

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XX, No. 3

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**Protected Area Update**

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EDITORIAL

Does wildlife matter?

The world's largest democracy has chosen for itself a new government in what many have described as one of the most vibrant and complex elections India has seen. There is a new Prime Minister and as he gets on with the job of managing and governing this incredibly diverse country, we will be watching keenly for policies related to the environment and to wildlife. If the election manifestos of the major political parties are anything to go by, the future should be a matter of concern. For one, the environment figured only nominally in these manifestos and where it did, the broad thrust (with perhaps a couple of small exceptions) is on creating an economy and a future that is energy and resource intensive. For ecosystems, for thousands of human communities that depend on these for their livelihoods and for the beleaguered wildlife, the challenges one might imagine, are only going to grow bigger. In the macro-context, it would seem, wildlife and the environment indeed does not matter.

But let's invert the lens for a moment to look not at the future, but the past and not at the macro picture, but at what is happening on the ground. There is a very interesting clutch of reports in this issue of the *PA Update* (see Page 19), which show how wildlife and wildlife issues were made to matter, how, in fact, they became a key election issue in at least a dozen parliamentary constituencies across the length and breadth of the country this time. In Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Punjab the key issue was damage to crop and human life caused by animals such as nilgai, spotted deer, wild boar, elephants, monkeys and leopards. Candidates were forced by the electorate here to take cognizance of the issues, including, by threatening to boycott the polls. This issue of damage caused by wildlife has been a serious issue across the country and urgent solutions are indeed needed to deal with it.

There were other issues as well in other places. In the Kawal Tiger Reserve in Andhra Pradesh, the candidates were forced to deal with local concerns related to eviction in the name of wildlife conservation, while in the Kaziranga NP in Assam, political parties traded charges on the rhino poaching that continues here. In the Chitradurga district of Karnataka and the Chalakudy Lok Sabha constituency, local communities actually boycotted the polls in protest against the use of land for projects, they say, are environmentally destructive and would also harm their livelihoods. Also in Kerala, one saw the recommendations for declaring the Western Ghats as an ecologically sensitive zone becoming a key issue that even influenced the choice of the candidates of the various political parties.

One can argue that the individual geographies of these issues are circumscribed and the impact these will actually have on the final outcome will be small. Even if this is true, it is striking how the wildlife related narrative has infiltrated the election discourse. It is also possible that we are missing out the larger picture, and that a more elaborate and careful mapping of the ground situation or even the media might reveal a much larger presence and influence of these issues.

For an illustration see the section 'A decade ago' (Page 18) which has stories from an earlier Lok Sabha elections of May 2004. Attacks by the elephants in the Chandaka WLS were a key issue for the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency. That issue of the *PA Update* had only one story on wildlife and those elections; this issue, ten years later, has almost a dozen!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Conflict between villagers and foresters at Orang National Park

Forest guards resorted to a mild lathi charge on a group of villagers, mostly women and

children, who had entered the Bhabapur area of the Orang National Park to collect the reed grass they use in construction. They had also damaged a portion of the electric fencing of the park in the process. The incident occurred in the month of April and villagers staged a protest against the attack before the Dalgaoon police station in Darrang district demanding immediate arrest of the forest personnel responsible for this.

The Forest Department (FD), meanwhile, has lodged a complaint with the police regarding the intrusion. This is the second incident of conflict at Bhabapur - last year, a FD mahout died in an attack by villagers. The mahout had gone to the area to chase back a tiger, which had strayed, out of the park.

Though the park authorities had signed an MoU with WWF-India a couple of years ago for making an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 2,500 to owners for cattle killed inside or on the periphery of the park (*PA Update* Vol. XVII, No. 1), the initiative does not seem to be working. Villagers here are reported to have poisoned at least three tigers last year in retaliation (*PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 4; Vol. XVII, No. 1 and Vol. XVI, Nos. 5, 2 & 1). Forest officials have claimed that the villagers not only poison the tigers but also provide logistical support to poachers. The FD has arrested several villagers from the fringes on earlier occasions as well, for their involvement in rhino poaching.

The park recorded a tiger population of 24 in the census conducted last year. However, at least 18 tigers have died here since 2005. While nine of them were killed because of poisoning, the rest died of infighting.

Source: 'Protest after clash in Orang', *The Telegraph*, 26/04/14.

Contact: **DFO**, Orang NP, Mangaldoi Wildlife Division, P.O. Mangaldoi, Darrang - 784 125, Tel: 0914-22065(O), 22349(R)

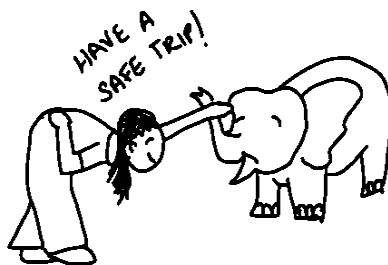
Four elephants shifted to Manas from wildlife rehab centre; to be released into the wild eventually

Four orphaned elephant calves hand-raised at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) near the Kaziranga

National Park (NP) have been shifted to Manas NP. The four elephants, three female and a male aged between three and five and a half years, will be kept in pre-release enclosures at Manas NP and released into the wild after they get used to the new environment.

These calves were rescued from different places and were moved to the CWRC. According to a CWRC official, a health check-up was conducted before they were sent to Manas. Five elephants that were shifted from CWRC to Manas NP in the past have already been released into the wild after being fitted with radio collars. Those animals have been observed to be socialising with the wild herds.

This initiative to rehabilitate marooned and abandoned elephant calves has been going on for a decade now. While many of the calves were reunited with their natal herds almost immediately after their rescue, which is a preferred practice wherever possible, a few have had to be hand-raised at CWRC before being eventually released into the wild.



Source: Pullock Dutta. '4 jumbo calves shifted to Manas - Orphan animals hand-raised at CWRC,' *The Telegraph*, 12/04/14.

Contact: **Sonali Ghosh, Dy. Director**, Manas NP, PO Barpeta Rd. Dist. Barpeta - 781315, Assam. Tel: 03666 - 261413. Fax: 232253 / 260253. Email: ghoshsonali@gmail.com

BIHAR

Satellite-tagged gharials released in River Gandak near Valmiki TR

Six gharials were satellite-tagged and released in the River Gandak adjacent to the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in the month of April. Five of these animals were female. They were sourced from Patna's Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park.

Wildlife officials said they will expand the project if this restocking initiative is successful.



Source: 'Satellite-tagged gharials released', *Deccan Herald*, 20/04/14.

Contact: **Director**, Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bettiah, Dist. West Champaran, Bihar. Tel: 06254 – 235331/232909. Fax: 232909

CHATTISGARH

Elephants spotted in Barnawapara WLS

Herds of elephants have been spotted in different areas of Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary. There are reported to be a total of 30 animals, a number that has never been seen here before. The Forest Department said that they had, most likely, migrated from neighbouring Odisha.

Two elephants were last seen here in 2010, but they hadn't stayed for more than 2-3 days. This time a herd of 12 elephants was spotted in compartment number 204 of the sanctuary for about two weeks and it has been suggested that it might be an indication that they might turn resident here.

