

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	3	Maharashtra	9
Tiger conservation and the construction of an 'urban conservation public'		337 villages from nine talukas in Pune district grant no-objection to ESZ	
NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES		Efforts to introduce solar irrigation pumps in Pench TR buffer	
Assam	4	NTCA nod for release of a captive tigress in Pench Tiger Reserve	
11 poachers killed, 20 arrested in Kaziranga National Park this year		Illegal research carried out on animals at VJBU and SGNP in 2001	
NGT asks Assam government to submit status report on restraining construction inside Manas NP		Odisha	11
WWF-India and Apeejay Tea partner to reduce human-elephant conflict in Assam		70 lakh Olive ridley hatchlings in Odisha	
Gujarat	5	CFR titles under the FRA distributed to villages in the Similipal TR	
FD proposes drone surveillance for Gujarat forests		Odisha Mining Corp to get Karlapat bauxite mines, part of which are inside the Karlapat WLS	
Jharkhand	6	Punjab	12
Jharkhand working on a comprehensive 24/7 elephant track-and-alert mechanism		Punjab to release gharials in Sutlej and Beas rivers	
Karnataka	6	Rajasthan	13
NTCA approves tiger reserve status to Kudremukh; state government disagrees		Tigers from Ranthambore TR moving into MP	
Dharwad-Belgavi railway line section turns death trap for wildlife		Five tigresses had 22 miscarriages in Sariska TR in seven years	
Karnataka initiates satellite based forest database		Tamil Nadu	13
Less than 25% wildlife crime cases resolved in Nagarahole between 1992 and 2013		Plastic waste in elephant dung in Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam and Periyar TRs	
Kerala	8	Visitors on a night safari in Mudumalai TR in violation of the law	
Help from tourism to tribal communities in Parambikulam TR		Telangana	14
'Elephant proof trenches causing escalation of human-elephant conflict in Attapady		250 acres bio-reserve to be created in Hyderabad University campus	
Study anticipates another outbreak of monkey fever in Wayanad WLS, adjoining forests		Uttarakhand	14
Madhya Pradesh	9	Tiger Reserve tag for Rajaji NP	
Director Panna TR transferred for opposing Ken- Betwa river link		West Bengal	15
Conviction in 13-year-old tiger poaching case		WII study reports no tiger signs in Buxa TR	
		NATIONAL NEWS	15
		MoTA refuses to exempt defence projects cleared by Environment Ministry	
		More than 3.43 lakh hectares of forestland diverted for development projects between 2004 and 2013	

Proposal to create institutional mechanism for using CAMPAs fund		IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE	20
Two Indian conservationists win Whitley Awards		National News	
Rescue centres planned for orphaned, injured wild animals		BNHS project for satellite tracking of Bengal florican	
Task Force on interlinking of rivers constituted		Andhra Pradesh	
India signs MoU with France for setting up marine research institutes		Tension between villages over fishing in Kolleru	
Centre considers a proposal to make lion India's national animal		Madhya Pradesh	
		Indian skimmer spotted in the Satpura NP	
		Diclofenac threat to vulture continues in Bundelkhand	
		Maharashtra	
SOUTH ASIA	19	Conservationists seek higher compensation for coconut growers to conserve vulture nests	
Bangladesh & India		Forest clearance withheld for Mumbai Trans Harbour Link through the Sewri mudflats	
India and Bangladesh to jointly protect forests, primates of the Patharia Hills			
Bhutan & India		A DECADE AGO	23
India and Bhutan plans to halt habitat loss and degradation in Manas landscape			
Nepal		PERSPECTIVE	24
Nepal rhino population increases by 21%		Tillari Must Not Die	

Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

Tiger conservation and the construction of an ‘urban conservation public’

An unprecedented pot-boiler has been playing out in the forests of the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve as a controversy rages on regarding the fate of tiger T-24, also known as Ustad. T-24 reportedly killed Rampal Saini, a forest guard in early May in the reserve and even as details of what had happened were emerging, there was news that he had been tranquilised and moved 400 km to the Sajjangarh Biological Park in Udaipur. Events unfolded at a brisk pace, allegations were seen flying thick and fast, and there was a clear lack of clarity, certainly agreement, on what some of the basic facts of the case were, or should be.

While the forest department and a number of prominent experts opined that the tiger had become a man-eater and should be removed from the forests, a group of the public started a campaign, mainly through social media, asking for Ustad to be brought back. There were complaints that the decision to move him had been taken in a hurry and that there was no transparency in the whole episode. All this alongside allegations that the tiger had been moved due to the pressure of the tourism lobby in Ranthambhore. The forest guards meanwhile, threatened to boycott work if the tiger was allowed to remain and a group of tour guides were seen asking for him to be brought back.

Going into the details of the matter, or judging the veracity of any of the claims and facts is not the purpose here. The matter, has in any case, been settled legally with the Jaipur High Court ruling that there was no case for Ustad to be taken back to Ranthambhore. The main thrust of this edit, therefore, is analytical with a focus on the role of one key player in the controversy – the tourist or what might be called the ‘urban conservation public’.

One of the major efforts of the wildlife conservation community over the years has been

to enlist the interest and support of the general public to the rationale of conservation. The question of what is a ‘public’ and how an amorphous, unconnected set of people with varying interests and backgrounds come to constitute a ‘public’ with a common agenda has been the subject of much research in the social sciences. One can discern clear trends in this context in wildlife conservation efforts in India, particularly in the case of the urban citizen.

The effort here has been mainly operationalized through the lens of tourism: connecting the unconnected urban folk with ‘untouched’ wilderness and nature; through the argument that tourism supports local people financially and by arguing that tourists can be the eyes and ears of conservation and protection – that poaching, for instance, is unlikely to happen in an area visited by tourism. Individual animals, like in the case of Ranthambhore, have been given names and individual identities; legends and mythologies have been created round them, and all of this has been mobilized to support conservation and protection.

