

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Writing on the wall for wildlife? 3

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Assam

Training on Gibbon conservation for forest guards 3

Special Rhino Protection Force for Assam

Bihar

Captive bred gharials released into the River Gandak 4

Goa

Final Notifications of ESZs of PAs in Goa 4

Gujarat

124 lions and 135 leopard deaths in Gujarat in last two years 6

Karnataka

Satellite records show twice the number of forest fires in Kudremukh than on FD's record 6

Night ban on traffic through Bandipur to stay: Supreme Court

Awareness camps for forest fire prevention around Nagarhole NP

Police raids sand extraction camps near Nagarhole; says onus on FD to stop the illegal activity

Yettinahole water project may affect an important elephant corridor

CEC seeks details of illegal resorts in Cauvery wildlife division

Kerala

Kozhikode farmers seek gun licences to curb wild boar menace 8

Five species of birds and eight of butterflies recorded for the first time in Malabar WLS

Environmentalists oppose burning of bamboo in Wayanad WLS; 'part of management plan,' say forest officials

Odisha

Odisha may take up tiger census of its own 10

Crocodile and bird numbers rise in Bhitarkanika National Park

432 dolphins spotted along Odisha coast

Hundreds of dead sea turtles found in Puri district

A large number of dead turtles found along Odisha coast

Crocodile and gharial populations stable in Satkosia gorge

Tamil Nadu

Plea to withdraw notification of the Kodaikanal WLS 11

Tamil Nadu takes up study on wild boar population

NGT orders closure of 39 quarries operating near the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve

High Court for demolishing encroachments, unauthorized pathways in the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel sanctuary

Research project in Srivilliputhur to study of impact of habitat fragmentation on toads

Telangana

Serious space constraint at the deer rehabilitation centre at Kawal TR 13

Uttarakhand

Leopard census in Uttarakhand 13

Uttar Pradesh

65 Gharials released in Hastinapur WLS 13

Jackals from Akbar's tomb premises to be translocated

West Bengal

Rhino numbers rise in West Bengal 14

Committee to look into violations of environmental norms in Sunderbans

Aggressive tourism development plan for the Sunderbans

NATIONAL NEWS

Budget for MoEFCC cut by nearly 25% 15

MoEFCC asks states for proposals to declare wild animals vermin

Assam, Nagaland and Manipur come together to curb wildlife crimes

NGT stays Centre's order on felling trees for linear projects

SOUTH ASIA

Bangladesh

Bangladesh bans trawlers passing through the Sunderbans

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

International News

4th meeting of Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) held in Bangladesh

Andhra Pradesh

Burning reeds affecting Kolleru lake habitat

Assam

More than 100 vulture deaths in Assam this year

Madhya Pradesh

Power line to be re-aligned to protect vultures in Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary

Odisha

7.62 lakh birds in Chilika this year

READERS WRITE

A DECADE AGO

PROJECTS cleared at the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the NBWL

PERSPECTIVE

NTFP decline in the Maikal Hills: What are its implications?

Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

Writing on the wall for wildlife?

One of the earliest indications of the present government's approach to wildlife was visible in the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) that was held in August 2014. Held only a few months after the government came to power, it cleared nearly 140 projects in and around protected areas. There was outrage in the media and in the conservation community and as it turned out, the Supreme Court also questioned the clearances, faulting the method by which the NBWL had been constituted (*PA Update* 111).

The intentions became clearer in the months that followed with the government going all out to make forest and environment clearances simpler, land acquisition for industrialization and infrastructure projects easier and rationalizing laws so that nothing would impede the so called development. An even more authoritative stamp of approval was stamped on the trajectory in the government's first full budget presented in February 2015. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has seen a cut of nearly 25% in its annual budget and even the flagship and prestigious Project Tiger saw a cut of 15% from the budget allocation of last year.

While this dimension of the larger policy frame got some media, there is something else that seems to have slipped through completely unnoticed. Nearly 50 different projects located in and around protected areas were recommended for clearance in the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the NBWL that was held in Delhi in the month of January, earlier in the year (pgs 21-23). These include, among others, clearances for road construction, oil drilling, mining and mining exploration, irrigation projects and expansion of thermal power plants. The argument has been made that some of the projects are necessary in the interests of the local communities, and that in others, the diversion of forestland and impact on wildlife will only be minimal. While there might be merit in the specific cases where this might apply, the larger concern is related to the overall

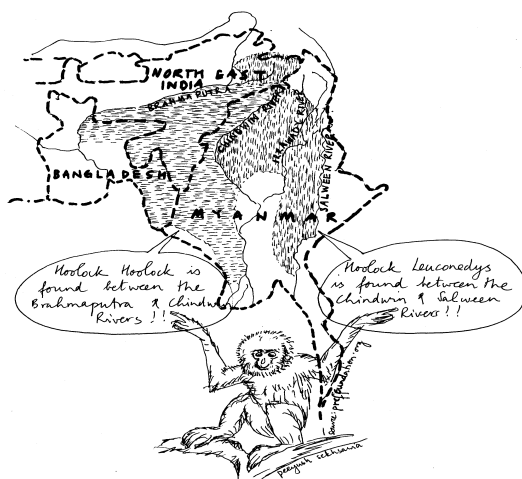
trend and direction of wildlife and environment policy in the country where environment concerns are increasingly being seen only an impediment in the 'development' of the country, the MoEFCC has become an agency meant to facilitate this development and growth and the NBWL is well set to become (if it is not already) a body merely for clearing projects in wildlife and wilderness areas.

The challenges to wildlife conservation in this country have always been difficult ones, and the writing on the wall, it seems, is only becoming clearer and sharper.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Training on Gibbon conservation for forest guards



Aaranyak and the Gibbon Conservation Centre, in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department (FD) and with financial support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service are training forest guards on conservation of the Hoolock gibbon. 27 forest guards from 15 forest divisions of the state were given the training in two sessions at the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary from February 21 to 27 and from March 21 to 27.

Training is being given on gibbon census or population estimation, data collection, maintaining and reporting, habitat characteristics and restoration, rescue and rehabilitation, using global positioning system and use in the field of wildlife laws and their application.

Source: 'Ape lessons for forest guards', *The Telegraph*, 09/03/15.

Special Rhino Protection Force for Assam

The Assam Chief Minister (CM), Mr Tarun Gogoi, announced recently that a special Rhino Protection Force with a strength of 1200 personnel would soon be formed in Assam. A proposal in this regard has already been sent to the centre. The announcement was made at a meeting held to review the situation of rhino conservation in the state.

The CM also asked the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) authorities to take the help of the National Investigating Agency to deal with rhino poachers and bust their trade routes across inter-state and international borders. He said that the government would provide modern arms and fighting gear to the frontline forest staff in Kaziranga by amending the existing provisions of law. He said he would also take up the matter of deploying drones for anti-poaching measures in KNP with the Ministry of Defence and the Director General, Civil Aviation.

The CM further announced the institution of the Chief Minister's Awards for Wildlife Conservation for exemplary service rendered in wildlife conservation and anti-poaching activities, and the Chief Minister's Gallantry Award for security guards for showing exemplary services in anti-poaching activities. He also announced the constitution of a Development Authority for the Kaziranga Landscape under his Chairmanship.

Member of Lok Sabha from Kaliabor constituency, Gaurav Gogoi, who was also present at the meeting announced that an Integrated Tourism Plan would be drawn up for Kaziranga and the adjoining areas, involving the forest, tourism and the cultural affairs

departments along with the district administration.

Source: Sushanta Talukdar, 'Gogoi moots special Rhino Protection Force to tackle poaching', *The Hindu*, 30/01/15.

BIHAR

Captive bred gharials released into the River Gandak

30 captive-bred and reared gharials were recently released in the Gandak River as part of the Gharial Restocking Project of the Bihar Environment & Forest Department. The project is being implemented with technical support of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). This includes a batch of 12 animals that were released on Jan 21 and another batch, also of 12 gharials (one male and 11 sub-adult females), that was released on February 11. The latter batch was sourced from the Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park, Patna. The released gharials were soon seen in the company of wild gharials by the project monitoring team.

Under a Rapid Action Project undertaken as part of International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)-WTI's Bhutan Trans Boundary Initiative, three staff members of the Wildlife Rescue Staff from Bhutan's Phuentsholing Crocodile Centre visited the Patna Zoo for training in handling gharials. The training was carried out in order to help them with their plan for relocation of crocodiles and gharials to Jigmeling, Gelephu in Bhutan.

