest patch circumscribed by agricultural fields that they routinely raid. Between 1986 and 2011, elephants killed 46 people and injured over 240, according to the ETF report.

Raman Sukumar, chairman of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science said the situation in Kodagu was not adequately studied yet.

Meanwhile, the FD has set aside Rs. four crore to create kraals and new elephant camps to restrain the captured elephants. The FD plans to begin the project in January 2014, and it would use a combination of methods that incorporate elements from traditional *khedda* as also modern-day chemical tranquilising.

Even as it prepares for a large-scale capture of elephants, the FD admits that its 10 camps, which together have 91 elephants, are too crowded. (See *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 5; Vol. XVIII, Nos. 2 & 1; & Vol. XVII, No. 6)

Source: Divya Gandhi, ‘State prepares for biggest elephant capture operation since 1971 ‘*khedda*’’, *The Hindu*, 13/10/13.

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

MADHYA PRADESH

NHAI lowers land demand for widening of NH 7 near Pench TR

The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has submitted a revised proposal to the state wildlife wing seeking clearance for the 37km road-widening project between Mansar and Khawasa in MP on National Highway (NH) 7. In the revised proposal, NHAI has substantially reduced the land requirement for the project. Widening of the stretch is stuck over objections by environmentalists and the state forest department as the road cuts through a wildlife corridor.

NHAI has now sought 49.246 hectares of forestland to widen the road from two lanes to four. This is less than the 112 hectares it had sought earlier. The revised proposal was submitted to the director of the tiger reserve on October 23. It will be forwarded to APCCF (wildlife), chief wildlife warden and then to the state government. It will finally be sent to the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL).

As the road falls within 2-10 km from the boundary of Mansinghdeo Wildlife Sanctuary, NHAI requires wildlife clearance from NBWL. A similar proposal for diversion of 4.493 hectares of forestland from the Pench-Mowgli Wildlife Sanctuary in MP is already with the NBWL. The existing road is in a bad shape accidents on it have claimed several lives. There have been many agitations by locals in the past to upgrade the road, but NHAI was not doing it apparently to mount pressure on the environment ministry to grant clearances.

NHAI had already secured environmental clearance in 2006 for this widening. The road, part of North-South corridor, has already been widened from Borkhedi up to Mansar and from Seoni onwards in the north. Wild animals can be sighted even

during the daytime along the patch. The NHAI has recently received forest clearance from the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), though it has been alleged that falsified information was submitted – the proposal for clearance submitted earlier notes, for instance, that no rare or endangered/unique species of flora and fauna were observed in the project area at the time of inspection.

Contrary to what the NHAI claimed, then CCF of Nagpur Circle, SWH Naqvi, who is now head of forest force, had on September 29, 2007, submitted in his site inspection report that road expansion will prove detrimental to wildlife as there is presence here of animals like tigers, leopards, chital, sambar, and barking deer.

Following the controversy over four-laning of the said road the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) was appointed by NHAI and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) last year to suggest mitigation measures on the said patch which is close to the Chorbahuli and Deolapar ranges of Mansinghdeo WLS and also Pench Tiger Reserve. The WII team made a site visit in February 2012 and recommended 11 underpasses, each admeasuring seven metres in height and 200 metres in width. NHAI now says that the WII report needs to be modified in light of its new proposal.

Others like Prafulla Bhamburkar of the Wildlife Trust of India have noted that the new proposal with a reduced land requirement does not minimise threat to wildlife as the four laning will cut the corridor between Pench, Kanha, Nagzira, Navegaon and Tadoba and that the mitigation measures suggested by NHAI are not commensurate with potential damage.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, No. 3; and Vol. XV, Nos. 4 & 1)

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'NHAI lowers land demand for road widening near Pench on NH7', *The Times of India*, 07/11/13.

Contact: **Field Director**, Pench Tiger Reserve,
P.O. Barapathar, Dist. Seoni - 480 661.
Tel: 07692-250794/250594. Fax:
250794/221180. Email:
root@trpench.ren.nic.in

MAHARASHTRA

Panel to get views on ESZ status for the Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor

The Maharashtra state government has set up a four-member committee to get views and comments of stakeholders on declaring the Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor as an ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ). The committee comprises the chief conservator of forests (Kolhapur), collector (Sindhudurg), chief agricultural officer (Sindhudurg) and deputy forest officer (Sawantwadi). There are 22 villages in the wildlife corridor.

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests recently accepted the Dr K Kasturirangan high-level working group (HLWG) committee report on the Western Ghats which had recommended that except for the wildlife corridor, the moratorium on mining in the rest of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts be lifted. The moratorium now applies only to Khed, Chiplun, Sangameshwar, Lanja and the Rajapur talukas of Ratnagiri, and Kankavli, Sawantwadi, Dodamarg, Deogad, Vaibhavwadi and Kudal talukas of Sindhudurg.

Environmentalists and wildlifers such as D Stalin of the NGO Vanshakti and Sumaira Abdulali of the Awaaz Foundation have expressed concern that the setting up of this panel is merely an attempt to subvert the orders of the Bombay high court that has directed the government to declare the area as an ESZ by December end. Stalin noted that the process was probably being initiated at the instance of the mining lobby, while Abdulali has pointed out that resolutions of each of the 22 gram sabhas asking the area to be declared an ESZ was already with the government.

Source: Clara Lewis, 'Panel to seek feedback on green tag for wildlife corridor', *The Times of India*, 02/11/13.

New rescue centre for leopards at the Sanjay Gandhi NP

A new rescue centre for leopards at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) is expected to be ready by the end of December and functional by

January. The centre will be spread over one acre of land and is located in the Mafco factory area of the national park. The work has been carried out by the Public Works Department. It will comprise 22 cages in a single building and the leopards will have access to a larger 'exercise area' when they are let out of the cages.