The hope has been that this urban public will become a wildlife defender and a defender of the entire idea of conservation. The attempt, one might argue, has also been quite successful with this section having aligned itself firmly behind the idea of wildlife conservation. This ‘urban conservation public’ which is broadly middle – upper-middle class urban India has, over the years, been in synch with the ‘expert conservation community’ that is mainly constituted by wildlife and environment NGOs, the community of researchers and scientists, a section of the press and also the state.

Tiger T-24 is perhaps the first significant case in which we see a rupture in this alignment – for once, the urban conservation public was seen aligned on one side of the divide, the conservation community on the other. It is noteworthy that the key challenge to the decision to move tiger T-24 into captivity has come from this ‘urban conservation public’ that has catalyzed into becoming a single, vocal and effective community through the technology of social media.

There are two related points that this leads us to – both of an analytical nature. Social studies of knowledge have shown convincingly that controversies are very important in a better understanding of situations because they create the theatre where competing claims over authority, expertise, knowledge and facts play out. A controversy also allows for a certain transparency, and decisions that might have occurred backstage, have to now be performed before an audience that is listening and watching. Justice, as it is said, needs not only to be done, but also needs to be seen as done. The T-24 case is a very good illustration of this.

A lot of opinion is emerging from the side of the expert conservation community that this is an unruly, unreasonable, emotional public that is opposing the incarceration of T-24, that it's attitude is problematic, the facts are fudgy and the understanding incomplete and incorrect. Even if there is a reason to accept this assessment it would be very useful to dwell for a moment on who created this urban conservation public, how and why?

The dust may have indeed settled on the T-24 case for now, but it may not be long before another such case hits the headlines and the public begins to make a difference. There is a huge stake in conservation that has been created around this public and only part of it is about the economy!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

NGT asks Assam government to submit status report on restraining construction inside Manas NP

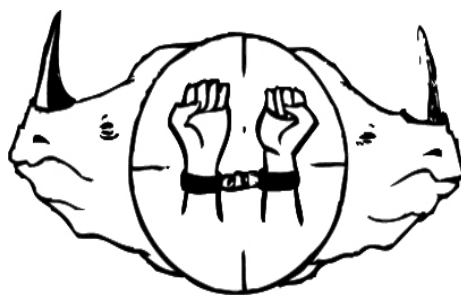
The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has expressed dismay over the failure of the Assam government to submit a status report on restraining construction at Mathanguri, inside the Manas National Park.

The NGT had, on January 9, restrained the Water Resources Department from taking up any river work at Mathanguri. It had then directed the Chief Secretary of Assam to take the necessary steps in the matter, to ask all his subordinate officers to ensure compliance and to submit a status report within four weeks. It had stated earlier that the place comes under the purview of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and there is a restriction here, therefore, on the de-reservation of forests or use of forestland for non-forest purposes.

The NGT in its latest order said that despite such directives on two earlier occasions, no status report has been filed by the Chief Secretary. The NGT took up the case after an environmental activist had filed a plea before the Calcutta-based eastern zone bench of the NGT last year to pass orders to stop all activities for streamlining the course of the Beki river on its left bank and activation of the dried up courses of the Manas and Hakua rivers at Mathanguri.

Source: 'NGT raps Dispur for 'failure'', *The Telegraph*, 09/04/15.

11 poachers killed, 20 arrested in Kaziranga NP this year



11 alleged poachers have been killed and another 20 arrested in the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in the first four months of 2015. The most recent incident occurred in the last week of April when three poachers were killed in two separate encounters with forest guards here. Two .303 rifles, a silencer, ammunition and a bag containing eatables were recovered from the dead men, who are yet to be identified.

Official sources said that acting on specific information, forest guards launched an operation at Agaratoli range and accosted a group of about five near the Nolonibon forest camp. The poachers opened fire and in the ensuing gun battle, two of them were killed while the other three fled. The three, however, came face-to-face with another group of forest guards, which was approaching the first encounter site. A gun battle broke out again, during which another poacher was killed. The other two did however manage to make good their escape.

Nine rhinos have been killed by poachers in KNP this year while 27 were killed last year. On the other hand, 65 poachers were arrested in 2013 and 47 were booked last year.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Three poachers gunned down', *The Telegraph*, 30/04/15.

WWF-India and Apeejay Tea partner to reduce human-elephant conflict in Assam

Apeejay Tea and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India recently announced a partnership to work towards reducing human-elephant conflict (HEC) in Assam by implementing a three-year, exhaustive management strategy in one of the worst affected elephant landscapes of the state. The first phase of work will be focused in Sonitpur district, which has seen 206 human, and 131 elephant fatalities between 1996 and 2009. (See *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 4 and Vol. XVII, No. 1). More than 50% HEC related human deaths have been recorded from the tea estates here. Of the 235 people who died in HEC in Sonitpur from 2001 to 2013, 127 were from tea estates. The number of people killed by elephants escalated in 2001 leading to 32 elephants being killed in retaliation in a single year. Apeejay Tea has four tea estates in the "hot zone" in Sonitpur district – Dhulapadung, Ghoirallie, Borjuli and Sessa.

The three-year project proposes to build upon the existing 10-year-old "Sonitpur Model" where WWF-India has been actively working on HEC along with the Department of Forests, Government of Assam, community

groups and a civil society organization called District Community Development Programme. This model includes the use of *kunkis* (captive elephants) to drive wild elephants from fields and tea estates, training anti-depredation teams to facilitate elephant drives and empowering the local community.