Source: 'Released Gharials Meet the Wild Ones, 12 More Released', www.wti.org, 11/02/15.

GOA

Final Notifications of ESZs for PAs in Goa

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MEF & CC) has issued final notifications of the eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) for all the six wildlife sanctuaries (WLS) and

national parks (NP) in Goa. The details are as follows:

Madei WLS

The Madei WLS extends between latitudes 15°40'56.58"N and 15°27'12.64"N and longitudes 74°16'55.70"E and 74°5'2.58"E in the North Goa District of Goa and extends over an area of 208.48 sq km

The Madei ESZ shall be one kilometre of land or the water body whichever is nearer to the boundary of the Madei WLS within the state of Goa. The ESZ is bounded on the north by the Maharashtra state boundary, on the south by the boundary of Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS, on the east by the villages of Karnataka and on the west by the Anjunem reservoir and its canals and areas of the villages of Sattari Taluka. The Mahadei river joins the ESZ on the east and passes along the ESZ boundary from the east towards west at few places, and the Anjunem reservoir is within the ESZ towards the west.

Netravali WLS

The Netravali WLS extends between latitudes 15°16'7.80"N and 14°59'54.49"N and longitudes 74°19'3.75" E and 74°10'6.66" E in the South Goa District and extends over an area of 211.05 sq km.

The Netravali ESZ shall be one kilometer of land or the water body whichever is nearer to the boundary of the Netravali WLS in the state of Goa. The ESZ is bounded on the north by the boundary of the Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS, on the south by the boundary of Cotigao WLS, on the east by the boundary of Netravali WLS and on the West by Salaulim reservoir and the balance areas of villages of Sanguem Taluka.

Cotigao WLS

The Cotigao WLS extends between latitudes 15°2'43.25"N and 14°55'33.54" N and longitudes 74°15'55.07"E and 74°7'22.20"E in the South Goa District and extends over an area of 85.65 sq km.

The Cotigao ESZ shall be one kilometre of land or the water body whichever is nearer to the boundary of the Cotigao WLS

within the state of Goa. The ESZ is bounded on the North by Netravali WLS, on the South by Karnataka, on the East by the sanctuary boundary and on the west by remaining part of Cotigao, Poinguinim and Gaodongrem villages.

Bondla WLS

The Bondla WLS extends between latitudes 15°26'54.78"N and 15°24'42.50"N and longitudes 74°7'16.36"E and 74°5'26.60"E in the North Goa District and extends over an area of 7.98 sq km.

The Bondla ESZ shall be one kilometre of land or the water body whichever is nearer to the boundary of the Bondla WLS within the state of Goa. The ESZ is bounded on the north by areas of the villages Gangem, Conquirem and Melauli, on the south and west by the areas of the villages Dharbandora, Piliem and Usgaon, on the east by areas of the villages Dharbandora and Melauli; the Ragada Nadi, a tributary of Madei River enters into the ESZ on the east and passes along the ESZ boundary from east towards the north at a few places.

Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS and NP

The Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS and NP extends between latitudes 15°29'30.47"N and 15°15'9.29"N and longitudes 74°20'10.01"E and 74°29'26.27"E in the North Goa District and extends over an area of 240 sq km. Out of the 240 sq km of the original Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS, an area of 107 sq km was carved out and constituted as a national park.

The ESZ is bounded on the north by the boundary of the Madei WLS, on the south by the boundary of the Netravali WLS, on the East by the boundary of the Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS and NP and on the West by areas of the villages of Dharbandora Taluka, Sattari Taluka and Sanguem Taluka; the Dudhsagar river, originating from the Bhagwan Mahaveer NP, passes through the ESZ towards the west along the ESZ boundary and the Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary boundary.

Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary

The Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary extends between latitudes 15°31'36.03"N and

15°30'35.35"N and longitudes 73°52'14.31"E and 73°50'44.12"E and extends over an area of 1.78 sq km at the confluence of the Mapusa river and the Mandovi river.

The ESZ of the Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary shall be up to the riverbank abutting the sanctuary on the three sides and to the extent of 100 meters on the eastern side towards Chorao village. The ESZ is bounded on the three sides i.e., north, west and south by the Mapusa river and the Mandovi river and the village Chorao of Tiswadi Taluka located towards the eastern side.

Source: 'Final Notifications of ESZs of all the Protected Areas of Goa', www.ercindia.org (based on notifications issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change)

GUJARAT

124 lions and 135 leopard deaths in Gujarat in last two years

As many as 124 lions and 135 leopards have died in Gujarat in the last two years. The information was provided by the Gujarat Forest Minister in the state assembly in response to a question in the matter. 63 lions died during 2013-14 while 61 died during 2014-15. Of the 135 leopards, 69 died in 2013-14 while 66 died in 2014-15. None of these deaths were due to poaching, and were mainly natural deaths on account of internal fights. According to a senior official of the forest department, the rise in deaths is directly related to the increase in population. Around 10-15% of the total number of lion deaths has always been recorded in Gujarat. When the total number of the big cats was around 411, around 42-45 lion deaths were recorded. Now, with the increase in population, the number of deaths has predictably increased.

In 2014, lion deaths due to unnatural causes were around 15% of the total deaths in the year - around 10 lions had died after falling in wells or were run over by speeding trains. There are around 500 lions, including cubs, in

Gir. Hence, the death of 64 big cats was nearly 15% of the total.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, '129 Gir lions died over past two years', *The Hindu*, 08/03/15.

'124 Lions and 135 Leopards Died in Gujarat in 2 Years', www.ndtv.com, 10/03/15.

KARNATAKA

Satellite records show twice the number of forest fires in Kudremukh than on FD's record



Space research satellites have recorded 115 forest fires in the Kudremukh Wildlife Division since January 2013, but the Forest Department (FD)'s count is less than half that number. NASA's fire alert satellite system detected 66

forest fires in 30 days over five months in 2013, while in 2014, it recorded 38 incidents on 23 days over four months. This year, 11 incidents were recorded on eight days between January and February 2015. Kudremukh Wildlife Division authorities have, however, claimed that only 40 fires were experienced in this period and these too were small fires.

Wildlife activists say the reason for under-reporting is that the forest staff is itself responsible for many of those fires. They allege that forest staff set fire to meadows and forests ahead of the summer to save themselves the responsibility of monitoring and preventing fires. They have also noted that this adversely affects the fauna and flora here.

Senior forest officials have pointed out that about 40% of the Kudremukh National Park (KNP) is grassland. 1,382 families live here and in many cases they are responsible for the fires. Some fires are caused accidentally by

trespassers. Wildlife activists have, however, pointed out that a majority of fires occur in remote areas where there are no human settlements.

The Karnataka Principal Chief Conservator of Forests has not disputed the accuracy of NASA fire alerts, and said they provide both GPS positions and timings. He said private owners may have set fire to vegetation on their holdings inside the KNP, thereby adding to the numbers.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj, ‘Cool Burning’ by Forest Staff Destroying KNP: Activists’, *The New Indian Express*, 23/02/15.

Night ban on traffic through Bandipur to stay: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has refused to lift the nightly ban on vehicles plying through the Bandipur Tiger Reserve. A three-judge Bench led by the Chief Justice of India, H.L. Dattu, observed orally that forests primarily belong to animals and tribes who resided in them and not to men who carve roads through it. Evoking its 2013 ban on tourists taking the Andaman Trunk Road that passed through the Jarawa Tribal Reserve, the apex court said it could not be seen to be taking a contradictory stand now.

The order came in response to an application by the Kerala government seeking a direction from the court to allow vehicles to move in a convoy through the reserve forest thrice during night-time. The ban had been imposed in June 2009 by the District Collector of Chamarajnagar as a protective measure to prevent road kills of wildlife (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 1; Vol. XVII, No. 6; Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 & 2; Vol. XV, Nos. 5 & 4 and Vol. XIV, No. 6.). Though the Karnataka government withdrew the order, the State High Court had stayed the decision in a public interest litigation filed by lawyer, L. Srinivasa Rao.

Senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam, appearing for Kerala, informed that there were proposals for alternative routes – the Mysore-Hunsur-Gonikoppa-Kutta-Kalpetta, Mysore-Bavali-Manathavady and Virajpet-Kannur as

well the one via Bylukuppe bridge to Wayanad district from Mysore. Kerala has also decided to approach the Railway and Environment ministries to clear a proposal on Nanjanagud-Nilambur rail line via Sultan Batheri.

The court adjourned the case for eight weeks after Mr. Subramaniam sought more time on behalf of the state to consult Karnataka authorities on these proposals.