Source: Rashmi Drolia, 'Tuskers knock at Chhattisgarh's Barnawapara wildlife sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 03/04/14.

Contact: DFO (WL), Barnawapara WLS, P.O. Pithora, Dist. Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Tel: 0771-2425064

DELHI

FD starts removing encroachments from Asola Bhatti WLS

The Forest Department (FD) has started a drive to remove encroachments from the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The National Green

Tribunal (NGT) had, in July 2013, asked the Delhi government to specify those regions of the Delhi Ridge, which were considered as forest area. The FD started making digitized maps of the area to demarcate the forestland and has made 14 such maps of the south Delhi ridge that clearly indicate the encroachments. The FD intends to remove the encroachments from the Asola Bhatti WLS, Maidan Garhi, and the Neb Sarai area and the government has given its approval for the same.

As a first step in the process, the FD, with protection from Delhi Police, demolished 500 metres of a farmhouse boundary wall in khasra number 1724 and a 32-meter wall of another farmhouse in khasra number 1728. It has restored about 11 acres of forestland, and, also reclaimed another patch of land that was being claimed by an individual as private property. The FD, however, did not touch a religious structure. Demolition will be carried out in 12 khasras in the first phase of the drive.

Some encroachers in Neb Sarai have been claiming that they had acquired the land under a 20-point programme of the government, though the FD says these were occupied illegally. One resident has complained to the NGT bench that his property was being demolished without serving a notice to him. He did not file any petition, but the NGT has asked the FD to clarify the status of his property.

Source: 'Asola encroachments removed,' *The Times of India*, 25/04/14.

GOA

32 mining leases to be cancelled in 1 km buffer zone around PAs

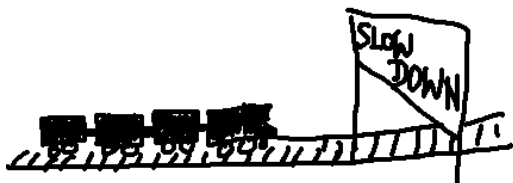
32 mining leases are to be cancelled on account of the Supreme Court's recent order fixing a one km buffer zone for mining around protected areas in the state. These include the Mhadei, Bondla and Netravali Wildlife Sanctuaries and Mollem National Park. Of these 32 leases, 22 had been working leases till the Supreme Court had imposed a ban on mining activity in Goa in October 2012 (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, Nos. 6, and 5).

The Supreme Court further stated that the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) will issue the notification of eco-sensitive zones around the PAs of Goa within a period of six months.

Source: Murari Shetye. '32 leases in 1km buffer zone to be cancelled', *The Times of India*, 24/04/14.

Contact: **Claude Alvares**. Tel: 0832 – 263305/ 6.
Email: oib@goatelecom.com

Speed limit sought on trains running through Mollem NP



The Deputy Conservator of Forests in charge of the Mollem National Park has written to the South-Western railway division at Hubli to curtail the speed of trains passing through the Mollem National Park, and to sensitise the drivers about the presence of wildlife here.

Cases of wildlife deaths on the railway tracks have become common in this area. Two sloth bears, one male and the other female, were killed recently near the Dudhsagar waterfall, about one km from the Caranzol railway station while crossing the tracks at night. The male died on the spot while the female died 15 days later while undergoing medical treatment at Bondla zoo. A leopard and a gaur were also mowed down here recently by a train.

Wildlife enthusiasts have expressed concern as many animals, including a large number of reptiles, die while crossing the rail tracks, especially during the night.

Source: 'Plea to curb train speeds at Mollem national park', *The Times of India*, 24/04/14.

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

Work on Kalsa-Bhandura project in the vicinity of Mhadei WLS continues despite tribunal order

Though the Karnataka government has been directed not to utilize or divert the waters under the Kalsa-Bhandura project till the dispute with Goa and Maharashtra is adjudicated upon by the tribunal, Karnataka has continued work of building canals to divert the same. On April 18, the Mhadei water disputes tribunal directed Karnataka not to utilize water or divert the water, but work on the Kalsa project, going on in Kankumbi since 2006, has not been stopped. Work with machinery like JCB machines and trucks has reportedly been going on from Amyacho Vhal to the temple of Mauli for completing the work on the open cut canal and also on the underground canal.

Project officials said they had been directed to not divert water of Kalsa and the order did not apply to work going on at Kankumbi. The Kalsa canal work site is 3.17 km away from the border of Surla village in Sattari, whereas the site of the proposed Kalsa dam is just 231.27 m away from the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary. The total length of the inter-connecting canal of the Kalsa project is 5,150m. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 1).

Source: Rajendra Kerkar. 'Kalsa work continues despite tribunal order' *The Times of India*, 19/04/14.

Contact: **Chief Wildlife Warden**, Wildlife Wing Junta House, Panaji403001, Goa. Tel: 0832 – 224747 / 223508 / 278891. Fax: 224747

GUJARAT

FD and NHAI plan to construct speed breakers to protect lions

The Forest Department (FD) and National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) officials have decided to set speed restrictions and put up signage in the area where lions are found along the coasts in the Saurashtra region. A proposal was also finalized to construct speed breakers in pockets where the lion movement is observed along the main road. The decisions were taken

in a recent meeting that was held following a road accident in which two lions were killed. It was also decided that NHAI should explore the possibility of building a fence along the road.

The FD also held meetings with the local villagers from either side of the highway and they too have recommended the setting up of speed breakers to reduce the number of accidents. Permission for the fences and the speed breakers will have to be taken from the Central government and this is expected to happen only after the new government is formed in May.

In the mean time, the FD has decided to post its trackers on night duty along the highway so that they can keep an eye on the movement of the big cats.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Forest department, NHAI plan speed bumps, signages to protect lions', *The Times of India*, 08/04/14.

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

JHARKHAND

Jharkhand prepares to control forest fires

The Jharkhand Forest Department (FD) has planned a series of initiatives to keep a check on forest fires. Around 30 per cent of the state's total area is under forest cover.

The Lohardaga divisional forest officer (DFO) has directed the officials to strengthen and reactivate their networks of local Joint Forest Management (JFM) groups to prevent fires. In the Khunti division, fire lines have been created in sensitive areas. The FD has been earmarking counter-fire zones in the vulnerable areas. 10 fire watchers have also been appointed on a daily payment basis. Additionally, the division has tied up with Koderma-based NGO, Rashtriya Jharkhand Vikas Samiti, to spread awareness about forest fires among the public. Together, they have constituted 200 JFMs in Khunti. For almost the entire month of March, the NGO conducted nukkad natak and chaupals

to educate villagers about the dos and don'ts of forest fires.

Palamau Tiger Reserve's core area DFO said that fire lines of about 5 metres each on either side of the roads had been drawn up, and about a dozen fire watchers had already been roped in. An official at the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary said some of the watchtowers were being repaired to use for fire surveillance. The FD has also held a number of meetings with the villagers to get their co-operation and is now working on a plan to reward villages with no forest fires.

Source: ASRP Mukesh, 'Special plans to avert forest fires', *The Telegraph*, 06/04/14.