The project will now seek to develop a matrix to calculate the quantum of loss that is usually borne by the tea estates on account of damage to property, including tea bushes and shade trees, infrastructure and injuries among residents. It will also map the new paths that elephants have established, to move away from forest areas.

The route used by elephants through Sessa Tea Estate will be the first one to be formalized as a movement corridor and it will be hedged in by a bio-fence of thorny bamboo. This will then be replicated in other Apeejay Tea locations in Upper Assam in the next two years and a structure to monitor HEC in Sonitpur district and replicate it in Nagaon, Golaghat, Sibsagar and Tinsukia districts will also be developed. Additionally, 16 monitors will be put in place in various strategic locations of the district to gather maximum information of the raiding elephants and the damage done.

Source: 'Apeejay Tea & WWF-India partnership to reduce the impact of Human-Elephant Conflict in Assam', Press Release, 09/04/15.

Contact: **Nitya Kaushik**, WWF India. Tel: 09819902763, Email: nkaushik@wwfindia.net

GUJARAT

FD proposes drone surveillance for Gujarat forests

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has proposed to initiate drone surveillance in the forest areas of Gujarat including in the Gir National Park. A senior state official said that the experiment had been successful in Panna Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh (PA Update Vol. XX, No. 4) and it can be replicated in

Gujarat. The proposal was recently sent to the state government for its approvals.

In its proposal the FD has also sought to increase the fine amount significantly - from Rs. 500 to Rs. 50,000 - for cutting trees in the reserved forest area. It has also proposed to initiate welfare activities for the front level staff like guards and rangers, including provision of quarters and schools.

Source: 'Forest dept proposes drone surveillance in state jungles', *The Indian Express*, 15/04/15.

JHARKHAND

Jharkhand working on a comprehensive 24/7 elephant track-and-alert mechanism

The Jharkhand Forest Department (FD) is working to put in place a comprehensive 24/7 elephant track-and-alert mechanism using a combination of Google Maps, GPS and quick response teams. Geared around a proposed online interface using Google Maps, the system will track each of the 688 elephants currently on FD records and who divide their time between Jharkhand and the neighbouring states of Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. So, if an elephant or herd being tracked gets dangerously close to a human habitation on this real-time online interface, the nearest quick-response-team (QRT) will rush to the spot and troubleshoot. QRTs are likely to be in place in all districts by the end of the current financial year.

The latest push to the plan follows an incident in early May, when a young wild elephant entered the city of Ranchi, causing considerable damage. One person was also killed.

Source: ASRP Mukesh. 'Tusker rage spurs hi-tech tracking', *The Telegraph*, 08/05/15.

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KARNATAKA

NTCA approves tiger reserve status to Kudremukh; state government disagrees

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has given its final approval for the Kudremukh National Park (KNP) to be declared as a tiger reserve (TR). The state government has, however, expressed its disapproval on the grounds that there is a lot of resistance from the local people to declaring KNP as a tiger reserve. It said it has also received a number of representations against the proposal.

The proposal to grant TR status to KNP had been approved by the NTCA in May 2011, and the UPA government had directed the state to send its proposal for the same. The then state government had written a letter explaining the state's opposition to the move. In June 2012, the then Chief Minister, Mr. DV Sadananda Gowda, had rejected the Centre's proposal and stated that there were already five tiger reserves in the state, the number of tigers too had increased and declaring a TR would lead to displacement of people living in these forests. Elected representatives of three districts where the park is located too had opposed the idea, saying that if KNP got the status of a tiger reserve, then more than 600 sq. km would be carved out as an exclusive habitat for tigers, thereby hindering the free movement of local people, especially the tribal community (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, Nos. 5 & 2 and Vol. XVII, No. 4).

A few tribal and farmer rights organisations had also vetoed this proposal as they felt it would not only infringe on the rights of the local people but would also displace them from their cultivable lands in the forests. Another fear was that it would give an impetus to Naxalites to increase their influence and activate their cadres in these districts. Some experts have also opined that while KNP would get more funding if it becomes a tiger reserve, there would not be a significant change as the laws applicable to a national park apply to a tiger reserve also. The PA that is spread over three districts is home to at least seven tigers. It is, presently, also witnessing a movement of

people out of the forests, in what the authorities are calling voluntary relocation by the people (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 4).

Source: Meera Bhardwaj, 'Confusion Over Tiger Reserve Status', *The New Indian Express*, 23/04/15

Dharwad-Belgavi railway line section turns death trap for wildlife

An adult male gaur was recently mowed down by a speeding train on the Dharwad-Alnavar-Londa-Khanapur-Belgavi railway line. This was the fourth incident in this section in six months. Scores of wild animals including elephants, gaur, leopards and wild dogs have been killed by passenger as well as freight trains on this railway section. The area where the latest incident took place is an important elephant corridor besides being part of the larger Sharavathi-Dandeli-Khanapur tiger landscape.

Repeated pleas by conservationists to adopt measures to prevent the deaths have been in vain. A further cause of worry is that the South Western Railways has commenced track-doubling work along this stretch.

Conservationists have pointed out that pantry staff often throws unused food on the tracks, thereby attracting the animals to the line. In addition, the locomotive drivers do not have any specific instructions to operate the trains at low speed near elephant corridors or wherever wildlife is sighted. Conservationists have suggested many measures to curb the accidents, but none has been implemented so far.

Source: 'Railway line turns death trap for endangered wild animals, scores crushed under trains', www.indiatoday.intoday.in, 15/04/15.

Karnataka initiates satellite based forest database

Karnataka is set to become the first state in the country to initiate a new, and publicly available satellite based database of its forestlands. The work also makes the forest department (FD) an

early non-aviation user of GAGAN, the Indian Global Positioning System. The move follows a Supreme Court directive to states almost four years ago to update and put up their respective forest maps in the public domain.