Source: Krishnadas Rajagopal, ‘Bandipur night ban to stay; forests belong to animals, says SC’, *The Hindu*, 30/01/15.

Awareness camps for forest fire prevention around Nagarahole NP

The NGO, Wildlife First, conducted 125 awareness camps on forest fire prevention around the borders of the Nagarahole National Park in the months of January and February. As many as 23,000 students and 1,100 teachers residing around the park and other forest areas participated.

Two public rallies, including one at Madikeri, were also organised and more than 30,000 pamphlets in Kannada were distributed with an appeal to alert the forest department in case of fire.

Source: ‘Campaign on forest fires’, *The Hindu*, 08/03/15.

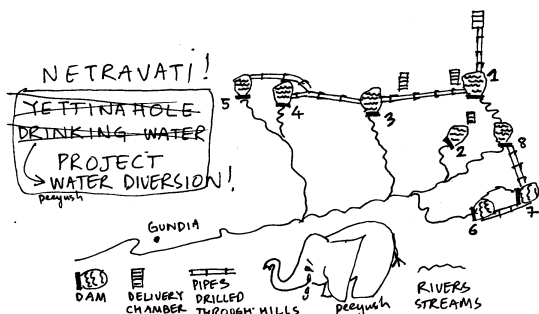
Police raids sand extraction camps near Nagarahole; says onus on FD to stop the illegal activity

In an operation carried out in February, the Mysuru district police raided illegal sand extraction camps on the fringes of Nagarahole National Park (NNP) along the Lakshmantirtha, a tributary of the Cauvery, and seized 20 truckloads of sand, a lorry, and an excavator. The extraction was going on at five spots along the river in Hunsur taluk. A news report on large-scale extraction of sand from the riverbed at Konanahosahalli and Billenahosahalli in Hunsur taluk for the past several months is said to have prompted the action.

The police also said that the forest department (FD) should have alerted them about the illegal activity. Senior FD officials have said, however, that the activity was taking place outside the limits of the national park and hence did not fall under their purview. The sites of the sand excavation do fall within the proposed eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) that includes areas within a 10 km radius from the park boundary but the ESZ has still not been officially notified here.

Source: R. Krishna Kumar, 'Onus on Forest Department to stop sand extraction near Nagarahole', *The Hindu*, 22/02/15.
 Laiqh A. Khan, 'Camps on Nagarahole park fringes raided', *The Hindu*, 23/02/15.

Yettinahole water project may affect an important elephant corridor



Environmentalists have expressed fears that the Yettinahole Integrated Drinking Water Project that will include the construction of eight dams in the Kenchanakumari forest, Kadumane, Kabbinala reserve forest and neighbouring areas will have an adverse impact on elephant movement here. Residents of Agani village in Sakleshpur taluk say they have been noticing movement of elephants for many years in Kadumane and nearby areas and the place has also been identified as an elephant corridor by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science.

The project by the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Ltd. involves the construction of eight dams, and environmentalists have demanded that the state government stop the work immediately and conduct a study to assess the impact of the project on environment and wildlife. They have said that the government was avoiding the study by naming Yettinahole

as a drinking water project though it had intentions to supply water drawn from the project for irrigation purposes. The state government has, however, maintained that there is no need to conduct an environment impact study because Yettinahole is a drinking water project.

Source: 'Fears over Yettinahole project affecting elephant corridor', *The Hindu*, 23/02/15.

CEC seeks details of illegal resorts in Cauvery wildlife division

The Supreme Court constituted Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has asked the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) to provide details of illegal resorts in forest areas of the Cauvery Wildlife Division (CWD). The move comes in response to a petition filed in the matter by a social activist who alleged that one particular resort in the Kanakapura area of Ramanagaram was being run illegally. It was stated in the petition that movements of vehicles and activities at the resort were disturbing wildlife and that sometimes visitors were also entering the forest for hunting from this and other illegal resorts.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) has instructed the Deputy Conservator of Forests (CWD) to submit a report in the matter.

Source: M.T. Shiva Kumar, 'CEC seeks details of illegal resorts in forests', *The Hindu*, 29/01/15.

KERALA

Kozhikode farmers seek gun licences to curb wild boar menace

In the wake of the increasing menace of wild boars, farmers from rural areas of Kozhikode have come out in protest against the district administration for its alleged laxity in processing the gun licence renewal requests on time.

Some of the gun-licence holders from Koodaranji, where a farmer was recently killed in a wild boar attack, said that over 50 farmers from the village were waiting for renewed gun licences from the collectorate. All of them had surrendered the guns to the nearby police stations as part of complying with the rules.

A similar situation has also been reported by farmers within the Thiruvambadi police station limits.

Source: Mithosh Joseph, 'Farmers seek quick renewal of gun licences', *The Hindu*, 08/03/15.

Five species of birds and eight of butterflies recorded for the first time in Malabar WLS

The annual population survey of butterflies and birds at the Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary (MWS) has added five new species of birds and eight new species of butterflies to the species list of the sanctuary. The survey was jointly carried out by Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department and the Malabar Natural History Society during the second week of February. 35 volunteers from Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu took part in the three-day event which surveyed nine different localities – Athikode, Choothupara, Amabalppara, Vattakyam, Peruvannamuzhi, Raveendra estate, Shankaranpuzha estate, Chengottakolli and Kakkayam dam site.

The survey recorded 123 different species of birds in the sanctuary. Five of these – the Oriental dwarf kingfisher, Malayan night heron, Black baza, Shaheen falcon and Legge's hawk eagle – were recorded here for the first time. The survey also documented 142 different species of butterflies, eight of which – Dusty spotted flat, Tamil grass dart, Indian awl king, Pale green awlet, Black swift, Sahyadri small palm bob, Forget-me-not and Pointed line blue – were first time records.

Population surveys to assess the biodiversity of the sanctuary are being carried out on a regular basis since 2011.

Source: 'Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary adds five new records to its avian fauna',

www.indianbiodiversitytalk.blogspot.in, 24/02/15.

Environmentalists oppose burning of bamboo in Wayanad WLS; 'part of management plan,' say forest officials

The burning of bamboo in parts of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the month of January has become a point of serious contention. While environmentalists have said that it is a violation of the Supreme Court order dated 14.02.2000 in Writ Petition No. 202 of 1995, forest officials have said it is part of the management plan of the sanctuary. The burning was carried out in the Muthanga and Sulthan Batheri ranges of the sanctuary, mainly in areas adjoining the national highway, which passes through here, and also in forests near the tribal areas of Rampalli, Thagarapadi and Kolor.

The forest department (FD) has said that the burning, particularly of the dry bamboo clusters, was aimed at tackling the threat of possible forest fires during summer. Only a few dry bamboo clusters in critical areas, including human habitats, on the fringes of the sanctuary and both sides of the national highway-212, had been burnt as a part of the plan. The dry bamboo clusters on the banks of the Nugu river were burned as per a directive issued by Wayanad District Collector after a group of villagers of the Ramapally village had complained that they were unable to use the water in the river as dry bamboo clusters fell in it.

It has been pointed out, however, that the burning would affect wildlife in the area. It has also been noted that there is a huge demand for firewood in the area and that the bamboo and the timber could be made available to the nearby villagers and tribal communities to meet their needs rather than be burned.

Source: C P Sajit, 'Flouting Rules, Forest Dept Burning Bamboos in Sanctuary', *The New Indian Express*, 02/02/15
'Burning is part of forest management plan: officials', *The Hindu*, 02/02/15.

ODISHA

Odisha may take up tiger census of its own

The Odisha Government is contemplating taking up enumeration of tigers in the state on its own. Though there is no formal move yet in this connection, the wildlife wing of the state forest department (FD) is examining possibilities of conducting a census to ascertain the number of tigers in the state, and is consulting experts about its plans.

The recent tiger enumeration by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Wildlife Institute of India (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 1) had put the total number of tigers in Odisha at 28, a figure less than what had been reported in 2010. Since no break-up was provided for the Similipal and Satkosia tiger reserves, the state has been clueless about the status of the big cats in these two habitats.

The wildlife wing is mulling its options on procurement of cameras and the cost it may entail. Besides, it also has to work out a census modality, which can challenge the four-phase methodology that the NTCA used. The state government has also seconded the view saying the NTCA report has not taken into consideration the number of tigers outside the tiger reserves.

Source: 'State Mulls Own Big Cat Survey to Shame NTCA', *The New Indian Express*, 07/02/15.