Contact: **PCCF**, Jharkhand, At- Doranda, P.O. Doranda, Ranchi. Tel: 0651-2500455(O), 2500413(R) Fax: 0651-500413

KARNATAKA

High Court issues notice over plan for shifting Bellary zoo to area adjoining the Daroji Bear Sanctuary

The High Court of Karnataka has issued a notice to the state government on a public interest litigation questioning the notification for shifting the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Zoo from Bellary to the forests of Kamalapura, adjoining the Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary.

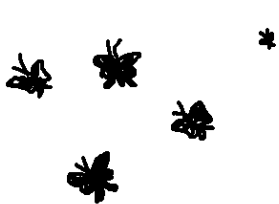
A division bench comprising Chief Justice D.H. Waghela and Justice B.V. Nagarathna passed the order stating that the zoo's proposed location falls within the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary. The petitioners have claimed that the purpose of setting up the sanctuary would be defeated if the zoo was shifted there.

Source: 'Bellary zoo: HC issues notice,' *The Hindu*, 23/04/14.

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

KERALA

Rare species of butterflies spotted in Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary



A survey conducted by the Department of Forests and Wildlife has found a number of rare species of butterflies in the Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary. Most of these species were found in the Shola forest areas of the sanctuary near the Idukki dam.

One of these is Baby Five-ring, one of the rarest butterflies in Kerala. It is known to have been seen very rarely and only in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Myanmar. This is also the first time that the Bright Babul Blue has been seen on the western slope of the Western Ghats in Idukki, far away from the dry eastern slope that is believed to be its natural home. Cornelian, Southern Blue Oakleaf and Coorg Forest Hopper that have been found sporadically from other parts of the state were also reported from here during the survey.

The survey was done by Dr.Unni Krishnan Pulikkal and Arun T.P. of the Butterfly Art Foundation with the operational support of sanctuary officials. Another survey of invertebrates that was carried out by the Zoological Survey of India had found the presence of Malabar Flash and Golden Tree-flitter here.

Source: Giji K. Raman, 'Survey finds rare species of butterflies in Idukki sanctuary', *The Hindu*, 01/04/14.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Idukki Wildlife Division, P.O. Painavu, Dist. Idukki – 685603. **Tel:** 04862-232271

CB probe proposed into Wayanad fire

The Kerala Department of Forest and Wildlife recommended a Crime Branch (CB) investigation into the forest fire that raged through five ranges of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in the month of March. Forest

Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan made the recommendation based on the findings in the final report submitted by Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Vigilance), C S Yalakki that the fire was man-made.

It was stated in the report that the fire broke out simultaneously in 15 places and it did not, therefore, seem like a natural incident. The findings of the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Vigilance) in the final report were the same as in his initial report, which was submitted to the minister on March 17, a day after the incident.

Source: 'CB probe into Wayanad wildfire mooted', *The New Indian Express*, 19/04/14.

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

FD for 'controlled burning' at Wayanad from next year onwards



The Forest Department (FD) has planned to resort to 'controlled burning' in the forests of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) from next summer. This follows the investigation carried out into the recent fire here that had reportedly spread over an area of 450 hectares. The FD concluded that though the fire was man-made, it may not have been deliberate (see story above).

Forest officials here are of the opinion that the uncontrolled growth of bamboo contributes to the spread of the fires. There is provision to remove it from areas outside the WLS, while concurrence of the state and national boards for wildlife is needed if the bamboo and the excess grass is to be removed from inside a PA. The state board had agreed to such a proposal in the past but the National Board for Wildlife had denied permission.

The option of 'controlled burning' was put forward by field officers when the Minister of Forests visited the area recently. At present, 'controlled burning' is resorted to in the Eravikulam National Park to get rid of dry grass. This is being pursued to facilitate growth of fresh grass to feed herbivores.

Source: Saritha S Balan, 'Forest Dept Plans 'Controlled Burning'', *The New Indian Express*, 07/04/14.

Five forest stations for Wayanad forests

The Kerala state government has sanctioned five forest stations for the Wayanad forests. The five stations will cover Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and north and south forest ranges, which include areas like Thirunelli, Tholpatty, Muthanga, Bengur and Sultan Bathery. The south Wayanad forest range covers forest areas like Chedleth, Kalpetta and Meppady spanning 323.81 sq km, while the north range covers areas like Manthavadi, Peria and Begur forest regions spanning 223.45 sq km.

The Forest Department (FD) currently has 180 field staff and they have to deal with problems like rising man-animal conflicts, Maoist intrusions, man-made forest fires and illegal encroachments. In addition to these challenges, the FD has to monitor the Wayanad WLS and assist 95 tribal settlements inside the forest, which are increasingly becoming vulnerable to animal attacks. Officials sighted an example of the recent man-made forest fire near Tholpatty-Pozhuthana forest range where field staff remained helpless as the fire spread rapidly in Thirunelli region and they had to wait for fire engines to arrive from Manthavadi, which is 30 km away. It is proposed to recruit 55 more field staff and this will include forest guards and veterinary doctors to help deal with the situation.

Source: Viju B. '5 forest stations to come up in Wayanad', *The Times of India*, 21/04/14.

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

MAHARASHTRA

Three irrigation projects, including two near Melghat TR, violate environmental laws: NGO

The South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (SANDRAP) has urged Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr Prithviraj Chavan, to withdraw the State Wildlife Board's (SWB) recent decision to clear three irrigation projects – Nardawe in Sindhudurg and Ar-Kacheri and Alewadi in Buldhana district near the Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR). SANDRAP has alleged that these three projects are violating Supreme Court directives and crores of rupees have been spent on them without acquiring essential wildlife clearances.

The Nardawe project is alleged to have violated the Forest (Conservation) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act. An environment impact assessment (EIA) of the project has still to be carried out fully and yet the Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation has already spent more than Rs. 311 crore on this project.

The Ar-Kacheri project which will irrigate 1900 hectares of land needs 321.43 hectares of private land located six km from MTR. In any case, SANDRAP points out, half the proposed land to be irrigated is already under irrigation. The Alewadi project, similarly, needs diversion of 273 hectares private land, and is situated about four 4 km from the boundary of MTR. Farmers are reportedly not ready to part with their land for either of these projects.

SANDRAP has also pointed out that the 65th meeting of the expert appraisal committee had rejected the terms of reference for the Ar-Kacheri and Alewadi projects, but the SWB has still gone ahead and cleared them.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Prithviraj Chavan urged to withdraw Ar-Kacheri, Alewadi irrigation projects', *The Times of India*, 11/04/14.

Contact: **Field Director**, Melghat Tiger Reserve Amravati- 444 602 Maharashtra . Tel: 0721 – 2662792 / 2551766. 07223 – 220214 / 222643. Fax: 0721 – 2662792. Email: ati_meltjag@sancharnet.in

Camera traps for wildlife in Gautala Autramghat WLS; sanctuary also gearing up to receive tourists

A proposal seeking 12 camera traps for the Gautala Autramghat Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has been sent to the forest division in Nashik. Officials said they were expecting to receive the equipment during the wildlife census scheduled for May.