The Karnataka FD completed a pilot of 220 villages in 2014–15, covering four types of landscapes. It would eventually map a total of 10,893 villages that have forests once the standard operating procedures for the work are released in May. Estimated to have cost over Rs. 27 crore, the geospatial database of forestlands pilot has used data from the Cartosat-2 satellite.

Source: Madhumathi D S, 'GAGAN kicks off new forest database', *The Hindu*, 19/04/15.

Less than 25% wildlife crime cases resolved in Nagarhole between 1992 and 2013

A response to an RTI query has revealed that less than 25% of the cases of wildlife violations filed with the Nagarhole National Park (NNP) authorities between 1992 and 2013 have been resolved. The query that was filed in 2014 by the NGO, Wildlife First, has also revealed that there were 704 cases of sandalwood poaching, forest encroachment, wildlife-related offences, and arson among others for the same period. Of these, a mere 17% – 120 cases — have reached completion or been charge-sheeted, or are in the trial stage. The query further reveals that a meeting of forest officials from the NNP in September 2013 had resolved to solve these cases within 15 days. However, no progress has been recorded since then.

A park official admitted to the need for a better system of prosecution and detection and said that many of the cases pertain to tribal people, who had been booked for minor causes. Similarly, officials file a case if a tree goes missing, but detection is difficult. Officials also say that many sandalwood smuggling cases go undetected and encroachment cases usually take a long time to resolve.

In a letter to the Chief Wildlife Warden, activists have demanded that a crime review of all protected areas in the state should be conducted, and a Special Investigation Team

should be formed to ensure investigations are completed in a time-bound manner.

Source: Mohit M. Rao. 'Count Of Unsolved Cases Mounts In Tiger Reserve! - 83 p.c. of cases at Nagarhole National Park have not had closure', *The Hindu*, 17/04/2015.

KERALA

Help from tourism to tribal communities in Parambikulam TR

A community based 'eco-tourism' initiative in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve is said to be helping 234 members of six tribal settlements within the reserve achieve a decent livelihood. The initiative was launched six years ago with the participation of the tribal communities who earlier found it tough to live in a forest environment cut off from the world outside. The tribes-people, who were forced to sell their cattle and forgo other means of livelihood after the sanctuary attained a tiger reserve status, are now employed as tourist guides, forest watchers and helpers for eco-tourism initiatives. Their salaries are paid for by the Parambikulam Tiger Foundation. They have become part of the Social Tiger Protection Force and are working with the forest department (FD) in combating forest and wildlife-related offences.

There are seven eco-development committees serving the restricted and regulated eco-tourism needs and looking after the livelihood of tribal people, and 13 eco-tourism packages operated by the FD through the communities. Plastic waste is said to have reduced drastically and the remaining waste is recycled and made into key chains, embedded with PTR-related images and slogans. They are sold as souvenir to tourists. Tourism activities are regulated in such a way as to not cause disturbance to wildlife. Entry of private vehicles to the reserve has been banned. Four new 18-seater vehicles have been bought to take tourists around the reserve.

The director of the reserve also pointed out that banana cultivation earlier used to lead to man-animal conflict. Now, with inputs from the

FD, the local communities have switched over to ginger, coffee, pepper and turmeric cultivation. Organic certification and good prices have also said to have added to the benefit that is accrued to them.

Source: KA Shaji. 'Eco-tourism brings succour to tribespeople', *The Hindu*, 13/05/15.

'Elephant-proof' trenches causing escalation of human-elephant conflict in Attapady

As many as 13 elephants have been separated from their herd after trenches were dug in the elephant corridors in eastern Attapady. They are now virtually trapped in between inhabited areas and the forest and this is said to have resulted in an escalation in conflict in the area. The trapped elephants have been raiding crops in Thoova, Vattalakki, and Kulukkur villages in the Sholayur belt. They also appear on the Mannarkkad-Coimbatore main road, causing disruption to vehicular traffic. Road-users, especially tourists who take the route to reach Ooty, via Mulli and Manjur, are often taken by surprise when they spot wild elephants on the road.

'Elephant-proof' trenches were dug in the Anaikatty forest fringes on the Tamil Nadu side following a public outcry. The elephants were not herded back to the forest ahead of the digging of trenches and this has led them to now move into farmlands and human habitations, causing human-animal conflict.

Senior forest officials said they were yet to find a way to resolve the crisis.

Source: K.A. Shaji, 'Elephants in a trouble trench', *The Hindu*, 23/04/15

Study anticipates another outbreak of monkey fever in Wayanad WLS, adjoining forests

A study has warned that another outbreak of Kysanur Forest Disease (KFD) or monkey fever may take a toll on the simian population in Wayanad district if the authorities fail to adopt preventive measures in time. The study was

conducted following the recent KFD outbreak in Bonnet macaques in the district by a team led by Arun Zachariah, Assistant Professor, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University.

The Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Palakkad, ordered the study after mass mortality of the macaques was reported in the forests of Nilambur south division in December 2014 and the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in January this year. More than 100 monkeys had perished due to the disease.

The study has pointed out that the current outbreak is a major one both in humans and simians in the non-KFD range area, raising serious questions regarding changing disease dynamics of the KFD virus. Nine persons have succumbed to the disease in the district so far.

Source: E.M. Manoj, 'Another monkey fever outbreak likely', *The Hindu*, 23/04/15.

MADHYA PRADESH

Director Panna TR transferred for opposing Ken-Betwa river link

R Sreenivasa Murthy, Director, Panna Tiger Reserve (TR) has reportedly been transferred to the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary because of his opposition to the Ken-Betwa river linking project. In his report to Madhya Pradesh chief wildlife warden, Narendra Kumar, Murthy said implementation of the project cannot be recommended as more than 200 square km of PTR would be submerged. Access to email correspondence has shown that the principal secretary of water resources department (WRD), Mr RS Julaniya was annoyed over Murthy's objections to the project. CCF Narendra Kumar has, however refuted the charges. He said it was Murthy's sixth year running at the same place and he himself wanted to quit Panna for medical reasons.