Crocodile and bird numbers rise in Bhitarkanika National Park

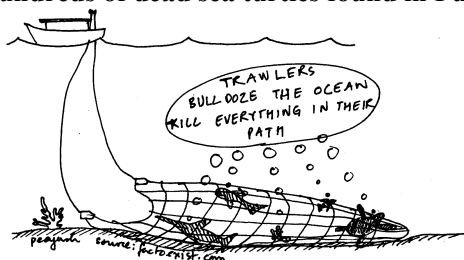
The latest census conducted in the Bhitarkanika National Park (BNP) has revealed an increase in the number of crocodiles and birds found here. The crocodile population has gone up from 1,644 last year to 1,665 now. This includes 511 hatchlings, 380 yearlings, 317 juveniles, 149 sub-adults, 305 adults and three giant crocodiles measuring more than 20 feet. The counting of the crocodiles was conducted by 25 teams involving forest officials, environmentalists, NGOs and local residents. The number of

migratory birds too has gone up from 68,514 birds counted last year to 1.13 lakh this time.

Source: 'Crocodile population rises in Bhitarkanika', www.odishasuntimes.com, 15/01/15.

'1.13 lakh migratory birds flock Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park', www.odishasuntimes.com, 16/01/15.

Hundreds of dead sea turtles found in Puri



Hundreds of Olive ridley turtles have been found dead in the area ranging from the mouth of River Devi at Astaranga to the mouth of River Kushabhadra at Ramchandi in Puri district. Local villagers said that hundreds of trawlers fish in the area irrespective of the ban, and they find dead turtles hitting the shore every day. They also pointed out that a trawler of the Marine Fishery Department (MFD) meant to patrol the no-fishing zones of the sea was lying unused at Bilua Mundli near Astaranga. The department hasn't been able to repair the defunct boat for three years now.

The forest department (FD) claims, however, that it has built 11 protection centres for the turtles along the Puri coast. The marine police station, MFD and the FD are also patrolling the coast to enforce the fishing ban and that they had also seized two boats at Chandrabhaga.

Source: 'Odisha's Puri coast turns cemetery for Olive Ridley turtles', www.odishasuntimes.com, 17/02/15

A large number of dead turtles found along Odisha coast

A large number of carcasses of Olive ridley turtles have been found along the Odisha coast

this nesting season in places like Barunei, Pentha, Satabhaya, Gahirmatha and Babubali river mouth. While the forest department (FD) has said that the total number of dead turtles reported is 800, unofficial estimates put the toll at over 5000.

It has been alleged that the mortalities are on account of trawling within the prohibited zone at Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. According to the FD, as many as 25 trawlers have been seized and at least 189 fishermen have been arrested for illegal trawling and venturing into prohibited regions during the ongoing mass nesting season of the turtles.

Dead Olive Ridley turtles were also found recently along the Devi river mouth at Astaranga to Kushabhadra river mouth at Ramchandi in Puri district owing to illegal trawling.

Source: 'Olive Ridley turtles carcasses dot Odisha's Gahirmatha coast', www.odishasuntimes.com, 19/02/15.

Crocodile and gharial populations stable in Satkosia gorge



A census conducted in January this year has revealed that the number of crocodiles and gharials in the 40 km stretch of the Mahanadi river from

Athmallik in Angul district to Chakragarh in Athgarh area of Cuttack district has remained unchanged from last year. The number this time was 90 crocodiles and five gharials as against 90 and six respectively, that were counted last year.

The Forest Department (FD) also recently released 15 gharials from the Nandakanan Zoo here (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 5). Three of these are reported to have died, bringing the total number of gharials in Satkosia to 17 now.

A three-day bird census was also carried out in several water bodies along the 22-km stretch of Mahanadi under Satkosia Wildlife Division in the month of January. A total of 51

bird species were spotted, of which 31 species were found in the Sishu Pathara (Suhagi Irrigation Project) area.

Source: 'No increase in Mugger, Gharial population in Odisha's Satkosia gorge', www.odishasuntimes.com, 17/01/15.

TAMIL NADU

Plea to withdraw notification of the Kodaikanal WLS

The Bharathiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) has called for the withdrawal of Government Order (GO) MS No.143 of the Department of Environment and Forests, issued on September 20, 2013, announcing the creation of Kodaikanal Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The GO had identified areas in Kodaikanal, Palani and Periyakulam taluks of Dindigul and Theni district as of "adequate ecological, faunal, floral, geo-morphological, natural and zoological significance for the purpose of protecting, propagating and developing wildlife and its environment" and declared them as Kodaikanal WLS.

The BKS has expressed the fear that the notification would endanger agriculture on 50,000 hectares of land, affecting the livelihood of 10 lakh people. It has pointed out that Sothuparai, Manjalar dam, Marutha Nadhi dam, Palaru Porundhalaru dam and Kuthirair dam were part of the sanctuary and nearly six lakh people depended on the water from these dams.

The BKS has also alleged that the said notification was against the law and had been framed without following the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, the Forest Conservation Act 1980, and guidelines of the apex court. It has said that the notification violated Articles 14 and 21 of the constitution, and principles of natural justice and that the GO had been passed without any public inquiry or a study of the nature and livelihoods of villagers.

Source: 'Plea to withdraw eco-sensitive zone notification', *The Hindu*, 07/03/15.

Tamil Nadu takes up study on wild boar population

The Tamil Nadu government has taken up a study of the wild boar population in the state. The Chief Wildlife Warden, in a circular sent to the Field Directors of tiger reserves and the Conservator of Forests of all circles, in December 2014, said that they had received several reports about the damage to crops caused by wild boar in villages located close to forests. A scientific study is required to see if the animal needs to be culled or shot dead when found in agricultural fields.

The areas from which complaints have been received in the last couple of years include Dharmapuri, Ambasamudram in Tirunelveli, Srivilliputhur in Virudhu Nagar and Perambalur. 290 cases of crop damage due to wild boar attacks were reported in the state in 2012-13. This number rose to 350 the following year. The compensation paid by the forest department, too, increased from Rs. 26 lakh in 2012-13 to Rs. 32 lakh in 2014.

Tamil Nadu forest officials have noted that the wild boar has been removed from the scheduled list of endangered animals in Kerala and that the neelgai too has been removed from the scheduled lists in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana. Conservationists have, however, warned that the wild boar is being killed in Kerala more for its meat, and not because of the damage it does to crops; and if TN authorities declare it a 'vermin', rampant poaching will take place in the state.

Source: P Oppili, 'Wild boars count underway as TN farmers demand culling', *The Times of India*, 17/02/15.

NGT orders closure of 39 quarries operating near the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve

The National Green Tribunal (NGT)'s southern bench has ordered shut 39 quarries operating in Erode district within a 10-km radius of the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve. Clusters of quarries, occupying several acres each, have

been operating in TN Palayam, Igalur, Thalavady, Bhavani Sagar and have continued even after Sathyamangalam was declared a tiger reserve (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 5)

The quarries were given permits by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board but they don't have clearances from the Ministry of Environment and Forests or from the National Board for Wildlife. It has been alleged that the continued operation of the quarries has affected wildlife habitat and animal behavior here and that surrounding villages were also being affected on account of the noise and air pollution from the constant detonation and trucks that transport the stone.

The NGT had taken up the case *suo motu* following a July 2013 news report.

Source: Divya Gandhi, 'NGT cracks the whip on quarries near Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve', *The Hindu*, 29/01/15.

High Court for demolishing encroachments, unauthorized pathways within the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel sanctuary

The Madras High Court has issued a notice to the forest department asking it to demolish the nearly 30 encroachments and to shut down of unauthorized pathways leading to the Sathuragiri Sundara Mahalingam temple in the forests of the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary. The Thaniparai pathway is the authorized pathway to the temple but visitors also use six others. This is said to have increased littering, illegal mining of sand and also allowed for increased poaching.

Source: 'HC orders issue of notice to Forest Department official', *Business Standard*, 27/01/15.

Research project in Srivilliputhur to study impact of habitat fragmentation on toads

Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, have initiated a project in Srivilliputhur to study the

impact of habitat fragmentation on toads. Asian toads fitted with radio collars are being released in the forests as part of the study that seeks to study how linear barriers such as roads, pipelines, power lines and canals affect the movement of these animals. The study will gather data on the home range of toads, their daily and seasonal movement patterns, habitat use and factors that trigger movement and the direction of movement of the toads. The study will eventually be extended to the entire state of Tamil Nadu.

Source: 'Study begins on impact of development on toads', *The Times of India*, 07/01/15.