At present, 18 cages are housed in two buildings, with an area of 100 sq ft per animal. As per norms, at least 125 sq ft area should be available for each animal. At the new centre, each animal will get around 175 sq ft area.

Source: 'New home for rescued leopards to be ready soon', *The Indian Express*, 03/11/13.

Contact: **Dy. Conservator of Forests**, SGNP, Borivili (East), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-28860362, 28860389(O), 8862780(R) Email: sgnpmbai@gmail.com

Deer from Maharaj Bagh Zoo to be released in Pench TR

Deer from the Maharaj Bagh Zoo in Nagpur are to be released in the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) to augment the prey base for tigers there.

There are 40 deer in the Maharaj Bagh Zoo at present, while as per the current guidelines of the National Zoo Policy, there cannot be more than 10 deer in a small zoo. The zoo has been granted permission by the Chief Wildlife Warden to release the excess 28 animals. Of these, eight deer have already been released in the Navegaon National Park and the remaining 20 will now be released in PTR.

Earlier, around 36 animals including nilgai and chital from the Seminary Hills 'Deer Park' were released in Pench.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Maharajbagh Zoo deer to become live feed for Pench tigers', *Economic Times*, 12/10/13.

Contact: **DCF, Pench National Park**, I/c, Bor WLS Near Govt. Press, Civil Lines, Nagpur-440001, Maharashtra. Tel: 0712 - 2524727(O), 2227282(R). Fax: 2539226
Chief Wildlife Warden – Maharashtra, Jaika Building, Civil Lines, Nagpur – 440001, Maharashtra. Tel: 0712 – 526758 / 530126.

ODISHA

Forest range office, boats set on fire in Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary

An irate mob torched the forest range office and two patrolling boats of the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in the seaside village of Sansarpeta in October following the death of a 62-year-old man in an attack by a wild boar. The mob also attacked forest personnel including the local forest range officer and forcefully detained them. They were released subsequently following police intervention.

The Forest Range Officer of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary said that around 300 villagers ransacked the two-storey forest office and set fire to its furniture and documents. Two motorised vessels and a motorcycle of the Forest Department were also burnt down. Police investigations are under way.

Source: 'Mob sets forest range office ablaze' *The New Indian Express*, 20/10/13.

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

Odisha issues SOP to curb man-animal conflicts

The Odisha State Wildlife Wing has asked all forest and wildlife divisions in the state to form Anti-Depredation Committees (ADCs) to deal with man-animal conflicts and straying of wild animals in addition to constituting Divisional Mobile Teams (DMTs) which will function as Rapid Response Teams (RRTs).

The Wildlife Wing has issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to handle straying wild animals in human landscapes. The SOP says the ADCs will be permanent panels to deal with ferocious wild animals and the conflict situations. With the Divisional Forest Officer as the chairman, the panels will provide technical guidance and monitor day-to-day situations. Members will be drawn from the district administration, police, panchayati raj institutions and veterinarians, among others.

Similarly, the DMT should comprise a team of 10 well-trained and well-equipped field staff and one veterinarian. It would be led by the Forest Range Officer. While functioning as the RRT, it would also patrol the division to check poaching and smuggling. At least nine forest guards and one forester, all less than 40 years of age, would be part of the team. It will also consist of two lady forest guards.

Since straying of bears and carnivores has become a major concern, the wildlife wing has directed that the team members should be trained in handling tranquilisation guns. The SOP prescribes that the RRTs have necessary resources at their disposal including equipment such as a field van, trap cages, tranquilisation kits, search lights, ear tags and a tag applicator.

Like the SOP issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, this set of protocols too says that district authorities can clamp prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to maintain law and order and avoid agitation and excitement during straying and capture exercise.

While most of the responsibilities have been vested with managers of the protected areas, the decision on release of the straying animal into the wild or its captivity will remain with the Chief Wildlife Warden of the state. The SOP also makes it clear that a wild animal should not, under any circumstances, be eliminated by invoking the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 unless it is confirmed as a problem animal through individual identification based on scientific analysis.

Source: 'SOP on straying wild animals issued', *The New Indian Express*, 08/10/13.

Contact: **CWLW– Orissa**, Plot No. 8, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751007, Orissa.
Tel: 0674- 2512502 / 2513134 / 2515840.
Fax: 512502

RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan completes numbering of tigers in Ranthambhore TR

The Rajasthan State Forest Department has completed the numbering of tiger cubs at the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (RTR). Tigers in

the reserve have been numbered till 70 from the existing 48. However, the number of tigers in the reserve is about 48, as an earlier assigned number is not re-assigned to a new tiger.

Of these 48 tigers, 26 are adults and 22 sub-adults. It is just these 26 adult tigers which remain from the earlier 48. Some others have either been relocated to Sariska or are dead. Many of the sub-adults have moved to adjoining parts of the RTR and have carved their own territories. These tigers were first traced, photographed and then assigned a number.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is in the process of assigning unique identification numbers (UIDs) to tigers across the country. However, the NTCA UID will be different from how the state assigned numbers of these tigers. They will be longer and will incorporate other information such as a landscape code, a tiger reserve code and the local ID among others.



Source: 'Ranthambhore tiger numbering completes, goes up to 70', *The Times of India*, 17/10/13.