The Forest Department (FD) here has also initiated a number of activities to boost tourism in the sanctuary while at the same time studying the impact of human presence on wildlife. A four-member team of experts from the Cohort for Bio-Research, Jalgaon, recently started a study of the impact of traffic and noise disturbances that have been created due to the presence of national highway 211 near the forest area. The team also plans to gauge the impact on wildlife, possible movement of animals and connection between major water and food resources. The team would submit its report in the next couple of months.

An information centre for the sanctuary and the species found here has been established at Hivarkheda. Sign boards have been erected in different places indicating directions to tourist spots and 12 pagoda like structures have been constructed for resting and sight-seeing purposes. Adequate safety arrangements have been provided in the form of nakas and watch towers, with one guard and two forest workers being stationed there, especially during the night. The historical sites of Gautam Rishi temple and Sita Nani are being developed to attract visitors and affordable residential arrangements have been made. The rooms can be booked through the wildlife office located in Aurangabad. 10 locals have also been trained as guides under the eco-development scheme of the joint forest management committee.

A number of activities directed towards better management, protection and conservation of wildlife have also been initiated. Smokeless stoves and solar cookers have been provided to four villages – Hivarkheda, Bildari, Haraswadi and Junona in the vicinity of the sanctuary and street lights operating on solar energy have been installed. Fire-fighting equipment has also been

procured to tackle wild fires though no such instances have been reported in last two years.

Source: Himanshu Nitnaware. 'Gautala sanctuary to get cameras for tracking animals', *The Times of India*, 10/04/14.

Umred-Karhandla officials catch nine poachers

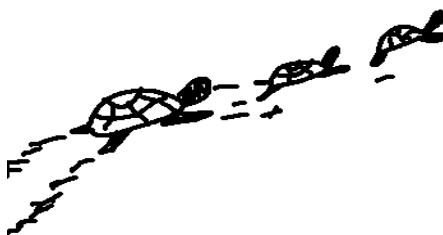
Officials of the Umred-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary caught nine alleged poachers inside the sanctuary in early April. The poachers were identified as residents of Budhwaripeth, Umred and are known to be habitual offenders. It is believed that they had been frequenting the area for long, but have been caught for the first time. Two of their accomplices did, however, manage to escape.

The divisional forest officer informed that the group was caught in compartment number 1415 in Karhandla beat. They had sneaked into the park on seven bicycles and two motorcycles with an alleged intention to poach wild animals. A dozen weapons like spears, sickles, knives, and big, thick nets were also confiscated from them. Those apprehended were produced before the court and the Judicial Magistrate sent them to custody till April 14.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. '9 poachers nabbed in Umred-Karhandla', *The Times of India*, 12/04/14.

ODISHA

Six lakh turtle hatchlings went to the sea from the Rushikulya rookery



Forest officials have estimated that nearly six lakh hatchlings have made their way to the sea from the Rushikulya rookery following the nesting of about 61000 Olive ridley turtles here in the month of March. The nesting this year

was much lower and also earlier as compared to previous years. An estimated three lakh turtles had nested here in 2013.

Special efforts were also taken to ensure the safe journey back to the sea for the hatchlings here. The Forest Department had requested the urban body of Ganjam town, authorities of Jayashree Chemicals as well as the inhabitants of villages near the rookery to switch off lights at night from April 2 till the end of the mass hatching process. Nets were also fixed towards the landward side of the nesting areas. The hatchlings that strayed and moved towards the land were caught in the net. They were collected and released into the sea by forest officials and volunteers.

Source: 'Six lakh Olive Ridley hatchlings find their way to the sea', *The Hindu*, 10/04/14
Contact: **DFO**, Bhitarkanika NP, At/PO Rajnagar, Dist. Kendrapada – 745225. Odisha. Tel: 06729-72460/64. Fax: 06727-20775

FD digs 21 water bodies for elephants, wildlife in Athagarh



The Forest Department (FD) has dug 21 water bodies in Athagarh forest division at a cost of Rs. 64.5 lakh in order to help elephants and other wild animals tide over the water shortage during summer. Among the 21 are 17 ponds, measuring 40x30 m which have been dug at a cost of Rs. 2.5 lakh each. Rs 5.5 lakh each has been spent on digging the other four ponds of a size 50x50x3 m. There are estimated to be 131 elephants in the forest division

In the last one year, the FD has paid Rs. 72 lakh as compensation to villagers in the division for crop and property damaged by

elephants and this is one of the reasons it is trying to make available water and fodder inside the forest itself. Nine such ponds had been dug last year as well, but most of them have dried up, necessitating the creation of new ones.

Source: Binita Jaiswal. 'Beating the summer heat: 21 ponds dug up for elephants in Odisha,' *The Times of India*, 24/04/14.

Satkosia wildlife division faces staff crunch

Satkosia wildlife division has been facing a serious staff crunch. According to official reports, there are 17 foresters against the sanctioned posts of 25 and 49 forest guards against the requirement of 60. The Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary itself needs a staff of 135 but has only 97 personnel as of now.

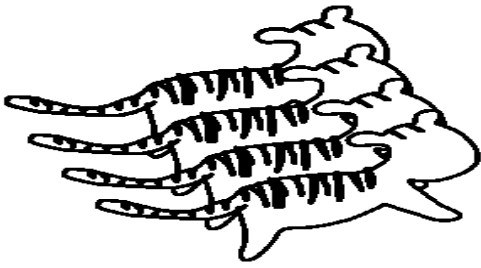
Two sanctioned posts of Assistant Conservator of Forests in the wildlife division are lying vacant and there are only two range officers here though the number of ranges is five. The ranges that don't have a range officer are Tikarpada, Zillinda and Purunakote and the officer at Raigoda is also expected to retire soon.

It is feared that this shortage of staff will lead to poachers here becoming active again. Officials have identified 50 armed poachers operating in the sanctuary. Many of them have licensed guns provided by the Angul administration without concurrence of the Satkosia wildlife division authorities. Recently, five of them were arrested by the authorities. Besides poachers, the timber mafia is also active in the sanctuary owing to lack of security provisions.

Source: 'Not Enough Officials to Man Satkosia Tiger Reserve', *The New Indian Express*, 24/04/14.

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

NTCA advocates connecting Satkosia and Similipal Tiger Reserves



Odisha. Tel: 06792-252593(O),
252773(R) Fax: 256705

CWLW– Odisha, Plot No. 8, Shahid
Nagar, Bhubaneshwar – 751007, Odisha.
Tel: 0674- 2512502 / 2513134 / 2515840.
Fax: 512502

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has proposed that the jurisdiction of the Similipal landscape should be expanded to include parts of Keonjhar so as to improve the wildlife corridor connecting the Similipal and Satkosia Tiger Reserves. A joint NTCA-Wildlife Trust of India study had, in 2010, already pointed to the existence of the corridor and the fresh suggestions have come from the NTCA Chairman Rajesh Gopal and Inspector General H S Negi who recently visited the state to review the tiger conservation plans for these two reserves.

The NTCA has asked the Satkosia Tiger Reserve management to prepare the micro plan for corridor development and management comprising Angul and Dhenkanal and contiguous parts of Jajpur district. The Similipal plan will consist of Mayurbhanj, Balasore and Anandpur, apart from Hadagarh Wildlife Sanctuary. This will, however require a nod from the Forest and Environment Department.