TELANGANA

Serious space constraint at the deer rehabilitation centre at Kawal TR

The deer rehabilitation centre (DRC) at Jannaram, the headquarters of Kawal Tiger Reserve is facing a serious space shortage. The DRC currently accommodates 50 spotted deer, seven neelgais, six sambars and one black buck – a total of 64 animals. 25 animals, mostly spotted deer and neelgai, are being moved to the Vana Vignana Kendram in Warangal to deal with the situation.

Forest officials and wildlife experts disagree on what space can be termed sufficient. According to forest officials, the fact that the animals in the park are provided green fodder by the forest department helps do away with the need for the animals to move about. However, wildlife experts say more space would help the animals integrate seamlessly to wild environments whenever the need arises.

Source: S. Harpal Singh, 'There just isn't enough space at Jannaram', *The Hindu*, 09/03/15.

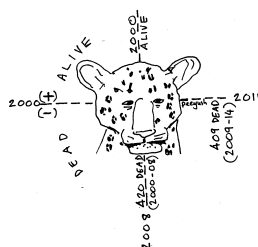
UTTARAKHAND

Leopard census in Uttarakhand

The Uttarakhand Forest Department will, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of

India, conduct a census of leopards in the state later this year. The last leopard census, conducted in the year 2008, had reported 2000 of these large cats in the state. Senior wildlife officials in the state have said that they expect the number to have fallen on account of deaths in accidents, and as a consequence of the human-wildlife conflicts.

829 leopards are reported to have died in Uttarakhand due to natural causes and accidents since the year 2000. 409 of these died between 2009 and 2014. In the past 14 years 241 people have also been killed, and 401 have been injured by leopards across Uttarakhand, especially in Almora, Chamoli, Pithoragarh, and Pauri districts.



Source: Kavita Upadhyay, 'Uttarakhand to take up leopard census', *The Hindu*, 06/02/15.

UTTAR PRADESH

65 gharials released in Hastinapur WLS

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India, in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department (UPFD) and local communities of Makhdumpur, Jalalpur and Kishorpur, recently released 65 captive reared juvenile gharials (50 females and 15 males of age three years) into the Ganges at Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary (HWLS). The animals were brought from the Kukrail breeding facility in Lucknow. The release was part of an ongoing WWF-India-UPFD programme that was initiated in 2009. 571 gharials have been released into the wild so far, as part of the programme.

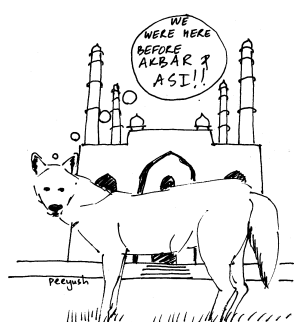
Intensive post-release field surveys to document habitat use and dispersal pattern have revealed almost 40% survival of the released animals. Between 17 December 2010 and 15 January 2011, thirteen animals were re-captured and biometric changes were recorded. Alongside the research, the study integrates

conservation awareness work with riparian communities.

Forest officials also informed that 532 turtle hatchlings were also released into the Ganges in December.

Source: 'UP: 65 captive reared Gharials released into Ganges', www.indiablooms.com, 27/02/15.

Jackals from Akbar's tomb premises to be translocated



Wildlife SOS in collaboration with the UP Forest Department and Archaeological Survey of India are launching a wildlife research project to study and eventually translocate about 30

- 35 jackals from within the 40-acre premises of Akbar's tomb in Sikandra, Agra, to a safe natural habitat.

The Jackal Translocation Project is an initiative to protect the resident blackbuck population in the same premises while also protecting jackals. Several young blackbuck fawns are killed frequently by jackals on account of their accidental confinement. Jackal numbers have been increasing and they have been preying on the young fawns. According to the survey results, this project would help save almost 100 blackbucks.

Source: Neha Madaan, 'Jackal research and translocation project launched', *The Times of India*, 31/01/15.

WEST BENGAL

Rhino numbers rise in West Bengal

A West Bengal State Forest Department survey in January has revealed that the rhino numbers in the state have risen to 250. This includes 200

in Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary and 50 in the Gorumara National Park. Jaldapara now has the second highest population of rhinos in India after the Kaziranga National Park in Assam, which has over 2,000.

The previous survey, conducted in 2013, had recorded 186 rhinos in Jaldapara while the number for Gorumara was 46 in a survey carried out in 2014. The total population of rhinos in West Bengal in the year 1990 had been recorded at 20.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'Rhino numbers rise in West Bengal' *The Hindu*, 13/03/15.

Committee to look into violations of environmental norms in Sunderbans

The West Bengal Government has constituted a 23-member committee to look into violations of environmental norms in the Sunderbans. This was stated in the action taken report submitted by the Chief Secretary to the Eastern Zonal Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The Committee will be headed by Chief Secretary, Sanjay Mitra, and will have secretaries of various departments along with representatives of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and civil society organizations.

The NGT has cautioned that if the state government fails to carry out the directives for protection of Sunderbans, the Army can be deployed there. The issue of illegal construction of houses under the state government's Gitanjali Scheme in 24 Parganas district was raised during the hearing, and the Court directed the government to take necessary steps in this regard as well.

Source: 'Panel to look into eco violations in Sunderbans', *The Hindu*, 05/03/15.

Aggressive tourism development plan for the Sunderbans

The West Bengal Government has proposed an aggressive tourism development plan for the Sunderbans with involvement of the private

sector. The state tourism department (TD), which will spend about Rs. 60 crore to develop infrastructure, has been given 90 acres in Jharkhali, one of the main entry points to the Sunderbans.

Mahindra & Mahindra's Club Mahindra time-share unit will invest Rs. 50 crore to build a resort in the area in the first phase, while Vivada Cruises is spending Rs. 35 crore to add six small vessels of two-four bedroom capacity to their existing Sunderbans cruise holiday package options. In addition to this, the TD floated a tender seeking the establishment of a budget hotel on seven acres in Jharkhali. Techno India Group has won the bid and is putting up a budget accommodation spending close to Rs. 40 crore in the next six months. The TD will also float tenders for another 40 acres in the coming months.

Environmentalists have pointed out that five-star style cement constructions, roads, bridges, generator noise, pollution and lights would adversely affect the fragile nocturnal ecology of the Sunderbans mangrove ecosystem, and ruin the visitor experience.



Source: Tasmayee Laha Roy, 'Bengal tiger confronts a new creature: Development', *The Times of India*, 07/02/15.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Budget for MoEFCC cut by nearly 25%

The budget allocation for the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has seen a significant cut in the current year's budget by the Finance Minister, Mr Arun Jaitley. The current allocation of Rs.1,681.60 crore is about 25% less than the amount budgeted for the fiscal year 2014-15.

The allocation for Project Tiger too has been reduced by about 15% - from Rs. 161.02

crore in 2014-15 to Rs.136.46 crore for 2015-16. The budget has earmarked around Rs.750 crore for ecology and environment, which includes Rs.100 crore for a national coastal management programme, Rs.76.10 crore for environmental monitoring and governance and around Rs.150 crore for the National Afforestation Programme.

Source: Mayank Aggarwal, 'Jaitley cuts allocation to environment ministry', *Mint*, 28/02/15.

MoEFCC asks states for proposals to declare wild animals vermin

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has asked states to send proposals to declare wild animals vermin for a specified period in a given area. If implemented, this will apply to wild animals listed in various schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972, in addition to Schedule I & Part II of Schedule II that lists the most endangered and iconic species. The new advisory will apply not only to the neelgai and wild boar that destroy crops but also to animals like the wild dog, chital, sambar, langur, and many species of birds that damage crops.

The MoEFCC has asked states to send proposals to declare wild animals or their herds as vermin if they have become dangerous to life or property, or if they have become disabled or diseased beyond recovery. The issue has come up amid pressure from politicians who have been raising these issues in parliament.

Wildlife officials and environmentalists have, however, expressed fear that protected species could be hunted in the name of eliminating vermin. They pointed out, for instance, that it was not easy for field staff to differentiate meat of chital from a neelgai's or that of a wild boar's. An analysis by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, for neelgai management and the recent recommendations by TSR Subramanian committee have also said that such a move will serve no purpose.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Centre eases process to declare wildlife vermin', *The Times of India*, 30/01/15.