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

TAMIL NADU

Drive to remove lantana, plant native trees inside Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary

The Forest Department has launched a drive for the plantation of native trees inside the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary. It is concentrated in a 20 hectares area where the forest officials had earlier

uprooted the invasive weed *Lantana camara*. The tree species to be planted include *Terminalia bellirica*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *Caryota urens*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Feronia elephantum* and bamboo. The saplings will be planted in Rajapalayam, Srivilliputhur, Watrap and Saptur ranges. As many as 200 saplings will be planted per hectare.

The sanctuary has also received funds to remove *Lantana camara* from another 20 hectares and this work is expected to start shortly.

Source: J Arockiaraj, 'Srivilliputhur sanctuary to raise fodder trees for resident animals', *The Economic Times*, 20/10/13.

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

Cracker-free Diwali in eight villages surrounding Vellore Bird Sanctuary

For the 14th successive year, people in eight villages surrounding the Vellore Bird Sanctuary in Erode district did not burst crackers during Diwali, fearing it might scare away the winged visitors forever. Around 750 families live in villages around the sanctuary.

The people here do not use crackers for other local village festivals either.

Source: 'Cracker-free Diwali for eight villages', *The Hindu*, 03/11/13.

Forester suspended for using explosives inside KMTR

The Range officer of Ambasamudram in the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) has been suspended on charges of using explosives in the core area of the tiger reserve.

He is reported to have used them to demolish structures in Manimuthar falls area, which is located in the core area, thus, violating guidelines issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Naturalists have complained that this was not the only violation committed in the KMTR. The Range

officer of Mundanthurai has also constructed a new shed in the reserve for running an eatery.

Earlier, a make-shift arrangement was made in which a small eatery was run by a tribal women's self-help group. This arrangement was considered in line with NTCA guideline that eco-development activities should be implemented with participation from the local people. According to the tribal women, however, the concerned officer asked them to leave and outsourced the running of the new eatery to outsiders.

It has also been noted that illegal sand quarrying was being carried out, allegedly, in connivance with the Range officer half a kilometre from the Manimuthar check post.

Source: P. Oppili, 'Range officer at tiger reserve suspended', *The Hindu*, 08/10/13.

Contact: **Field Director, KMTR**, NGO 'A' Colony, Palayam Kottai, Tirunelveli - 627 007. Tel: 0462-273075, 2552663(O), 2580115(R). Fax: 0462-2580115

Granite quarries affecting wildlife of KMTR

Granite quarries in the vicinity of Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) are affecting the wildlife in the area as well as villagers. There are around 12 granite quarries operating in Sivanthipuram, Pottal, Therkupappankulam, Poombudayarkulam, Therku Kallidaikurichi and Mela Ambasamuthram in Ambasamudram taluk in Tirunelveli district. Most of them are as near as three km from the boundary of KMTR.

Panchayat president of Kodarankulam village in the neighbourhood of KMTR has filed a Public Interest Litigation before the National Green Tribunal demanding that the quarry licences be scrapped. He has pointed out that the quarry operators have been blasting rocks throughout the day and this has also affected houses in the area. Villagers also note that many wild animals which were seen in the neighbourhood till about seven years ago, before the quarrying started, have now disappeared.

The Tamil Nadu Green Movement has claimed that the quarry operation has been taking place against the Supreme Court

guidelines, which bars 'red category industries' within a 10 km-area radius of protected areas. The Tirunelveli District Collector has said, meanwhile, that the district administration has stopped issuing fresh quarry licences in the region or renewing old ones. Officials have noted, however, that the granite quarries have been operating for the last seven years with a 20-year license period, and the licence issued cannot be terminated before the end of the agreement period.

Source: J Arockiaraj, 'Tiger reserve faces threat from quarries', *The Times of India*, 11/10/13.

Soligas fined for clearing forest, expanding agriculture in Sathyamangalam TR

Members of the Soliga tribal community living in the Mavanatham area of the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve were fined Rs. 11,000 by the Forest Department for clearing bushes and cutting trees for the purpose of expanding agricultural activities inside the tiger reserve. Cases were also filed against five of them.

It has been alleged that nearly 100 acres of forest has been cleared in this manner in the last few months.

Source: P. Oppili, 'Tribals clear forest bushes', *The Hindu*, 22/10/13.

Tamil Nadu notifies Gangaikondan Spotted deer Sanctuary



The Tamil Nadu government has notified the Gangaikondan Spotted Deer Sanctuary in Tirunelveli district.

The Chief Minister, J Jayalalitha, had announced the formation of the sanctuary in the state assembly in May 2013. Following her announcement, an order was issued for the same by the Environment and Forests Department. Subsequently, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden sent a proposal for declaration of Gangaikondan Spotted Deer Sanctuary under the Wildlife

(Protection) Act, 1972 and it was accepted by the government with effect from October 1.

According to the notification, the Gangaikondan Reserve Forest is an important habitat for Spotted deer. This is the southern-most habitat of the species outside the Western Ghats.

Forest officials said the sanctuary is spread over an area of 250 hectares and is surrounded by patta lands. Due to this a perimeter wall has to be built around the sanctuary area. Also, the department has proposed to introduce eco-development activities by involving the locals. The activities would include skill development for youth, asset creation and micro enterprises for livelihood.

Source: P. Oppili and N. Ravi Kumar, 'State gets exclusive sanctuary for spotted deer', *The Hindu*, 09/10/13.

UTTARAKHAND

Expert group to study environmental impacts of hydropower projects in Alaknanda and Bhagirathi basins

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has set up an expert group, as mandated by the Supreme Court, to study environmental impacts of hydropower projects along the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers and their tributaries. This is an effort to ensure that there is no repeat of the Uttarakhand disaster witnessed earlier this year.