The area beyond Anandpur would remain under the control of Rourkela though the NTCA has advocated that the Anandpur wildlife division should also be brought under the jurisdiction of Satkosia. Currently, it is under the ambit of Regional Chief Conservator of Forests (RCCF), Rourkela, while RCCF, Baripada has jurisdictional control over Mayurbhanj and Balasore.

The NTCA also reviewed the core area management of Satkosia which has been experiencing human interference because of fishing and tourism.

Source: 'NTCA Proposal for Linking State's 2 Tiger Reserves,' *The New Indian Express*, 25/04/14.

Contact: **Director**, Similipal Tiger Reserve, P.O. Baripada, Dist. Mayurbhanj – 757002,

TAMIL NADU

Dry weather forces closure of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu ordered the closure of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) from April 10 as a measure of precaution in light of the extremely dry weather conditions, the consequent chances of fires breaking out and also the increased pressure on water sources.

Carelessness on the part of tourists is a major reason for forest fires and people, including tribal communities, residing in or near the tiger reserve have been asked to be extremely careful. Patrolling and fire prevention measures have been intensified and arrangements have been made to meet the water requirements of wild animals through provision of tankers.

The park will remain closed till further orders and the closure time will also be utilized to carry out maintenance works.

Source: 'Dry weather forces closure of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve', *The Hindu*, 10/04/14.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Mudumalai WLS, Mt. Stewart Hill, Udhamandalam - 643001 Tamil Nadu. Tel: 0423-244098

UTTARAKHAND

Survey begins for Rishikesh-Karnaprayag rail line; concern over impact on forests, wildlife

Preliminary survey work has begun for the 125.09 km Rishikesh-Karnaprayag rail line that is estimated to cost Rs. 4295.3 crore. The proposed rail line will pass through Dehradun, Tehri, Paudi and Chamoli districts, will have 128 bridges and 81 tunnels, and will also pass

through a three-km stretch of the Rishikesh forest range. Forest officials have expressed concern over the impact this will have on wildlife, as the 18 km Dehradun-Haridwar railway line cutting across the Rajaji National Park has already been causing casualties of elephants, leopards and other smaller animals.

Forest officials have also pointed out that the railway authorities were flouting the Forest (Conservation) Act by not carrying out modalities related to forestland transfer and yet going ahead with the survey work. The Deputy General Manager of the Railway Vikas Nigam Ltd. is reported to have said, on the other hand, that the railways have multiple proposals with regard to alignment, and will leave it to the Forest Department to choose one among them.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'Trains to chug through Rishikesh forest?', *The Times of India*, 21/04/14.

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

Expert committee rejects 23 out of 24 power projects on Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers because of location inside or close to PAs

The monitoring committee that was formed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests following the Supreme Court directive in October 2013 has unanimously decided not to recommend 23 of the hydropower projects on the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers in Uttarakhand. The 13-member committee comprising experts from various fields was set up to study 24 proposed hydropower projects in the aftermath of the unprecedented floods experienced in the state in June 2013. Most of the rejected projects were proposed either in eco-sensitive zones or within forbidden zones of wildlife sanctuaries or national parks, and in habitats of rare, endangered and threatened species.

The site of the proposed Rambara Project (24 MW) on the Mandakini River was washed out during the June 2013 deluge. The Alaknanda (300 MW) and Khairon Ganga (4 MW) projects are proposed within 10-km of the Valley of Flowers National Park (NP), a World

Heritage Site, while four others - the Lata Tapovan (170 MW), Malari Jhelam (114 MW), Jalam Tamak (126 MW) and Tamak Lata (250 MW) projects on the Dhauliganga river fall within the Nanda Devi NP, another World Heritage Site. Two others on the Rishi Ganga river, with a joint capacity of 105 MW, have been proposed within a 10-km radius of the Nanda Devi NP.

The members of the committee only approved the Kotlibhel (195 MW) project because this was in a "comparatively low biodiversity sensitive area", and would not significantly impact wildlife. It was, however, noted that even this project could impede the free flow of the river up to 20 km downstream. Speaking of other projects not listed along with these 24, the members expressed concern that approval was granted to the Lakhwar (300 MW) and Vysai (120 MW) project recently, without the mandatory clearances, and also without an approved disaster management plan.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, Nos. 6 & 4)

Source: Seema Sharma, 'SC committee rejects 23 of 24 proposed Uttarakhand hydro projects', *The Times of India*, 09/04/14.

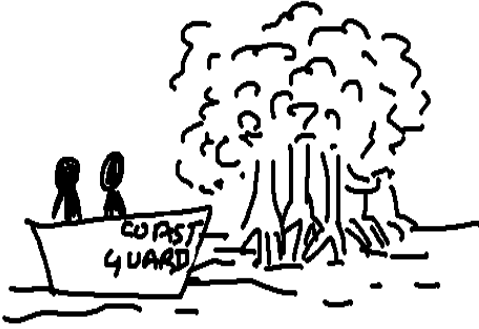
WEST BENGAL

New Indian Coast Guard station in the Sundarbans

A new Indian Coast Guard (ICG) station has been set up at Frazerganj in the Sundarbans. Two hovercrafts will operate from this forward operating base in South 24-Parganas district and ensure regular surveillance of the international maritime boundary and the adjoining shallow water area.

Various maritime operations like anti-poaching, search and rescue, pollution response and anti-piracy will also be the mandate of the new station. It will coordinate with the state administration, police, customs, fisheries, forest department and other agencies including local fishermen to achieve an effective surveillance and security network.

Commandant Rajendra Swaroop has been appointed Commanding Officer of the new ICG station.



Source: 'Sundarbans gets Coast Guard station,' *Business Standard*, 14/04/14.

Contact: **Field Director**, Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, PO Canning, Dist. South 24 Parganas 743329, West Bengal

SOUTH ASIA

SRI LANKA

Important Bird Areas Update

NATIONAL NEWS

ASSAM

Himalayan griffon vultures poisoned at Patiagaon; three found dead, two others rescued and released in Kaziranga NP

Two Himalayan griffon vultures were found poisoned in early April at Patiagaon on the banks of the Brahmaputra. The two were rescued from a paddy field along with the carcasses of three other birds by forest department staff. They were treated at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation and then released in the Kaziranga National Park.

Sri Lankan monk demands capture of wild elephants for temple duties

A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk who is the patron of the Tamed Elephant Owners' Association, has demanded that authorities capture wild pachyderms to boost the dwindling number of elephants in temples in Sri Lanka. He noted that there were only 130 tamed elephants in the country and of these only about half were actually available for temple parades.

The monk led a procession of about two-dozen elephants from parliament to the wildlife office to make his demands.

Source: 'Sri Lanka monk demands capture of wild elephants for temples', www.straitstimes.com, 26/03/14.

Forest officials said the birds had consumed a cow carcass and fallen ill. A veterinarian at the rehabilitation centre said the two birds when brought there were refusing to take food. They showed clear signs of being poisoned and were administered an antidote. It was only after three days that they started to take food again.