In another move, activist Ajay Dubey, has said that he is all set to move court against Ken-Betwa river link project. The Rs. 9,393-crore project involves 9,000 hectares of land, half of which is forest area. If the project is

cleared, 10% of the tiger reserve will be taken away. It also involves transferring 591 million cubic metre of surplus water in Ken basin through 231.45-km canal to Betwa river. An estimated 6,000 hectares of land is needed for acquisition and the resettlement, and is estimated to cost Rs. 333 crore.

Source: P Naveen. 'Director Panna tiger reserve transferred for opposing Ken-Betwa river linkage; email reveals', *The Times of India*, 12/05/2015.

Conviction in 13-year-old tiger poaching case

In an order that was passed on 10 April 2015, the Judicial Magistrate First Class, Katni, convicted six people for shooting a tiger and skinning it in the Baboriband range of Katni division, Madhya Pradesh in January 2002. Two firearms including one muzzle loading gun, and a 12-bore gun, had been seized from the accused at the time. One of the persons convicted in this case was the president of the Van Suraksha Samiti (Forest Protection Committee) at the time of the incident.

The accused were sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of Rs. 10,000 each was also imposed on them. On request by the prosecution, the court directed the fine amount of Rs. 60,000 to be given to the forest department as compensation, for its use in forest protection.

Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India, Email dated 14/04/15.

MAHARASHTRA

Efforts to introduce solar irrigation pumps in Pench TR buffer

Satpuda Foundation, a NGO working on wildlife conservation issues, recently organized a workshop in the Pipariya village of Ramtek tehsil to introduce farmers from the Pench Tiger Reserve buffer zone to solar-powered irrigation pumps. About 25 farmers from five villages - Pipariya, Ghatpendri, Ghoti, Wagholi and Sillari

- attended the event. The farmers observed the solar panels and controllers. They were made aware of various government schemes which will provide them with benefits and subsidies for installation of such solar-powered irrigation units. The initiative is supported by Born Free Foundation and IndusInd Bank in Pench.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Pench buffer farmers take to solar irrigation pumps', *The Times of India*, 13/05/2015

NTCA nod for release of a captive tigress in Pench TR

After six years, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has finally given the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) a go ahead to release one of the two tigresses, kept in an enclosure in Pench Tiger Reserve, back into the wild. The tigress is one of three animals— one male and two females — that had been rescued from the Dhaba forest in Chandrapur district in 2009. The male was sent to a zoological park in Pune after it was found “not fit” for release.

The NTCA approval is reported to have followed an intervention of the Union Environment Minister, Mr Prakash Javadekar. Volunteers of NGO Srushti, which had earlier taken care of the abandoned tigers in Bor, had recently met Javadekar to discuss the issue. A three-member committee consisting of Vaibhav Mathur of NTCA and Bilal Habib and Parag Nigam from the Wildlife Institute of India submitted a report to the NTCA based on which the decision was taken.

The decision of where the tigress (now six years old) should be released will be that of the local wildlife officials. As per the original plan, a soft-release was proposed in Pench itself. However, Pench officials have written to the Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (wildlife) saying that releasing the tigress in Pench will not be wise as Pench and the adjoining Mansinghdeo WLS (450 sq. km) already have 23 adult tigers and 6 cubs. If a decision is taken to not release the tigress in Pench, a meeting of the expert committee will be called to take a decision in the matter.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Green signal for tigress release, but where is the question', *The Times of India*, 15/04/15.

Illegal research carried out on animals at VJBU and SGNP in 2001

While the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals Act states that experimentation on animals in zoos or protected areas is illegal, details procured from the Bombay Veterinary College (BVC) via the Right to Information (RTI) act have revealed that chemical experiments were carried out on tigers and deer at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosle Udyan (VJBU) and Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in Mumbai. The research, conducted for a dissertation by two students from the BVC in 2001, sought to understand drug reactions on animals. While all tigers showed inverse effects to the drug administration, two deer died during the experiments in the zoo, said the RTI response. The details were obtained by Sunish Subramanian Kunju, Secretary, Plant and Animal Welfare Society, Mumbai.

Both the VJBU and the SGNP rejected Kunju's request three times saying no such experiments were carried out as per their records. The proof, however, came from the thesis written by students of the BVC. The submitted thesis says that the tests were conducted on six tigers, three male and three female, from the VJBU and SGNP. The tigers were anaesthetised using a blowgun and were kept on fast for the same during the research without the presence of any anesthetic experts. Side effects of the anesthesia such as apnea, severe respiratory distress, vomiting and excessive salivation were noted during the experiment. These side effects were observed in five out of 11 trials conducted on the tigers. The animals also showed severe cardiac and respiratory repression after administration of xylazine and ketamine.

Burdizzo experiments for castration were also conducted on the deer in the zoo, and one of the animals died while anesthesia was being administered to it. The other deer showed severe respiratory distress after the onset of

anesthesia. The paper states that the postmortem conducted on both deer showed severe congestion along with extensive escape of blood in the brain. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests is reported now to have ordered an investigation into the matter.

Source: Swati Jha, 'Illegal research carried out at SGNP, zoo', *The Asian Age*, 09/03/15.

337 villages from nine talukas in Pune district grant no-objection to ESZ



As many as 337 villages across nine talukas of the Pune district have granted their 'no-objection', paving the way for them to be covered under the proposed eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). This includes 37 villages in Ambegaon taluka, 56 in Bhore, four in Haveli, 32 in Junnar, 51 in Maval, 22 in Khed, 66 in Mulshi, nine in Purandar and 60 in Velhe. Some villagers in Mulshi and Maval talukas were reported to have expressed their reservations initially, but agreed later.