Headed by Ravi Chopra, member of National Ganga River Basin Authority and director of People's Science Institute, the 17-member group has been asked to assess both, existing and under-construction projects, in the region over the next three months. The experts will also draft a Himalayan policy which will take into account the state's unique ecological, social and cultural characteristics to formulate a course of development that does not endanger the environment. The group includes among others, Chandi Prasad Bhatt of the Chipko Movement, Shekhar Pathak of People's Association for Himalayan Area Research, Sathyakumar of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and AN Purohit, former director of the GB Pant Institute.

Part of the group's mandate is to determine the validity of WII's earlier findings that the proposed 24 projects will have a significant impact on the biodiversity of the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi basins. The MoEF had, in July 2010, asked the WII to undertake a cumulative impact assessment of 70 hydroelectric projects in these two river basins. Of the 70 projects, 17 are complete, 14 are under construction and 39 projects have been proposed. The WII suggested that the MoEF review its decision to permit the construction of 24 of the 39 proposed projects.

The group will take stock of compliance with environmental norms and safeguard measures by the project developers. It will review compliance of existing protocols for construction activities and this will also involve identification of projects where damage to the environment cannot be lessened. Besides, the group will suggest environmental safeguard measures to counter adverse impacts where possible, and suggest changes in the project parameters where required.

The group will also look into the state of the Himalayan glaciers and the impact of projects on the glaciers. It will also undertake a review of existing cumulative impact assessments for the river basins. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 4)

Source: Urmi A Goswami, 'Supreme Court-mandated panel to study impact of hydro projects on environment', *The Economic Times*, 23/10/13.

UTTAR PRADESH

Dudhwa TR prepares for the upcoming tourist season



With the tourist season commencing on November 15, authorities of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (DTR) have upgraded the amenities at

the reserve while also finalising some fresh instructions and a code of conduct for the visitors.

No private vehicles will be allowed inside the reserve as the drivers often fail to follow the guidelines about speed-limit, use horns and sometimes even cause disturbance to the wild animals by venturing into the dense jungle. Tourists will now have to leave their vehicles at Dudhwa and they will be provided with Gypsies. There are 16 Gypsies with DTR at present and this number will be increased to 35 to accommodate all the tourists.

Every tourist group will be necessarily accompanied by a tourist guide who would be called *Paryatak Mitra*. These guides who will be local residents will be given special, three-day training. The reserve is also to be made polythene free this season.

Source: 'No private vehicles into jungles of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve now', *The Economic Times*, 10/10/13.

Contact: **Director**, Dudhwa National Park, Dist. Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh. Tel: 05872-252106. Fax: 05872-252106

WEST BENGAL

NTCA demands photographic evidence of tigers in Buxa TR

In a technical meeting held in Delhi recently, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has asked for photographic evidence of the presence of tigers in the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Doubts have been expressed at the number of 19 tigers reported from here a couple of years ago based on scat analysis. The NTCA has asked the reserve authorities to take help from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for an extensive camera-trap study for a confirmation.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee, 'Where have all the Buxa tigers gone?', *The Times of India*, 04/11/13.

Contact: **Field Director**, Buxa Tiger Reserve, P.O. Alipurduar, Dist. Jalpaiguri - 736 122. West Bengal. Tel: 03564-256333 /255979. Fax: 03564-255577. Email: buxatiger@dte.vsnl.net.in

Director, NTCA, Annexe No. 5, Bikaner House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi-110011. Telefax: 2338 4428. E-mail: dirpt-r@nic.in

Concerns over ambitious tourism project proposed in the Sunderbans



Concerns have been expressed over an ambitious, Rs. 1000 crore tourism project proposed within only three km from the Sajnekhali Wildlife Sanctuary under the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve area. The project site is also only a few metres away from the Reserve Forest of Herobhanga which has a healthy tiger population. Tigers move frequently in the area and often there are reports of man-tiger conflict from nearby villages like Tridibnagar and Kanmari. Tigers from Pirkhali are also known to cross over the Bidya river to move into the forests of Herobhanga.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India has pointed out that a tourism project on the lines of 'African Safari', as labeled by the state earlier, may prove disastrous for the mangroves. A member of the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has suggested that the project would trigger more conflict and that tiger presence and frequency of man-animal conflict should be taken into account before planning the tourism project.

The State tourism minister Krishnendu Narayan Chowdhury, has however said that the land on which the project is being planned has been transferred to the Tourism Department by the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, the original owner of the land, and hence the forest clearance is not required.

The proposed project will include among other things a high-end resort, a budget category resort, a helipad, a nature park, a picnic

park, an ethnic food village, a golf course and parking facilities.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee, 'Alarm over Sunderbans tourism project', *The Times of India*, 10/10/13.

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

State notifies West Sunderbans WLS

The West Bengal government has recently notified the West Sunderbans Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The new sanctuary comprises the forests of Chulkaithi and Dhulibashani and it is the fourth sanctuary in the Sunderbans after Sajnekhali (362 sq km), Lothian (38 sq km) and Haliday (6 sq km). Covering 556.45 sq km area in the South 24-Parganas forest division, the new sanctuary will have Dhulibhashani I to its north, the Bay of Bengal to its south and rivers Matla and Thakuran to its east and west respectively.

The Forest Department (FD) is also trying to bring the new sanctuary under the management of the tiger reserve to ensure better protection for it.

Experts have suggested that the declaration of the sanctuary will also help protect forests located around it. A study on tiger presence in the forests here, done by the Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve and WWF-India recently, had sounded an alarm on the human pressure on the forests. The study, which detected the presence of a minimum of 22 tigers in the forests, had also found a human density of more than 550 persons per sq km in the 22 villages around the newly-declared sanctuary.