The site where they were found falls under the 30,000 square km "vulture safe zone" spread over parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is here that the vultures being hand-raised at the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre at Rani near Guwahati will be released, and experts working on the conservation programme have already begun a sanitization process in the area. Special efforts are being made to ensure that there is no use of diclofenac

in the area selected for the release of the vultures.

It was not clear, however, if diclofenac was the cause of the poisoning in the present case.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Vultures released in Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 18/04/14.

Seven vultures found dead in Tinsukia

Seven vultures, including three critically endangered Slender-billed vultures, died after consuming a carcass of a poison-laced cow at Lajunpathar under Kakopathar police station in Tinsukia district on April 20. Another seven vultures, all Himalayan griffons, were rescued from the area and sent for treatment to the Wildlife Trust of India-run mobile veterinary service centre at Saikhowa. This is the largest number of vultures found dead in Upper Assam in recent times.

It was not clear if the dead cow had been administered diclofenac. It has also been suggested that bones of vultures are in demand and fetch a good price in villages near the incident site, though it is not clear what the bones are used for. Officials are also exploring this angle as the possible motive for spraying poison on the cow carcass to kill the vultures.

The Lajunpathar area is also part of the 30,000 square km "safe zone" for vultures here (see earlier story as well)

Source: 'Seven vultures found dead in Tinsukia', *The Telegraph*, 21/04/14.

MAHARASHTRA

Committee for Sarus crane conservation in Gondia district

The Maharashtra State Government has set up a six-member expert committee for the conservation of Sarus Cranes and their habitat in Gondia district. The Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & State Biodiversity Board (SBB) Member-Secretary announced the formation of the committee in a meeting held on February 25 in Mumbai. The committee includes

the Deputy Conservators of Forests of Gondia and Bhandara, Honorary District Wildlife Wardens of Gondia and Bhandara and a couple of members of the civil society organizations in the region.

The Principal Secretary (forests) has already ordered Gondia officials to conserve malguzari tanks, grass plantations and to remove ipomoea weeds from Sarus crane areas. Now the expert committee plans to set up Biodiversity Management Committees through which conservation work will be taken up. The SBB will allot funds as per the requirement.

The current number of sarus cranes in Gondia district is estimated to be 50.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Six-member panel set up for cranes conservation', *The Times of India*, 25/04/14.

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

TAMIL NADU

Five long-billed vultures sighted in the Nilgiris

Wildlife officials and volunteers of Arulagam, a Coimbatore-based NGO involved in vulture conservation, recently sighted five long-billed vultures along the north-eastern slopes of the Nilgiris. A huge cattle population is found in the Nilgiris and its surrounding areas and it has been suggested that this could be the reason that the vultures continue to be found here.

The other vulture species that are reported from the Nilgiris, the Moyar Valley and adjoining areas include the White-backed, King and Egyptian vultures.

Source: P. Oppili 'Long-billed vultures sighted in the Nilgiris', *The Hindu*, 06/04/14.

PAKISTAN

Saudi prince hunts 2100 houbara bustards in three weeks in Balochistan; hunts illegally inside PAs as well

In what is considered the first incident of its kind, a Saudi prince and his hunting party hunted

a record number of over 2,100 houbara bustards during a 21-day hunting safari in the Chagai region of Balochistan in Pakistan. This included illegal hunting in protected areas. The hunting expedition was carried out from Jan 11, 2014, to Jan 31 wherein the prince himself hunted 1,977 birds. Other members of his party hunted an additional 123 birds, bringing the total toll to 2,100.

Although the birds are officially protected in Pakistan, VIP visitors from the Gulf are allowed to hunt the rare bird as part of the practice of the Pakistan government to issue hunting permits to individual members of royalty with a cap of 100 birds per person. The hunting is, however, allowed for only 10 days and this limit too was violated by the prince and his hunting party.

The hunting was also carried out within protected areas: 112 bustards were killed in the Gut game sanctuary (Arbe pat); 209 were killed in the Gut game sanctuary (Sai Rek), 582 birds

in the Koh-i-Sultan state forest, 313 in Gut game sanctuary (Dam) and another 403 birds in the Gut game sanctuary.

Source: 'Arab royal hunts 2,100 endangered houbara bustards in three week safari in Balochistan',
www.transasianews.com

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 NEWS

Interim application filed in SC in the matter of FRA claims in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh

Three NGOs, Wildlife First, Nature Conservation Society, Amravati, and TRACT, have filed an interim application in their still-pending case in the Supreme Court related to the FRA. The application is numbered IA 5 in Wildlife First and Ors. vs. Union of India and Ors. [WP 109/2008] and was filed on 21.2.2014.

Following are the prayers of the applicants in the present application:

i) direct the respondents to constitute a committee of independent experts or the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) to examine the implementation of the Impugned Act and in particular the procedure adopted

for identification of the genuine claims and grant of forest rights in three states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and submit a report to this Hon'ble Court within two months;

- ii) direct the above independent committee or the CAG to give a report as to the extent of forest land which has been physically occupied by the ineligible claimants after the cutoff date of 13th December 2005 or whose claims have been rejected under the provisions of the impugned Act and the extent of forest land that has been recovered from the such ineligible claimants/encroachers;
- iii) direct the Respondent No. 2 States to provide information giving district-wise details including the number of individual and community claims filed, claims granted and claims rejected along with the extent of forest

area involved in all these three categories within a time bound manner;

- iv) direct the respondents to permit voluntary resettlement of people residing within national parks and sanctuaries without insisting on settling their rights therein under the impugned Act and;
- v) direct the Respondent No. 2 to issue directions to all the states for mandatory use of satellite imageries for verification of all the claims as a proof/ evidence of actual occupation/ physical possession of the forest lands as on the cutoff date of 13.12.2005 before granting any new rights under the impugned Act. Directions may also be issued to use satellite imageries to review all the rights which have already been granted under the impugned Act to verify their correctness;
- vi) grant ad-interim ex-parte stay of commercial extraction of all non timber forest produce (NTFP) from national parks and sanctuaries in view of the prohibition provided in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and also prohibited by this Hon'ble Court's order dt. 14.2.2000 passed in IA No. 548 in WP (C) 202 of 1995, till the disposal of the present petition

A joint letter of appeal was sent in response to this application requesting the applicants to withdraw their application and what they have termed their anti-FRA petition in the SC. Those who signed this letter included among others the All India Forum of Forest Movements, the All India Union of Forest Working People, Greenpeace India, Vivekananda Girijana Kalyan Kendra, BRT Hills, Mahan Sangharsh Samiti Indian Community Activists Network, and the Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development. A number of individuals also signed on to this letter.

Source: Shankar Gopalakrishnan, Email dated 03/04/14.

Contact: Shankar Gopalakrishnan.

Email: shankargopal@myfastmail.com

GUJARAT

Aghariyas from Little Rann of Kutch issued eviction notices; claims under FRA pending

Aghariyas (the salt making community) living in the Little Rann of Kutch (LRK) were issued eviction notices by the wildlife warden of the area in the first week of April. The notice pointed out that as per Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) - 1972 (amendment 2002) any activity in the sanctuary area was prohibited and those violating the law were liable to punishment from 3 to 7 years of imprisonment and a penalty of Rs. 25000.