The ESZs have been demarcated after the Kasturirangan committee recommended a ban on development activities in a 60,000 sq km ecologically-sensitive area spread over six states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Maharashtra, the notification will be applicable in the districts of Ahmednagar, Dhule, Kolhapur, Nandurbar, Nashik, Pune, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sangli, Sindhudurg, Satara and Thane.

As per the report, the biologically rich areas with some measure of contiguity are about

37 per cent of the Western Ghats. They are considered to have high biological richness, low forest fragmentation, low population density and comprise protected areas, world heritage sites and tiger and elephant corridors. As per the Environment Ministry's notification, there can be no mining, quarrying, setting up of thermal plants or big building complexes in ecologically-sensitive areas as identified by the Kasturirangan committee. The committee had recommended a no-tolerance policy with respect to highly interventionist and environmentally damaging activities like mining or polluting industries. This would also restrict activities like mining for stone and sand, atomic energy projects, construction up to 20,000 sq. m or development of townships up to 50 hectares.

Source: Nisha Nambiar. 'Eco-sensitive zones: 337 villages issue 'no-objection' certificate', *The Indian Express*, 08/05/15.

ODISHA

CFR titles under the FRA distributed to villages in the Similipal TR

Community Forest Rights (CFR) titles under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) were distributed to 42 villages in the Similipal Tiger Reserve during an event in the month of April. The event was organized jointly by the block development authority and the revenue department and was held in Barehipani Gram Panchayat of Jasipur Tehsil, Mayurbhanj district.

44 villages under the Jasipur Tehsil of Mayurbhanj district were entitled to CFRs and two of these, Jamunagarh and Jenabil have already been awarded these (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 1).

Source: Bibhor Deo, C/o Vasundhara. Email dated 09/04/15.

Contact: Bibhor Deo,
Email: bibhor@vasundharaorissa.org

Odisha Mining Corp to get Karlapat bauxite mines, part of which are inside the Karlapat WLS

The Union Mines Ministry has decided to allocate the Karlapat bauxite mines to state-run mining company, Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC). The bauxite deposit is spread over an area of 3,002 hectare (ha) in the Kalahandi district of the state and the northern part of the mine is said to be part of the Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The bauxite reserves are estimated to be of 207 million tonnes which includes 153 tonnes proven reserve and 54 million tonnes probable reserve.

The state government had moved the Central ministry in June 2013, seeking the Karlapat deposits in OMC's favour, stating that it will be in the interest of mineral conservation and prudent exploitation. The state government had sought reservation of the bauxite mines for 30 years, arguing that it will ensure fair and equitable distribution of the raw material. Besides, the government felt such an arrangement would help accrue more economic returns for the state by way of royalty, taxes and dividend, thereby providing more funds for developmental activities.

OMC securing the Karlapat mines is also seen as offering a glimmer of hope to the Vedanta Group owned firm Sesa Sterlite's alumina refinery at Lanjigarh. The one million tonnes refinery without any raw material linkages was continuing operations at a low capacity on bauxite sourced from Gujarat and Chattisgarh and also imports from nations like New Guinea. OMC had entered into an agreement with the Vedanta Group firm for supplying 150 million tonnes of bauxite for the Lanjigarh refinery. The attempts to supply bauxite from the Niyamgiri deposits to the Vedanta alumina refinery were thwarted with the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) withdrawing clearances to the mining project, a decision which was later endorsed by the local gram sabhas convened on the direction of the Supreme Court.

Source: 'Odisha Mining Corp to get Karlapat bauxite mines', *Business Standard*, 18/03/15.

70 lakh Olive ridley hatchlings in Odisha



An estimated 70 lakh Olive ridley sea turtles are reported to have hatched this year at the two prominent turtle nesting grounds in Odisha — 40-45 lakh in the Gahirmatha

marine sanctuary in coastal Kendrapara district and the remaining on the sea beach near the mouth of river Rusikulya in southern Ganjam district. This number is expected to go up because more than 4.33 lakh and 3.10 lakh Olive ridley turtles respectively had nested in Gahirmatha and at Rusikulya in March, earlier this year.

Source: 'Over 70 lakh turtles hatched in Odisha' *Deccan Herald*, 07/05/15.

PUNJAB

Punjab to release gharials in Sutlej and Beas rivers

The Punjab Chief Minister, Prakash Singh Badal, has approved a proposal for the release of gharials in the Sutlej and Beas rivers to promote eco-tourism. The decision was taken after recommendations of the State Board for Wildlife for releasing the "critically endangered species" in the river systems of the state. The Union Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change had accorded permission for release of gharials in the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 1) under Section 12 of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The state government has now chalked out a programme for their release with Harike Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) as the starting point. 10 gharials will be released here initially in September, later this year, and another 100 will be released in the two rivers during a period spanning two years.

Source: 'Punjab to release Gharials in rivers to promote eco-tourism', *Business Standard*, 17/04/15.

RAJASTHAN

Tigers from Ranthambore TR moving into Madhya Pradesh

Four tigers, originally from Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (RTR), have been photographed in different parts of neighbouring Madhya Pradesh (MP) in the last few years. The most recent has been the sub-adult tiger T-71 that was captured in cameras in the Sheopur territorial division of MP. T-71 (cub of T-30) was first photo-captured in Karanpur range of Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary (KWLS) – which forms a part of RTR – on November 20, 2014. It has since travelled a distance of 100 km and officials have suggested that it might be moving in an attempt to establish its own territory.

The others that have moved from RTR to MP include one of the three cubs of the tigress T-26 that moved a distance of nearly 220 km from RTR to Datia in MP in the year 2013. The other tiger, T-38, had crossed the Chambal river and entered Shivpuri district of MP in 2010.