It is reported that the FD issues more than 3000 fishing licences for the area, and people often resort to illegal felling of *passur*, *dhudul* and *goran* trees, apart from collecting honey.

Source: 'Sunderbans gets largest sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 23/10/13.

SOUTH ASIA

BHUTAN

Training for Bhutanese foresters to prevent wildlife crime

The Wildlife Conservation Division of Bhutan along with the International Fund for Animal Welfare – Wildlife Trust of India (IFAW-WTI) conducted a month-long training for around 450 forest rangers for effective wildlife crime prevention in Bhutan.

The sessions - each lasting three days - began in October for over 50 participants including 13 women of the Wangdue Forest Division (FD). The sessions were also to be conducted for staff of the Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park (NP), Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve, Wangchuk Centennial Park, Thrumingla NP, Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Sakteng WLS, Samdrup Jongkhar FD and the Samtse FD.

The trainers included experts from Bhutan as well as IFAW-WTI members from India. In June last year, the team had covered Royal Manas NP and Phibsoo WLS adjoining India's Greater Manas region. A total of 107 rangers were trained then.

The sessions included training on Bhutanese laws as well as international laws on wildlife conservation as also on effective patrolling and ambushing techniques, collection and preservation of evidences/samples, preparation of offense reports, and identification of original and fake wildlife articles. Training was also provided on the use of global positioning systems (GPS), camera traps, and

other field crafts. The participants were also oriented on first aid for snakebite, and basic wildlife rescue and rehabilitation.

Source: Subhamoy Bhatta, 'Training to Bhutan's forest rangers for tiger protection', www.assamtimes.org, 23/10/13.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

First International Meet on Elephants postponed

The first ever international conference to discuss conservation and welfare of elephants — the International Elephant Congress and Ministerial Meet — which was scheduled to be held in New Delhi from November 14 to 19 was postponed indefinitely by the Ministry of Environment and Forests without citing a reason. The fresh dates are yet to be announced.

The conference was scheduled to include conclaves on science, culture and management, culminating in a ministerial summit to adopt "a charter with common minimum global vision on conservation, management and welfare of elephants across all range countries" for the next 50 years. Representatives of fifty countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Congo, Zimbabwe, Togo, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Zambia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, India and Thailand were expected to participate in the conference.

Source: Vishwa Mohan, 'India postpones first ever international meet on elephants', *The Times of India*, 17/10/13.

The PA Update is now on facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/protectedareaupdate/>

Important Bird Areas Update



ASSAM

Deepor Beel festival from December 23

A two-day Deepor Beel festival is being organized on December 23 and 24 by the Parijat Academy in collaboration with the local people and other non-government organisations. The festival intends to highlight the need for conserving the water body and the organisers will also use the occasion to promote eco-tourism as a sustainable livelihood option.

The activities that will form part of the festival include trekking, rock climbing, exhibitions, contests, and an exploration into the life and culture of the local communities.

Source: 'Deepor Beel festival', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/11/13.

Contact: Divisional Forest Officer, Assam State Zoo Division, I/c Deepor Beel WLS, R.G. Baruah Road, Guwahati - 781 024, Assam. Tel: 0361-261363(O), 263331(R)

Low oxygen level causes fish deaths in Deepor Beel

The Assam Fisheries Department has found that low oxygen levels in the water caused the deaths of fishes in Deepor Beel in October. The level of dissolved oxygen in the water was found to be below 3 mg per litre as opposed to the required 4 mg and more in a litre.

According to the sub-divisional fisheries development officer, Guwahati, the release of sewage into the water might have caused the fall in oxygen levels. The local residents alleged that sewage enters the wetland through the Bahini and Bharalu rivers. Decomposition of excessive aquatic vegetation might also reduce the oxygen level in autumn, said an expert at the University of Guwahati.

The flow of industrial effluents and rampant and unregulated fishing in the area continues to pose a threat to the wetland.

Industries on the northern side of the beel and brick kilns on the banks also pose a threat.

Source: Kishore Talukdar, 'Low oxygen level killed fish: Govt.' *The Telegraph*, 19/10/13.

GUJARAT

Part of Thol WLS declared eco-sensitive zone

A part of the Thol Wildlife Sanctuary has been declared an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) and mining, commercial and industrial activity has been banned in the area. A draft notification of the Ministry of Environment and Forests said that the government shall constitute a state level Eco-sensitive Zone Monitoring Committee (SESZMC) to monitor the compliance of the ESZ notification. The extent of the ESZ ranges from 0.308 km to 2.244 kms from the boundary of the sanctuary.

The SESZMC will be chaired by the chief secretary of the state and will have representatives from state urban development, ports and transport departments, NGOs working in the field of nature conservation and the Gujarat State Pollution Control Board.

All types of mining (minor and major minerals), stone quarrying and crushing units except those for meeting the domestic needs of bonafide local residents will now be prohibited here. No fresh mining lease shall be granted in the eco-sensitive zone and the existing mining leases, if any, shall be phased out in five years or with the term of current lease renewal, whichever is earlier. The notification has also prohibited the stoppage or diversion of water inflow into the sanctuary.

The ministry has stated that the SESZMC will submit the annual action taken report by the March 31 every year to the Environment ministry. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 4)

Source: 'Part of Thol wildlife sanctuary declared eco sensitive zone', *The Times of India*, 04/11/13.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Bird Ringing station set up in Great Himalayan National Park

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has set up the first bird ringing station of the Western Himalayan region at Salropa in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). The FD hopes that the move will help attract bird watchers and ringers to Himachal from many western countries besides providing a communication and knowledge transfer platform between the state and international species and conservation experts.