Assam, Nagaland and Manipur come together to curb wildlife crimes

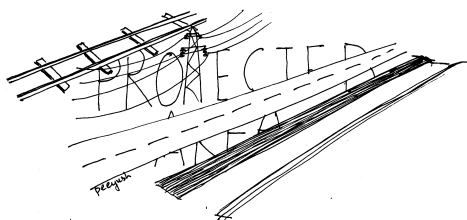
Representatives of law enforcement agencies in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur have joined hands to set up a wildlife crime control unit with a focus on national highway 39 that connects the three states with Myanmar and is a key route for illegal wildlife trade. A meeting, organised by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change and Nagaland Forest Department (FD) at Dimapur, decided that law enforcement agencies, the army and paramilitary forces should join hands to check wildlife crime along national highway 39.

The newly formed unit will have representatives from the Army, the Border Security Force, Assam Rifles, the Central Reserve Police Force, the state police, transportation agencies – aviation, rail and surface transport - customs and FDs of the three states. Guidelines are to be prepared for the proper functioning and co-ordination among these agencies to share information regarding wildlife crime.

The formation of this exclusive unit comes in the wake of reports of involvement of militant groups in wildlife crimes. The Assam FD recently claimed that militant groups were involved in the latest incidents of rhino killings in the Kaziranga National Park. The park authorities have said that militants use sophisticated weapons like AK-47 and light machine guns during encounters with forest guards. They pointed out that wildlife products from the region and other parts of the country find their way to the international market through national highway 39 via Moreh in Manipur bordering Myanmar. Recently, a consignment of star tortoises and ivory was recovered from Dimapur. Assam has also witnessed a sharp increase in incidents of rhino killings in the last few years.

Source: Pullock Dutta, 'Joint squad to curb wildlife crimes', *The Telegraph*, 21/02/15.

NGT stays Centre's order on felling trees for linear projects



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed a stay on the felling of trees for all linear projects in the country right after stage one clearance. The decision to allow for the felling of trees had been made by the BJP government for fast tracking projects like roads, railway lines, transmission lines, pipelines and highways. A bench headed by the NGT chairperson, Swatanter Kumar, stayed the operation of two communications of the centre dated August 8, 2014, and January 15, 2015, which relaxed forest clearance for felling of trees for linear projects, allowing the felling and commencement of work right after obtaining in-principle clearance. The Centre has been claiming that the relaxation in norms will bring in expeditious implementation and execution of linear projects of public utility.

The NGT was hearing a petition filed by wildlife biologist Milind Pariwakam, who contended that the relaxation given by the centre is contrary to the procedure prescribed in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, which states that "in-principle approval is not an approval as contemplated in law". The petitioner also pointed out that some of the important linear projects that have attracted attention in the recent past are the railway line and canal bifurcating the Rajaji National Park and the proposed expansion of national highway NH-7 passing through Kanha-Pench and Kanha-Indravati tiger corridors.

High-voltage power lines have also been in the news recently because of large-scale deaths of elephants due to electrocution. Linear projects and their expansion have also affect the environment and put the wildlife at great risk, like in the Kaziranga National Park in Assam

where elephants and rhinos are killed in accidents on national highway NH-37.

Source: Akanksha Jain, 'NGT stays govt. order on felling of trees to push linear projects', *The Hindu*, 21/02/15

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh bans trawlers passing through the Sunderbans

The Bangladeshi authorities have imposed a ban on plying trawlers in the rivers and canals of the Sunderbans as these are widely used for poaching and smuggling of wildlife. The authorities of the Sunderbans - both east and west zones - clamped the ban restricting the use of trawlers in any work in the forest, including fishing and transportation, until further orders. Fisherfolk of Dubla village will, however, remain out of the purview of the restriction during the daytime.

On an average, around 300 trawlers ply the rivers and canals here every day. The forest department (FD) has said that poachers enter the forest after taking permission from the department in the name of fishing and transportation of fish. They then hunt tigers, deer and other wildlife by setting traps or shooting them. In separate initiatives in the month of February, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the FD arrested four poachers along with the hides of two tigers and 38 deer in Bagerhat, Barguna and Satkhira. The RAB had also arrested a gang of three members with a tiger hide, teeth and some tiger bones from a bus stand in Morelganj upazila of the district in the month of January.

Source: 'Trawlers' passing thru Sunderbans banned', *The Daily Star*, 12/02/15.

Important Bird Areas Update

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

4th meeting of Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) held in Bangladesh

The 4th meeting of Saving Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) was held in November 2014 in Bangladesh. The 5-day meet was attended by government and NGO representatives and experts from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia and Nepal. Following is a list of the 'Updated SAVE priorities for Vulture Conservation 2015', as agreed to in the meeting:

- An immediate ban on diclofenac manufactured for human medicine in vials or ampoules larger than 3ml;
- An effective system of regulation of veterinary drugs, based upon safety-testing on vultures (protocol already agreed for India) initiated and underway for all current painkillers (NSAIDs) and for all potential new ones entering veterinary practice;
- Improve the availability of more effective meloxicam formulations thereby facilitating take up by veterinary practitioners;
- Veterinary licenses to be withdrawn for two drugs – ketoprofen and aceclofenac - based on the good existing evidence that they are unsafe for vultures;
- Major efforts urgently needed within South Asia to address the immediate and increasing gap in funding for vulture conservation which now jeopardises the programme;
- Promotion of network and approach of 'Vulture Safe Zones' across South Asia with expansion to include trans-boundary cooperative efforts;
- Maintain and support the existing vulture conservation breeding programmes throughout South Asia;
- Prepare for first soft releases of captive bred vultures in India by 2016;
- Link SAVE activities and meetings to closely support the 'Regional Steering

Committee' to facilitate the implementation of the 2012 Delhi Regional Agreement.

Source: 'Report from the 4th meeting of Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction', January 2015.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Burning reeds affecting Kolleru lake habitat

Local communities are resorting to burning the reed *Phragmites karka* known locally as *kikkisa* that grows in large quantities in the Kolleru lake. A portion of the reeds was burnt by the locals recently in the heart of the lake near Kolletikota village in spite of the deployment by the forest department of special teams to prevent the burning. The burning was reportedly carried out to create fishponds. The area is adjacent to the existing fishponds and is covered by the reed on both sides of the waterway, which leads to the Peddintlamma temple under Kaikaluru police limits in Krishna district.

The heat and smoke generated by the fire spreads over the lake and poses a threat to the migratory and resident waterfowl here.

Source: 'Burning reeds poses threat for birds at Kolleru Lake', *The Hindu*, 23/02/15.

ASSAM

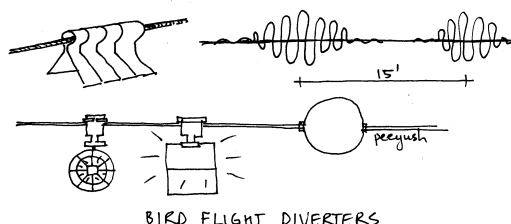
More than 100 vulture deaths in Assam

More than 100 vulture deaths due to poisoning have been reported this year in Assam. 50 vultures had been found poisoned in Sivsagar district in January and another 54 were found in the first week of March in two different districts of Upper Assam. The poisoning is reportedly done by farmers and cattle owners. The sequence begins when the cattle owner loses his livestock to dog bite. The cattle owner then sprays the carcass with pesticides with an intention to kill the dog. Unfortunately, however, vultures feed on the poisoned carcass and are getting poisoned to death themselves. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 3)

Source: 'Assam turns into vulture graveyard', *The Telegraph*, 09/03/15.

MADHYA PRADESH

Power line to be re-aligned to protect vultures in Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary



Concerns have been expressed on the impact on vultures of a project for connecting Jaipur and Gwalior with high-tension electric cables that will pass through the Great Indian Bustard sanctuary. Teams from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) recently found a nesting and breeding site of vultures in the project premises during a survey of the area.

On the directions of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), the final recommendations for the construction of the Power Grid Corporation of India project at the sanctuary site were finalised in a recently held meeting between the company and the WII in New Delhi. The project has been recommended for clearance by the Standing Committee of the NBWL with the following conditions:

- i) The proposed Route 1 of transmission line between angle points 35-38 be realigned away from the Vulture nest/roost sites by 225-275 m, in order to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and provide them lead flight distance for taking off or landing on the cliff.
- ii) Earth wires of transmission line be marked at 20 m distance within and 40 m distance around (2 km radius) the sanctuary with bird flight diverters while spacers binding quad- conductors should be colour marked at 50 m distance within and around sanctuary to make them more visible to flying birds, thereby reducing the chances of aerial collision.
- iii) Five percent of the project cost in

iv) sanctuary area should be utilized to restore the Bustard core conservation area for (a) creating a core area enclosure in 100 sq. kms as potential Great Indian Bustard habitat within the sanctuary by chain-link fencing; (b) reducing human pressure in this area by employing watchers with vehicles; and (c) restoring grassland habitat herein through scientifically informed management.