Source: P Naveen. 'Rajasthan losing its big cats to MP', *The Times of India*, 30/04/15.

Five tigresses had 22 miscarriages in Sariska TR in seven years

Five tigresses introduced into the Sariska Tiger Reserve in the last seven years have experienced a total of 22 miscarriages, and this is being offered as part of the explanation for the slow growth of tiger numbers in Sariska. The information of the miscarriages was provided recently by Mr K.L. Saini, Vice President of the Sariska Tiger Foundation and field director of the reserve during the period 1984-89.

Currently there are 13 tigers in the sanctuary, including four cubs, two male and seven female. Ever since the tiger, coded ST-1, was killed by poisoning (*PA Updates* Vol.

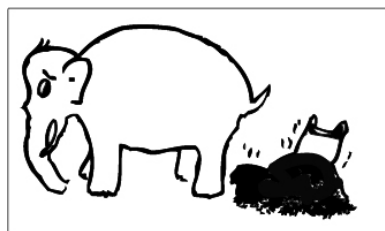
XVIII, No. 5 and Vol. XVII, No. 5), the sanctuary is facing a gender imbalance. The problem is more pronounced because all the six cubs born in Sariska have been fathered by ST-4. Only two tigresses ST-2 and ST-10 have given birth so far. ST-2 gave birth to two cubs, one each in 2011 and 2014, while ST-10 gave birth to two cubs in 2014.

Some experts have noted that the main cause for miscarriages and non-breeding was the radio collar put around the neck of tigresses that hinders their mating process. They have called for the removal of the collars once the introduced animals have settled into their new homes. Others, including, Rajasthan's former principal chief wildlife warden Mr R.N. Mehrotra have refuted these arguments, asserting instead, that the main reason for non-breeding or inadequate breeding and several miscarriages was the large scale human interference in the tiger habitat.

Source: Sudhanshu Mishra. '5 tigresses had 22 miscarriages in Sariska in 7 years', *Mail Today*, 07/05/15.

TAMIL NADU

Plastic waste in elephant dung in Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam and Periyar TRs



Researchers have found plastic waste in elephant dung in five places in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the Nilgiris and also in dung samples collected at Bannari temple in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve and in the Thorappalli, Nilakkottai, Bennei, Masinagudi, Sigur and Singara areas. The non-degradable matter that was found in the dung included, among others, chips packets, tetra packs, cups and small bowls made of thermocol.

A large amount of this plastic waste is generated by pilgrims visiting the temples who throw away the plastic bags, wrappers and bowls made of thermocol which are used to distribute food at the temples. The postmortem of an elephant that was found dead in Gudalur a few years ago had revealed a large quantity of plastic materials in its stomach, which caused the death. In another case in Kerala, 40 kg of plastic materials was removed by the doctors from a dead elephant's stomach during the postmortem.

Source: P Oppili. 'Pilgrims' litter puts jumbos on plastic diet', *The Times of India*, 30/03/15.

Visitors on a night safari in Mudumalai TR in violation of the law

A groups of visitors was reported to have entered the core area of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) and also gone out on a night safari in the month of March in blatant violation of the law. They took shelter in an anti poaching camp near Wombetta lake in Kargudi range of the reserve and stayed on for a 2nd day as well. The visitors were believed to be relatives of friends of one of the reserve officials. More details are not yet available though the reserve director is reported to have expressed ignorance about the incident.

Source: Shantha Thiagarajan. 'Tourists allowed to enter core area of tiger reserve at night', *The Times of India*, 03/04/15.

TELANGANA

250 acres bio-reserve to be created in Hyderabad University campus

The University of Hyderabad has planned to develop 250 acres of land on its campus as a bio-reserve. The blueprint has been prepared to protect four lakes located on the campus – the Peacock, Gundlakunta, Chilkalkunta and Nallagandla lakes along with the surrounding

areas. The administration is said to have banned construction in this area.

The master plan to develop the place into a greenbelt was approved by the university administration three months ago. Another survey was earlier taken up to record the topography. The committee took stock of the survey and then finalized the master plan. The university has already de-silted one of the lakes with the help of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. The campus, according to an internal survey, has 734 varieties of flowering plants, 80 species of birds, 10 of mammals and 15 reptile species.

Source: Nikhila Henry, 'In a first, University of Hyderabad to have bio-reserve', *The Times of India*, 18/04/15.

UTTARAKHAND

Tiger Reserve tag for Rajaji NP

In a recently held meeting of the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL), Uttarakhand Chief Minister, Mr Harish Rawat, has given a go ahead to the proposal for the notification of the Rajaji National Park (RNP) as a tiger reserve. This will be the second tiger reserve in Uttarakhand after Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Former Chief Minister, Mr Vijay Bahuguna had first made an announcement in this regard on April 1, 2013. Soon after this, the SBWL had sent a proposal to the National Tiger Conservation Authority, which was accepted. Bahuguna, however was replaced by Rawat as the CM of the state and the matter was lost in the official rigmarole. The long wait has come to an end with the recent announcement.

The RNP director said that three ranges, Shyampur of the Haridwar forest division and Kotdwar and Laldhang ranges of Lansdowne forest division will be merged with the present area of 820 sq. km of RNP. These ranges will act as a buffer zone of the tiger reserve.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'U'khand to get its 2nd tiger reserve soon', *The Times of India*, 18/04/15.

WEST BENGAL

WII study reports no tiger signs in Buxa TR

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), which has conducted the all-India tiger census spanning four years, has reported that no sign of the tiger has been found in the Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR). The WII had taken the GPS coordinates of the scat samples from the state foresters and had also sent their researchers to those areas, but the team did not find any sign of the tiger in and around there. A camera-trap exercise that has been on-going in Buxa for more than a year has also failed to capture any tiger image. The same exercise, though, has brought to light the existence of other rare animals such as the Clouded leopard, Marbled cat and Himalayan serow in the reserve.