A capacity building programme was organized for the frontline staff in bird ringing, and Dr Francis Buner, a senior conservation scientist at the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK and TH Walker, British Trust of Ornithology gave intensive training to wildlife staff in bird identification skills and ringing for two weeks recently. During the programme, 57 bird species were identified and more than 260 individual birds of various species were ringed with metallic rings having an unique number and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) stamp.

Source: 'First bird ringing station set up in the Great Himalayan National Park', www.post.jagran.com, 09/11/13.

Contact: **Director**, GHNP,
Shamshi, Dist Kullu 175 126 Himachal Pradesh. Email: dirghnp@vsnl.com

MANIPUR

Civil Society Organizations discuss livelihood impacts of power project and law on Loktak

A Public Consultation on "Livelihood Impacts of 105 MW Loktak HEP Project & Manipur Loktak Lake (Protection) Act, 2006 on Communities" was organized under the joint aegis of All Loktak Lake Areas Fishermen's Union, All Manipur Thanga People's Welfare Association,

Committee on the Protection of Natural Resources in Manipur and Citizens Concern for Dams and Development at Thanga Haoreng Chingyang at the end of September.

A number of resolutions were adopted on the occasion; the most important being the decision about return of agricultural lands, which have been submerged due to construction of Ithai Barrage. The decision was taken considering the fact that the promises of providing adequate power supply, water for irrigation and controlling flood made at the time of construction of Ithai Barrage are not fulfilled. People have received none of the promised benefits so far.

Other resolutions included the recognition of the intrinsic rights of communities to control and manage the Loktak wetlands for mutual survival and their self-determined development of the wetlands based on their needs and aspirations; to repeal Manipur Loktak Lake Protection Act, 2006 for its anti-people and anti-Loktak provisions; to review Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Project for its impacts on Loktak wetlands, including the proliferation of Phumdis in Loktak lake and impact on Keibul Lamjao National Park; decommissioning of Ithai Barrage of the Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Project; to stop all forms of anti-people policy in the guise of development of Loktak wetlands and ensure the right to free, prior and informed consent of all the indigenous communities depending on Loktak for introduction of any development process here; to formulate a comprehensive Wetlands Management Policy in Manipur with community participation as per guidelines of Ramsar Convention and as per the provision of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 2 and Vol. XVIII, No. 6)

Source: 'Meet demands return of the submerged lands', *Hueiyen News Service*, 29/09/13.

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

NAGALAND

Satellite tags, rings for Amur Falcons

The Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, the Convention on Migratory Species Office - Abu Dhabi, the United Nations Environment Programme, Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi and Nagaland Forest Department has taken up joint scientific mission to satellite tag Amur Falcons from Nagaland.

Three birds named Naga, Wokha and Pangti were satellite tagged and subsequently released as part of this project on November 6. 28 other birds were also ringed before being released on the eve of Lotha Tokhu Emong festival celebrated throughout Wokha district.

Source: Satellite tagging of Amur Falcon in Nagaland', *The Morung Express*, 09/11/13.

The *Important Bird Areas* Update is being brought out in collaboration with and support from the *Bombay Natural History Society* (BNHS), the *Indian Bird Conservation Network* (IBCN) and the *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds* (RSPB, UK)

The Forest Rights Act, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation

National Consultation on Forest Rights Act and Protected Areas – A Brief Report

The Future of Conservation Network organized a consultation on the status of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), particularly the provision for Community Forestry Resource (CFR) in protected areas. The consultation was held in Delhi on November 11 and 12, 2013 and was attended by about 50 individuals representing local communities and civil society, working in and around PAs in different states.

It was clear from the updates given by participants from different states that many issues which emerged from the field in a similar meeting held last year appeared to have remained unresolved. These included:

1. Implementation of FRA continues to be tardy and non-existent in PAs in most states; CFR titles have been granted only in a few protected areas in the last one year.
2. Claims that have been filed (in many cases since 2009) remain remain pending with committees at various levels. One of the claims from a village in the Melghat Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH) was rejected in November 2013 on the grounds that such claims cannot be granted in a CTH (which is contrary to the FRA).

3. Relocation of committees dwelling inside tiger reserves continues in violation of the letter and spirit of the FRA. Civil society organizations had demanded that independent investigations and public hearings be organized on this issue by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), but this has not been done to date.

4. Guidelines for Critical Wildlife Habitat (CWH) have still not been finalized; yet processes at the official level and without the involvement of resident communities have begun in many protected areas .

5. It was demanded by the civil society organizations that the status of implementation of CFRs in PAs be regularly monitored by the MoTA and status reports uploaded on its website. This has still not commenced.

6. Related to the CTH, it was observed last year that the focus of the forest department was largely on relocation of forest dwellers rather than exploring the possibilities of their co-existence with wildlife. It was also pointed out that the declaration of core and buffer areas of Tiger Reserves was itself in violation of the FRA. The groups had demanded a protocol on co-existence keeping in mind that CFRs will be claimed in all PAs. This however has not been developed yet. Neither has it been officially

clarified by the MoEF yet, as was demanded, that “inviolate” as mentioned in the FRA cannot be taken to mean “human free” but should rather be understood as “minimal impact”.

It was pointed out by the participants that data emerging from new empirical research is clearly showing trends which argue for a landscape approach to conservation rather than the island approach. It was pointed out that, increasingly, tiger habitats and migratory corridors are being found outside of PAs, making it mandatory to consider such areas important for tiger conservation. Landscape approach on the other hand cannot be achieved by exclusionary policies of relocation; it needs inclusive policies of recognition and the establishment of rights and co-existence. This would require a completely different and democratic conservation governance regime.