Source: Kavita Upadhyay, 'Ensuring safe flight for the endangered vultures', *The Hindu*, 28/01/15.
Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the NBWL held in New Delhi in January 2015

ODISHA

7.62 lakh birds in Chilika this year

A day-long bird census conducted in Chilika in the month of January counted 7.62 lakh birds of 172 species here. This is marginally higher than the previous year's count of 7.19 lakh birds. The birds counted included 1.29 lakh Northern Pintails, 61,000 Godwits and 1,375 flamingos. The maximum number were sighted at Nalabana Bird Sanctuary, and the smallest number reported was from the Rambha range. The census was carried out by the Chilika Wildlife Division of the Forest Department and experts from various organisations.

Source: '7.62 lakh winged guests visited Odisha's Chilika this year', www.odishasuntimes.com, 10/01/15.

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)

READERS WRITE

• Thanks for the PA Update. Will some one please share their thoughts on one issue troubling me? Ever since the latest tiger numbers are just out (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 1) I am wondering how tiger numbers could go up when their habitats are continuously under threat and are shrinking? May be one reason is that the poaching has been contained. But the diversion of forestlands seem to continue unabated in all parts of the country, and there is no indication of this forest land diversion coming to a halt. As long as there is no indication of this forestland diversion coming to a halt, tigers will soon loose their habitat sooner than later. So where is the cause for celebration? Not clear to me.

- *Shankar Sharma on email*

• The *Protected Area Update* is such a valuable contribution to conservation in India. Our gratitude to the PAU team.

- *Bittu Sahgal on facebook*

A Decade Ago

Protected Area Update 54, April 2005

MANIPUR

Six underground camps destroyed inside Keibul Lamjao NP

The state police, acting in concert with the army, busted six underground (UG) camps located inside the Keibul Lamjao National Park, and recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunitions following a brief encounter in the last week of February.

The operation was launched after midnight by a combined team of state police commandoes, 2nd IRB personnel, and Army troops of the 73rd Brigade located at Bishenpur and Assam Rifles troops following reports of the presence of the camps. It was conducted after cordoning off the areas of Keibul Lamjao, Chingmei, Kumbi, Khordak, Arong and Laphupat Tera. It is estimated that a total of about 150 people may have been staying at the camps at the time of the operation.

Source: 'Police backed by Army troops bust six UG camps at Keibul Lamjao', *Imphal Free Press*, 26/02/05.

ORISSA

Dolphin deaths in Chilika on the rise

At least seven Irrawady Dolphins were reported to have died because of mechanized tourist boats in Chilika Lake in month of February 2005 alone. All the deaths were reported from Mahisa in the Satpada zone of the lake. The current deaths have taken the toll to 13 since April 2004 and 50 since 2003. This is addition to the 15 dolphins that were killed in a similar manner between 2001 & 2003.

The total population of the dolphins in the lake is estimated to be about 130 (see *PA Update* 52 & 49) and they are mostly seen in the lake's outer channel near Mahisa-Berhampura, Alupatna, Magarmukh and Rajhans in the

southern sector. After the opening of the new mouth of the lake (See *PA Updates* 52, 30 & 26), and increase in salinity level in the lake, the dolphins are nowadays also sighted at Balugaon, Nalabana, INS Chilika and Rambha areas.

The Orissa government's promotion of eco-tourism in Chilika Lake has resulted in the rise of tourists over the last few years. Most of the fishermen of Satpada and Balugaon become tour operators during winter and take boatloads of tourists to the lake to show them the dolphins. During the peak tourism season from October to March, more than 600 tourist boats, fitted with "noisy and polluting engines", are used to take the tourists to where the dolphins stay.

Mr Biswajit Mohanty, Secretary, Wildlife Society of Orissa (WSO) has pointed out that the tourist boats are actually fishing boats, running on Lombardi engines, which, unlike the outboard motor engines (OBMs), have six-foot propellers jutting out of the rear of the boats. These boats usually keep circling the animals till the tourists get a good view. The panic-stricken mammals get injured by the propeller blades in an attempt to swim away and later succumb to their injuries.

The WSO has made a number of suggestions for "sustainable and regulated tourism" in Chilika, which will help, deal with this serious problem of dolphin deaths. The suggestions include use of OBMs by the boat operators, restriction on the number of boats allowed to take out tourists at a time, employment of a Forest Department patrol boat to keep watch and strict instructions to boat operators against chasing the dolphins.



Source: 'Dolphin death toll on the rise, thanks to 'unregulated tourism'', *The Statesman*, 21/02/05.

Projects in and around protected areas that were recommended for clearance at 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife held in New Delhi on 21 January 2015

No.	PA	Project/ Proposal
Arunachal Pradesh		
1	Itanagar WLS	Permission for carrying out survey & investigation works/ forest clearance for improvement /upgradation of the Papu-Yupia-Hoj-Potin road from 0.00 km to 7.00 km
2	Namdapha TR	Maintenance/improvement of Mio-Vijaynagar Road of 100.5 km falling within the TR
Assam		
3	Borail WLS	Diversion of 24.1268 ha of forestland from the PA for upgradation of Harangajao-Udarband-Silchar section from 244 km to 275 km of NH-54(E)
4	Dehing-Patkai WLS	Use of 2.3 ha of Dirok Tea Estate land falling within 10 km from the boundary of the PA for drilling of appraisal well by Hindustan Oil Corp.
Bihar		
5	Kaimur WLS	Alternation of boundary of the PA for exclusion of part of the limestone bearing mineral zone
Gujarat		
6	Balaram Ambaji and Jessore WLSs	Use of 3.213 ha of forestland for double track rail line project within Balaram Ambaji WLS. Part of the work will be done inside Balaram Ambaji WLS while a majority will be done adjacent to the this PA and the Jessore WLS
Haryana		
7-14	Abubshehar WLS	Establishment of petrol pump of IOCL in area of 0.2521 ha of land at Village Chautala, Dabwali Dist, inside the PA
		Proposal for establishment of petrol pump of IOCL in area of 0.1521 ha at Chautala on Sangaria Bypass road, Dist. Sirsa, inside the PA
		Establishment of a HPCL petrol pump in area of 0.1698 ha along Dabwali-Sangaria Road at village Abubshehar inside the PA
		Establishment of IOCL petrol pump in area of 0.08103 ha at village Ganga along Goriwala-Chautala road inside the PA
		Establishment of IOCL petrol pump in an area of 0.1308 ha at Village Chautala along Chautala-Rattanpura road inside the PA
		Establishment of IOCL petrol pump in area of 0.1482 ha along Dabwali Chautala Road in Tehsil Dabwali inside the PA
		Establishment of a new retail outlet in area of 0.171 ha on Ganga Munnawali road, Tehsil Dabwali, inside the PA
		Establishment of BPCL petrol pump in an area of 0.131 ha at village Chautala along Dabwali-Hanumangarh Road inside the PA
15	Khol-hi-Raitan WLS	Diversion of 3.609 ha of forest land from the PA and 28.873 ha of land outside the PA for 4-laning of the Panchkula-Yamunanagar Section of National Highway NH-73
16	Kalesar NP	Diversion of 0.495 ha of forestland from the PA for optical fibre cable
Himachal Pradesh		
17	Majathal WLS	Diversion of 0.3514 ha forestland in PA for drawing water from Pazeena Khad
18	Simbalbara WLS	Proposal for mining project (area of 10.25 ha) on river Yamuna located 8.5 km from the PA
Karnataka		
19	Dandeli WLS	Diversion of 6.423 ha of forestland in PA for improvement of NH-4a from km 0.00 to km 84.120 in the Belgaum-Khanapur-Gunjinad Ramnagar bypass