They were asked to provide documentary evidence for the activity within seven days or else to vacate the Rann with all their equipment. The AHRM has on behalf of the 12 to 15 thousand Aghariya families here already made a representation to "tribal commissioner" to initiate the process of recognizing customary community user rights over LRK as per the Forest Rights Act. The representation is still with the authorities.

Those who are aware of the situation here note that the LRK is nearly 5000 sq. km of un-surveyed land, and was recently given survey number 'Zero'. The government too does have not have any land records for the area in which the Aghariya community has been involved in salt farming for at least six centuries.

Source: Email from Pankti Jog, dated 05/04/14.

Contact: **Pankti Jog**, 3, Sahajanand Tower, Jivraj Park Cross Rd, Ahmedabad -380051, Gujarat, India. Email: jogpankti@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 49, June 2004**

MAHARASHTRA

Forest Owlet discovered in Yawal WLS

A team from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Satpuda Foundation recently recorded the presence of the endangered Forest Owlet in the Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary in Jalgaon District. The two nearest known locations for the bird are at Shahada, 120 km west to Yawal and Melghat, 150 km to the east

Source: Email from Kishor Rithe. 25/05/04.

ORISSA

Elephants from Chandka become election issue

Elephants from the Chandka Wildlife Sanctuary near Bhubaneswar were an important election issue during the recently concluded assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Candidates campaigning in Chandka, Andharua and Bharatpur villages of the Bhubaneswar constituency were trying to convince voters on the single issue that they will save them from the attacks of wild animals. The villages are part of the Jatni Assembly constituency.

Villages in this region and as also those around Bhubaneswar, have for many years been suffering because of the elephants. More than 24 villagers have died in the last decade due to elephant attacks.

Congress candidate Soumya Ranjan Patnaik promised to divert a portion of his MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) Fund for better metal fencing and trench digging work around the sanctuary. Biju Janta Dal (BJD)'s Prasanna Patsani assured villagers that he would make 'elephant trespassing' a big issue in parliament.

Mr. Prasanna Patsani was elected as the MP from the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha

seat, while Mr. Sarat Paikray was elected as the member from the Jatni Assembly segment

Source: Himanshu Sahoo. 'Jumbo problem a big poll issue in Bhubaneswar', *Hindustan Times*, 17/04/04.

WEST BENGAL

Bengal; WWF alleges that Railways are flouting High Court guidelines

The conversion of the metergauge railway track to broad gauge in the North Bengal region was completed in November 2003. Subsequent to this there have been at least two reports of elephant accidents, including one, in which the animal finally died (see *PA Update 47*).

The rail track passes through a number of protected areas in this region. The conversion to broad gauge was strongly opposed by a number of wildlife and conservation groups because of the fear that it would lead to a larger number of accidents involving elephants. The WWF - India Calcutta Chapter, had filed a petition in the Calcutta High Court (also see *PA Updates 43, 39, 36, 34, 32 & 29*) opposing the conversion. In response the High Court had appointed an advisory committee and guidelines were laid out to reduce the impact of the gauge conversion on wildlife.

WWF has alleged that the railways are flouting these guidelines and that they have collected video footage of the evidence of this. The evidence was collected during a tour conducted by officials of the WWF on the tracks between Sukna and Gulma stations. Forest officials of the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary had helped organise this tour.

The team found that the trenches dug along the tracks for gauge conversion had not been filled up, making them death traps for unsuspecting animals. The space left on either side of the track was not sufficient for large animals to walk on. There was also only one board cautioning train drivers before entering elephant territory and that too was said to be worn out.

Source: Kuheli Chakravorty. 'Evidence on camera to save jumbos', *The Telegraph*, 19/04/04.

Where wildlife related issues came centre-stage in these elections...

State	PA	Constituency/ District	Issue
Andhra Pradesh	Kawal Tiger Reserve	Khanapur, Bellampally and Asifabad (State assembly constituencies), Adilabad district	40 villages in these constituencies expressed concern over reports of eviction following the creation of the buffer zone for the TR over an area of nearly 1100 sq km. Four villages in the core of the reserve- Alinagar, Dongapalli, Malyal and Maisampet – have reportedly agreed to relocation and to the rehabilitation package of Rs. 10 lakhs per family. Source: S Harpal Singh. 'Tribal people to confront leaders over fate of villages', <i>The Hindu</i> , 06/04/14.
Assam	Kaziranga National Park	Kaliabor Lok Sabha constituency	The issue here is of continued rhino poaching and the encroachment in and around Kaziranga NP by suspected Bangladeshi nationals. The opposition parties including the Bhartiya Janata Party, the Asom Gana Parishad and the Communist Party of India, Marxist have all blamed the ruling Congress government for the present situation. All party manifestos talk of better protection for the rhino, which is the state animal. Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap. 'In Assam Kaziranga's rhinos become election plank', <i>The Indian Express</i> , 06/4/14.
Chhattisgarh	-	Sarasbahar village, Jashpur District	Around 1000 villagers here threatened to boycott the polls on a number of issues, including that of elephant attacks on paddy fields, homes and people. One of key demands in this zero electricity village is for power supply, which the villagers argue will illuminate the village at night and also help keep elephants at bay. Source: Rashmi Drolia. 'Chhattisgarh's Jashpur villagers to boycott polls', <i>The Times of India</i> , 24/03/14.

Himachal Pradesh		2301 panchayats across the state	<p>The main issue is damage to crops by a range of wild animals, mainly monkeys, wild boar, hare, fruit bats and nilgai that have affected large areas in the districts of Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur, Solan and Sirmour. In the Dehra sub-division of Kangra district, farmers in more than 20 panchayats have given up traditional farming to take up other work on account of the damage caused to their crops. A study conducted two years ago showed that the troubles caused by animals have affected 2,301 panchayats across the state and the annual crop losses have been nearly Rs. 500 crore. The government has so far also sterilised 77,380 monkeys since 2007, but the troubles seem far from over. Major political parties like the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party were seen making promises in the run up to elections to deal with this issue.</p> <p>Source: Gaurav Bisht, 'Wild boars, leopards, deer join monkeys as poll issues in HP', <i>Hindustan Times</i>, 22/04/14.</p>
Karnataka	Nagarahole Tiger Reserve	Mysore-Madikeri Lok Sabha constituency	<p>The key issue citizens are raising here is related to the large-scale problem of elephant depredation in areas adjoining the forests of the Nagarahole TR. In Kodagu's Madikeri division alone, 610 cases of animals attack were reported in which three persons died while the estimated crop loss was put at 19.24 lakh during 2013-14. In the ten years since 2000, Kodagu Circle has reported 67 human deaths in elephant attacks.</p> <p>Source: HM Aravind. 'It's a jumbo issue for villagers bordering Nagarahole tiger reserve', <i>The Times of India</i>, 06/04/14.</p>