7. It was also strongly felt by the participants that the Wildlife Protection Act needs to be amended to harmonise the process of the settlement of rights under the WLPA with that of rights recognition as prescribed by the FRA, and acknowledge that once rights under the FRA are obtained, the authority for management in order to achieve conservation goals will have to be shared by the forest department and gram sabhas.

It was also noted that while amendments had been made in the WLPA, there are no provisions to harmonise these with FRA. The said amendments are before the Rajya Sabha at the moment (see following report).

Granting of CFR titles and Post CFR processes

8. Some participants mentioned that the 2000 ruling of the Supreme Court continues to be used as an excuse for not implementing the FRA in PAs. They added, that in a series of regional consultations the MoTA has clarified that the 2000 ruling of the Supreme Court is not applicable where people are claiming, will be claiming, or exercising rights under the FRA. MoTA needs to amplify this clarification.

9. In a few positive developments in the last year - in the Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, 16 CFR claims have been recognized in the core while 131 CFRs have been recognized in the buffer area. These processes were facilitated by the forest department and there is a

lack of clarity on the process followed to file the claims and the exact nature of the rights granted. In Gujarat, CFR rights have been recognized only in the Shoolpaneshwar WLS. The sanctuary has a total of 76 villages, of which 70 filed claims and 33 have received titles over 17000 ha of land; in Kuchchh, implementation of FRA began in February 2013 after much lobbying. In Maharashtra, 12-15 CFRs have been granted in the Buffer Zone of Melghat Tiger Reserve. Seven claims have been filed within Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH), one of which has been rejected.

10. Some progress has been made in the post CFR processes also. Only a few examples, however, exist including in PAs where CFR claims are still pending. Such efforts have focussed on planning by the local villagers towards forest conservation, watershed development and village development. In Yaval and Melghat, implementation of such village plans have been supported by the state through the convergence of various government schemes, particularly NREGA and those of the Tribal and Forest Departments. These included 17 villages in and around the Yaval WLS in Maharashtra; a cluster of five villages on the boundary of buffer zone of Melghat Tiger Reserve; 33 villages in the Biligiri Rangaswami Temple Sanctuary in Karnataka; a few villages in Shoolpaneshwar WLS in Gujarat and a few villages in the Vazhachal forest division in Kerala in the core area of the Parambikulam TR.

11. There was also some discussion on the applicability of the management plan for protected areas where CFRs have been claimed. An interesting example was cited from Yaval WLS where a decision has been made that the management plan of the protected area will be drafted based on the microplans that the villages have made for their CFRs and that the FD will plan only for the area of the PA which does not fall in any of the CFRs, and that too in consultation with the local villages. In many of these PAs where convergence has happened, regular meetings are organized between all line agencies and local people to ensure effective implementation.

Contact: Neema Pathak Broome, Kalpavriksh.

Email: neema.pb@gmail.com

WLPA amendment does not acknowledge FRA – Submission by Kalpavriksh

Kalpavriksh has made a submission to the standing committee on environment and forests, science in technology, with comments to the proposed amendment to the WLPA that was recently submitted to the Rajya Sabha.

The submission notes that since this is the first amendment of the WLPA since the FRA was enacted, it can provide an opportunity for reducing the present contradictions and lack of clarity at the interface of these two laws.

Points raised in the submission:

Settlement of rights process: The settlement of rights process continues to remain largely unchanged. The amendment does not clearly discuss the relationship of the settlement of rights procedure with the FRA recognition of rights procedure. Additionally, to harmonise the settlement of rights process with the FRA, the following should be added to the proposed amendment: “No right recognized under FRA can be extinguished by this process without the consent of the rights holders and following due process as per Section 4 of FRA.

Regarding consultation with the gram sabhas for notification of protected areas:

The amendment presented in the Rajya Sabha provides for gram sabha consultation only where land falling under Scheduled Areas is to be notified as a sanctuary or a national park. While this amendment seems to be made to accommodate PESA, in fact, it contradicts the provisions of PESA, which requires gram sabha *consent* (and not just consultation) in Scheduled Areas. Moreover, the amendment is in direct contradiction with the FRA as most areas being declared as national parks and sanctuaries would be potential or existing sites for claims or titles under the FRA. Any area which is being notified as a PA (irrespective of whether it is a Scheduled Area or not) therefore needs to go through a detailed process of consultation with and consent

from those who either already have rights or are likely to claim rights over these forests. The consultations should be conducted with the purpose of informing them about the purposes and implications of the notification, and obtaining their views and support. The views expressed during these consultations need to be considered in further steps relating to the proposed PA.

Management plans:

The amendment provides that in the case of a sanctuary in a Scheduled Area, plans are to be prepared in consultation with the concerned gram sabhas. This is again contradictory to the FRA which requires management of *all PAs* where forest dwellers are eligible for recognition of rights under FRA exist (not just sanctuaries, and not just in Scheduled Areas) to be in consultation with the gram sabhas. Under Section 5 of the FRA, a greater role has been assigned to the gram sabhas towards formulation of rules and regulations and management and governance strategies of their Community Forest Resource. This would imply that the plans that are made by the gram sabhas for their CFR need to be part of the management plan of the new notified PAs and the existing PAs in order to take into account the concerns of the gram sabhas, their rights and their CFR conservation strategies.

Prohibition of activities:

In the amendment to Section 29, it is suggested that the activities recognised as rights under FRA should be incorporated into ‘activities not prohibited’ under the Act. It is also suggested that in Section 34B dealing with power to remove encroachment, it should be provided that no such order shall be passed unless the affected person is given an opportunity to be heard, and the process prescribed under the FRA has been completed.