Madhya Pradesh		
20	Bagdara WLS	Construction of a minor irrigation water tank inside the PA. The tank is to be constructed over 78.46 ha of revenue and private land
21-24	Son Chiriya WLS	Diversion of 27.47 ha (20.77 ha forest land and 6.70 ha private land) for 765 KV electric line from Gwalior to Jaipur
		Diversion of 0.336 ha of forestland from the PA for construction of a 0.56 km road from AB Road to Kansar village along the Gwalior Shivpuri railway line
		Construction of the following 10 roads passing through the PA: i) Panihar Pangara Rd to Bhondeswar ii) AB Road to Chak Girawai iii) Thighara Basota Marg to Raikasba iv) Charaidang to Raikasba v) Basai Road to Khitera vi) Thighara Basota to Para vii) Thigara Rd. to Sujwya viii) Thigara Basota to Chhikari ix) Thigara Basota to Ghatwasini and x) Panihar Pagara Road to Nagda
		Construction of Danda Khirak to Thighara Road in the PA which will need 25.95 ha of sanctuary land (15.75 ha forest land and 10.20 ha revenue land)
25	Ratapani WLS	Construction of third railway track including electrification, signaling and telecommunication between Habibganj km 830.850 and Barkheda km 789.430 passing through the PA & within 10 km from the sanctuary
26	Madhav NP	Cutting of 604 trees for laying of an underground pipeline along the Agra – Mumbai NH-3
27	Singhori WLS	Renovation & maintenance of existing canal of Barna project passing through the WLS
28	Nauradehi WLS	Upgradation and widening of the Balakot-Chirai-Manka Road within the PA
Maharashtra		
29	Sanjay Gandhi NP	Excavation of a strip of land measuring 360 mts X 1.25 mts for laying a water pipeline needing an area of).045 ha of land in the PA
Rajasthan		
30	Ramgarh WLS	Exclusion of 281.97 ha for rationalization of the boundary of the PA
Tamil Nadu		
31	Gulf of Mannar NP	2X500 MW Coal based thermal plant at Tuticorin by M/s Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) Ltd and Tamil Nadu Power Ltd.
32	Pulicat Bird Sanctuary	Diversion of 1.11 ha of forest land for construction of high level bridge at Km 0/4, Chennai Pulicat Rd to Pasiyavaram Rd
33	Pulicat Bird Sanctuary	Diversion of 0.65 ha of forest land for construction of fish landing centre at Periyamongagodu, Thiruvallur district
Uttar Pradesh		
	National Chambal WLS	Diversion of 0.1575 ha of forestland from the PA for laying of optical fiber cable between Udimore and Chambal river along NH-92
Uttarakhand		
34		Proposal for aerial passenger ropeway between Ghangaria and Hemkund Sahib, Dist Chamoli
Proposals within 10 km boundary of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries		
Andaman & Nicobar Islands		
35	Mt. Harriet NP, Lohabarrack and Snake Island WLSs	For provision of jetty extension – Phase 2 (190x17 m) and wet basin and refit jetty (145x12 m) at the ship repair yard in Port Blair. The proposal is located at 3.8 km, 6.2 km and 9.5 km from the Mt Harriet NP, Lohabarrack WLS and Snake Island WLS respectively
Assam		
36	Laokhowa WLS	Using 5 ha of non-forest land falling within 10 km of the PA for widening and improvement of State Highway-3

Madhya Pradesh		
37	Ratapani WLS	Diversion of 3.240 ha of forestland for construction of a modern bulk storage facility in Village Padoniya within a 10 km periphery of the PA
Maharashtra		
38	Ambabarwa WLS	Ar-Kacheri Larger Minor Irrigation Project over 321.93 ha of private land in Sangrampur Taluka of Buldhana district. Project is within 10 km of Ambabarwa WLS and within the ESZ of Melghat TR
39	Melghat TR, Ambabarwa and Wan WLSs	Alewadi Larger Minor Irrigation project over 273.02 ha of private land in Sangrampur Taluka of Buldhana district within the proposed ESZ of the TR. Project is 1.5-1.75 km from Ambabarwa WLS and within 5 km of Wan WLS
40	Melghat TR	Patiya Minor Irrigation Project over forest area of 9.33 ha near Patiya Village of Amravati district. The project is 6.9 km from the core area of the TR and 1.5 km from its buffer
41	Mansingdeo WLS	Diversion of 16.40 ha of forestland for Khindsi Feeder Canal of the Pench Irrigation Project in Parshion taluka of Nagpur District. The project is within 10km of boundary of the Mansingdeo WLS
42	Radhanagari WLS	Diversion of 34.135 ha of forestland for Narad Medium Irrigation Project in Kankwali taluka of Sindhudurg district. The area is 0.75 to 2.00 km from boundary of the PA. A total of 1193 trees to be felled
Mizoram		
43	Loktak Lake	Use of 0.2145 ha of forestland in the ecosensitive zone of the Keibul Lamjao NP for the Integrated Cable Car and Lakeside Tourism Development Project. The project is located 4.2 km from the boundary of the PA
Punjab		
44	Bir Aishwan WLS	Implementation of project for improvement, rehabilitation, resurfacing and routine maintenance of roads under the Sangrur-Mansa-Bathinda contract area of Punjab – located within 10 km of boundary of PA
Rajasthan		
	Ranthambhor TR, Ramgarh Vishdhari WLS, National Chambal Sanc	Lakheri-Chamovali mining lease of M/s ACC Ltd. in Lakheri, Dist Bundi. The mining lease area includes 1107 ha non forest land and 409.88 ha forestland including the newly proposed diversion of 201.88 ha falling within the Ranthambhor TR Buffer zone. The 1107 ha of revenue land is at a distance of 2.65 km from the Ramgarh Vishdhari WLS and 2.50 km from the National Chambal Sanctuary. The State Wildlife Board has already recommended exclusion of the lease area form the buffer zone of the Ranthambhor TR.
Telangana		
45	Kinnersani WLS	Setting up of 800 MW expansion unit in the Kothaguden Thermal Power Station, Khammam district, located 1.25 km from the PA, but outside its proposed ESZ
Tripura		
46	Gumti WLS	Diversion of 3.189 ha of forestland for hydrocarbon exploration project at Khushirampara in Gumti Forest Division. The site is 3.25 km from the PA
47		Diversion of 2.86 ha of reserved forestland for hydrocarbon exploration at Babusaipura in Gumti Forest Division. The site is 6 km from the proposed ESZ of the PA
Uttar Pradesh		
48	Samaspur WLS	Expansion of existing coal based power project by adding one unit of 500 MW under stage IV of NTPC Ltd. The site is within 10 km of the PA boundary

Source: Minutes of the 32nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife held on 21st January 2015

PERSPECTIVE

NTFP decline in the Maikal Hills: What are its implications?

The sal-dominated mixed deciduous forests of the Kanha-Achanakmar corridor in Central India are rich in non-timber forest products (NTFP) and have a long history of NTFP trade. Honey, lac, silk cocoons, and dye-producing plant products were traded in the pre-colonial period. During British rule, lac, tans and resin from the Maikal Hills were exported to Europe for industrial use. Over time, the construction of roads, the opening up of the hinterland, and increasing NTFP demand have taken their toll on the natural occurrence of many NTFP species. In the last 20 years, an alarming trend in overharvesting has become especially apparent.

Starting in the mid-1990s, commercial NTFP extraction in the Maikal hills scaled new peaks. Demand rose for amla (*Phyllanthus emblica* and *P. indofischeri*), mahul patta (*Bauhinia vahlii*), char-chironji (*Buchania lanzan*), baibirang (*Embelica ribes*), lac, and non-edible mushrooms. The boom lasted about a decade. These products were so heavily overharvested that their occurrence has been profoundly affected. Amla trees were indiscriminately chopped down; in the Karanjia forest range those that have regenerated, strangely enough, are not bearing fruit.

A second, ongoing process of NTFP overharvesting owes to the medicinal plant trade. There are two parts to this. First, the sprucing up of the nearby pilgrimage-centre of Amarkantak has witnessed increased tourist footfall in recent years. The demand for medicinal plant products, sold in raw form by itinerant vendors, has consequently increased, and has heightened the pressure on the forests of the Achanakmar-Kanha corridor. Second, smaller-rung traders have helped establish an extended commodity chain; through them forest produce is making its way into cosmetics, food products, and medicines to feed the growing demand of the urban middle classes. Ironically,

most NTFP gatherers and small traders have little knowledge of (or purchasing power over) the end-product of their labour.

NTFPs are frequently discussed from a livelihoods perspective but understanding their ecological impact is equally important. The decline of one or more species can potentially contribute to larger ecosystem changes with implications for biodiversity conservation. Local accounts in the Maikal Hills are already drawing tentative associations between plant species decline and disappearing insect pollinators. While the absence of ecological studies is a shortcoming, NTFP decline in the Maikal Hills serves to highlight a vital but neglected aspect of the link between consumerist propensities and their distant environmental consequences. This is a link that demands reflection on our part as much as academic attention.

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