Karnataka	Amrit Mahal Kavals	Chitradurga district	<p>The villagers of Challakere taluka boycotted the polls in protest against the diversion of their Amrit Mahal Kavals (grassland forests) that form the main source of livelihoods for about 300000 people in 80 villages. An estimated 10000 acres of pristine grasslands in Kudapura, Varavukaval and Ullarti Amrit Mahal Kavals have been transferred to the Defense Research Development Organization (DRDO), Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Karnataka State Small Scale Industries Association and a host of other national and transnational companies. The village Tehsildars, reportedly, tried to convince the villagers to vote, but were unsuccessful.</p> <p>Source: 'Challakere villages boycott polls as political parties ignore appeal of villagers', www.udayvanienglish.com, 18/04/14.</p>
Kerala	Athirapally forests	Chalakydy Lok Sabha constituency	<p>340 individuals from 70 hamlets of the Kadar tribal community in the Vazhachal forests boycotted the elections in protest against the Athirapally Hydro-electric project that they said would destroy their lives. The project would displace 163 Kadar families in Vazhachal and 71 families in the Pokalappara settlements. The total number of Kadars, who live in Pokalappara, Vazhachal, Vachumaram, Ambalapara, Malakkapara and Sholayar hamlets in the same locality is said to be fewer than 1,500. The Chalakydy river basin, which includes the famous Athirappilly waterfalls area as well, is the only home to the Kadars.</p> <p>Source: KA Shaji. 'Kadar tribe boycotts polls in Vazhachal over power project', <i>The Hindu</i>, 11/04/14.</p>

Kerala	Western ghats	Idukki Lok Sabha constituency	<p>The recommendations of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel and that of the Kasturirangan Committee are the key issue here with the state government strongly opposing the original eco-sensitive zone proposal. The sitting Congress MP, PT Thomas, who had taken a strong stand in favour of conservation was denied the ticket to contest this time. The Left parties put up an independant candidate supported by Syro Malabar Catholic Church (SMC) that is strongly opposed to the committee proposals.</p> <p>Source: M Suchitra. 'Western Ghats conservation now a poll issue in Kerala's Idukki', <i>Down to Earth</i>, 19/03/14.</p>
Odisha	Gahirmatha Sanctuary and Bhitarkanika National Park	Kendrapada district	<p>The key demands here are related to loss of crops and human lives in attacks by crocodiles, wild boar and spotted deer. It is estimated that nearly one lakh people are affected by wildlife and forest laws in the Rajnagar and Mahalakapada assembly constituencies here. This includes the issue of the embargo on sea-fishing to ensure the safety of Olive ridley turtles that nest along the coast here.</p> <p>Source: Odisha: Security from wildlife attacks key poll issue', <i>Business Line</i> 15/04/14.</p>
Punjab	Six WLSs in Patiala: Bir Gurdialpur, Bir Bhadson, Bir Bunerheri, Bir Dosanjih, Bir Mehaswala, Bir Motibar	Patiala Lok Sabha constituency	<p>The main issue here too is of crop damage by wild boar and nilgai. Farmers here keep vigil for nine months a year to prevent these animals from damaging their crops and have been demanding the construction of fences to solve their problem. The government has sanctioned Rs. 14 crores for the construction of these fences and all the birs are to be covered in phases.</p> <p>Source: Amaninder Pal Sharma. 'Forest fencing remains a poll issue in Patiala villages', <i>The Times of India</i>, 24/04/14.</p>

Tamil Nadu		Pollachi Lok Sabha constituency	<p>The National Democratic Alliance’s Pollachi candidate from the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi, E.R. Eswaran, promised as part of his election campaign, to bring amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act as a number of people in the forest periphery stood affected. He said he would implement the Anamalaiaru –Nallaru scheme, widen the Coimbatore-Pollachi road and expedite the pending gauge conversion project as well.</p> <p>Source: ‘Eswaran seeks changes to Wildlife Protection Act’, <i>The Hindu</i>, 22/04/14.</p>
Uttar Pradesh	Suhelwa WLS	Shravasti-Balrampur Lok Sabha constituency	<p>Villagers living in the region threatened to boycott polls if the issue of attacks by leopards here was not addressed. Nearly 75000 people living in the 100 odd villages around the sanctuary are said be to be affected by this problem. At least six children were killed and another four injured in leopard attacks in just the last six months. Villagers complain that nearly half the villages here don’t have electricity making it easier for the leopards to attack.</p> <p>Source: Nitin Srivastava, ‘Why leopard attacks have become election issue in India’, www.bbc.com, 02/04/14.</p>
Uttar Pradesh		Bahraich District	<p>Residents of eight forest villages, Kailashnagar, Nayee Bastee, Daseya Gauri, Bhawanipur, Bichiya gaon, Butiya Bazar, Tedhia, Dhethiya and Nishatgarh in the Mihinpurwa block threatened to boycott polls until they were given assurances that their problems related to the lack of electricity, basic amenities and conflicts with wildlife were not dealt with. The residents who belong to the dalit and OBC category also noted that the Forest Rights Act had not been implemented here properly. They allege that their livelihood activities like picking and crushing stones from the bet of the Gerwa river and collection of forest produce has been stopped following protests by wildlife activists.</p> <p>Source: Sharmila Krishna. ‘No work, no vote, say miffed forest dwellers of Bahraich’, <i>The Pioneer</i>, 05/05/14</p>
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PERSPECTIVE

A farmer on the edge of Bandipur

Shivappa is a small farmer in a six-member household; he farms on six acres of land in Jakkahalli, a village located near the eastern tip of Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and which is part of the western-ghats rain-shadow area. His agriculture is all rain-fed and similar to that of the poor communities in and around Bandipur. Shivappa cultivates his fields twice a year between June and August and then again from September to November, growing ragi, cowpeas, groundnuts, jowar and onions. With the exception of ragi that is kept for consumption by the family most other crops are sold to make a living.

In the years that the rains fail, only one crop is cultivated, though there have been times, like two years ago, when the monsoons failed completely and farmers were not able to harvest even a single crop. Ration from the government ration helps see them through these hungry months. An Oxfam study recently concluded that 80% of people who go hungry are involved in food production and that there is a correlation between poverty, hunger, water stress and therefore on the prevalence of malnutrition. Coupled with the scarcity of water is the constant threat from wild animals in a place like Bandipur. In January this year, Shivappa lost his onion and groundnut harvest to elephants. While he has put in an application with the forest department for compensation, he

is yet to hear from them. Claiming compensations is a long and arduous process that holds little hope for most villagers.

Co-existing cheek by jowl with the villages in this area are several high-end resorts that bring city dwellers to the forest for a wildlife-weekend getaway. With enticing advertising inviting visitors to float in the swimming pool and reconnect with nature, to luxuriate in the exclusive spa in the jungle, etc., it would seem that this is another world from Shivappa's. The two, however, are closely linked. A 20x30 ft swimming pool (tiny by general standards) holds about 76,000 liters of water, all of which is drawn from the ground by several deep tube wells that have been dug here to cater to the resorts. This is clearly unsustainable and will have a serious impact on the thousands of farmers like Shivappa who live here. The choice is between the weekend luxury of a few urban elite against the very survival of thousands who live much closer to the forests and to wildlife than the resorts can ever hope to be.

- **Nithila Baskaran** Nithila Baskaran is interested in people and conservation and works with school children in Mangala Gram Panchayat adjoining the Bandipur Tiger Reserve.
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