Contact: **Shiba Desor**, Kalpavriksh.

Email: desor.shiba@gmail.com

‘The Forest Rights Act, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation’ special section is being revived with support from Action Aid India. We invite readers to send us news and information about developments that link the FRA and various aspects of wildlife conservation in general and the protected area network in particular.

A Decade Ago

Protected Area Update 45, October 2003

ODISHA

Increased salinity in Chilka affects migratory bird population

Increased salinity levels following the opening of its mouth to the sea is reported to have adversely impacted the Chilka Lake. The increase in salinity has resulted in a major change in the flora and fauna of the lake and also resulted in the reduction of aquatic myophites, the ideal food of the birds visiting the lake. The increased salinity is also said to have cleared a weed that had infested the lake in the past and has helped in the emergence of new species that had disappeared from the lake. It has also resulted in the growth of different varieties of fish and prawn but, on the other hand, also destroyed the habitat for the birds. Consequently bird congregation has been sighted in the river mouth areas where salinity was considerably low than the central area of the lake.

Wildlife officials apprehend that if the lake continues to have the current level of salinity, the migratory birds might choose some other place for their winter abode.

Three years back, before the mouth of the lake was opened, over eight lakh migratory birds visited the lake during winter. Last year this was down drastically, to almost half the earlier population. The number of species of birds however, is reported to have gone up, from 180 a couple of years ago, to 211 in the last season.

Source: 'Migratory birds face shortage of natural habitat in Chilka', *The Daily Excelsior*, 28/10/03.

Villagers join government to check poaching in Chilka

Villagers in Orissa are teaming up with wildlife officials to check poaching of migratory and domestic birds in the Chilka Lake. Three people from each village around the lake will join the

anti-poaching drive. The State Government has also created a special Chilka Wildlife Division and 14 special squads have been set up to check the poaching of birds here.

A large number of people in the 132 villages around the lake earlier trapped birds as their principal source of livelihood. FD and NGO led initiatives over the last few years have been trying to wean them away from hunting and helping them in the search for alternative sources of income.

Source: Jatindra Dash. 'Villagers join government to check poaching in Chilka', *Indo-Asian News Service*, 23/10/03.

WEST BENGAL

Joint FD-NGO initiative in Singalila NP

The Forest Department and seven NGOs from North Bengal have come together in a joint initiative to work for the Singalila NP. The FD has banned the use of polythene in the park and also made it compulsory for tourists to take a guide with them. Programmes for the training and motivation of the local people, tourist guides and porters are also to be taken up.

The NGOs, from Siliguri, Naxalbari, Raiganj, Balurghat, Dinhata, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling, recently conducted a week-long cleanliness drive along the 31-km stretch of road in the park from Manebhanjang to Sandakphu with help from local residents. Residents of Manebhanjang, Chittrey, Lamedhura, Meghma, Gurasae, Tonglu, Tumling, Jowbari, Gairibas, Katyakata, Kalipokhari, Beekay Bhanjan and Sandakphu participated and a lot of non-biodegradable waste was collected during the drive. One of the main problems that still needs resolution is the large-scale tree cutting along the trekking route. The initiative has been taken up under the Clean and Green Singalila National Park Project.

Source: Forest dept shield for Singalila Park, *The Statesman*, 13/11/03.

PERSPECTIVE

Giving fresh water fishes their due

Freshwater fish have seldom been considered 'wildlife' and issues related to their conservation have rarely occupied the minds of the common public in India (and elsewhere around the world). Nevertheless, they are one of the most threatened groups of vertebrates with more than one third of the species on the verge of extinction. In the Western Ghats alone more than 50% of the described endemic fish species are threatened with extinction.

The freshwater ecosystems of the Western Ghats harbour an extraordinary diversity and endemism of fish, some of which are confined to the network of protected areas that dot the landscape. Yet protected areas in the region have never looked beyond the charismatic mega-vertebrate centric approaches. Take the case of the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR), which remains globally renowned for its large mammal diversity, especially for its tiger conservation efforts. Few know that it also harbours a unique assemblage of endemic freshwater fishes - the remaining populations of one genus, *Lepidopygopsis*, and eight species *Crossocheilus periyarensis*, *Garra mlapparaensis*, *G. periyarensis*, *Homaloptera silasi*, *Hypselobarbus periyarensis*, *Lepidopygopsis typus*, *Nemacheilus menoni* and *N. periyarensis* of endemic freshwater fish of which three have been listed as 'Endangered' and three as 'Vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Since three of the eight endemic fishes are categorized as 'Endangered', the Periyar Tiger Reserve qualifies as an Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) site, which represent high conservation priorities. Species that are restricted to a single location and with a very high risk of extinction (i.e., Critically Endangered or Endangered) and falling within a single management unit qualify as AZE species.

Although these endemic and threatened species are 'protected' in view of their distribution inside the boundary of the national park, no conservation efforts focused on 'fish' are currently in place. Indiscriminate introduction, escape and proliferation of exotic species, and pollution are posing serious threats to these fish species. Several organizations including those represented by the authors of the present communication are now working together to eliminate the existing threats - holding the key to the continued survival of this unique assemblage of freshwater fishes.

- **Rajeev Raghavan and Sanjay Molur**
Rajeev Raghavan is Researcher,
Conservation Research Group, Kochi.
Email: rajeevraq@hotmail.com. Sanjay
Molur is Executive Director, Zoo
Outreach Organization, Coimbatore.
Email: herpinvert@gmail.com

For Private Circulation/ Printed Matter

From

Kalpavriksh

Apt. 5, Sri Dutta Krupa
908 Deccan Gymkhana
Pune 411004