Four other researchers who have worked extensively in BTR have endorsed WII's findings. Karpagam Chelliah of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, who has been working on human-elephant conflict in Buxa since March 2006, said she never encountered a tiger in Buxa. A research scholar with the National Institute for Advanced Studies, Asmita Sengupta, said similarly, that she had set up camera traps for her study on the Rhesus macaque in the Damanpur and Cheko areas of the park between July 2012 and September 2014, but never got any image of a tiger. Independent research scholar Sumanta Kundu covered the entire forest for his study on elephants' movement pattern between September 2005 and November 2007. He said there were reports of phantom sighting, but he never encountered even a tiger sign in the park.

The Additional PCCF (wildlife) has said, however, that a study by the NGO, Aaranyak, in 2010 had detected the presence of 13 tigers in the park, and following that, in 2011, the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology had also found the presence of 19 tigers based on a scat analysis.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee. 'Sariska encore? Scientists find 'no sign of tigers' in Buxa', *The Times of India*, 27/04/15.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

MoTA refuses to exempt defence projects cleared by Environment Ministry

Days after the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) relaxed rules to help create strategic defence infrastructure, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has refused to exempt these projects in the border states of north and north-east India from the purview of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). Pointing out that most rights over forests in the 6th Schedule areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura are vested with the local communities, and that forests in states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and hill areas of Manipur are owned by communities through village councils, MoTA has told the Ministry of Defence that the FRA has no provision to exempt in part or full from the process laid down therein.

The Tribal Affairs Ministry's refusal came after the MoEFCC on January 29 granted general approval for diversion of forest land for all security infrastructure projects of the Border Security Force and Sashastra Seema Bal within 5 km of the international border. MoTA's refusal will affect at least 35 defence projects (see box) involving more than 20,000 acres of forest land — in eight states under the eastern, northern and central commands.

State	No. of Projects	Total Forest Land (in acres)
Eastern Command		
Arunachal Pradesh	11	11,667
Sikkim	6	1,172
West Bengal	5	4,009
Assam	4	2,307
Mizoram	1	392
Tripura	1	3
Central Command		
Uttarakhand	3	170
Northern Command		
Himachal Pradesh	4	728

Source: Jay Mazoomdar. 'Ministry refuses to relax norms for 35 border projects', *The Indian Express*, 23/04/15.

More than 3.43 lakh hectares of forest land diverted for development projects between 2004 and 2013



More than 3.43 lakh hectares of forest land was diverted for development projects across the country in the period 2004-2013. The information was provided recently in the Rajya Sabha by the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar. The total number of projects that were involved was 13,891.

The minister also said that a web-based portal for online submission and monitoring of forest clearance proposals, launched by the Ministry in July last year, has received 2,724 proposals for clearance till May 5, 2015.

Source: '3.43L hectares forest land diverted for development projects', *Business Standard*, 07/05/15.

Proposal to create institutional mechanism for using CAMPA fund

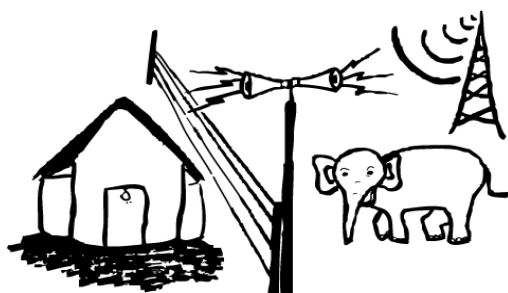
The Centre has proposed a new institutional mechanism for the proper utilization of the Rs. 38,000 crore that have now accumulated with the ad hoc body - the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). The money is supposed to be used for afforestation and other related works like wildlife care and ecological services under central and state monitoring authorities. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2015 has been prepared for placing before parliament for the purpose. Once constituted, the body will also monitor use of the fresh accrual of an

estimated Rs. 6,000 crore per annum to newly created "non-lapsable interest bearing" funds.

Any user agency which diverts forestland for non-forest purpose is, at present, required to deposit a prescribed amount to CAMPA. Under the proposed law, 90% of the deposited money will be given to states for afforestation works. The states' shares are calculated on the basis of diversion of forest land and the accrued money in the CAMPA fund. The bill also provides for setting up of the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) and the State CAF to credit amounts collected by state governments and union territories administrations. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XIX. No. 3).

Source: Vishwa Mohan. 'Forest fund gets Rs. 38,000 crore boost', *The Times of India*, 30/04/15.

Two Indian conservationists win Whitley Awards-2015



Two Indians have been awarded with the Whitley Awards-2015 for their contribution to wildlife conservation. Dr. Ananda Kumar was awarded the prize for his innovative use of communication systems to enable human-elephant coexistence in southern India and Dr Pramod Patil was awarded for his work to protect the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in the Thar desert.

Dr. Ananda Kumar has developed an Elephant Information Network which acts as an early warning mechanism to alert people when elephants are nearby. As part of the system, a trained conflict response team tracks elephant movement and conveys this information to

people via text messages, calls and mobile-operated red light indicators placed in strategic locations. Fatal encounters and incidents of damage to property in the area have fallen significantly since the inception of this early warning system, and these positive results have encouraged him to expand his project to the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve.

Dr Pramod Patil of the Bombay Natural History Society, a medical doctor by training, now works in Rajasthan to develop positive relationships between authorities and local people, and to enable better management of the land on which GIBs depend for survival as do the communities for their livelihoods.

The 2015 Whitley Awards Ceremony was held on April 29 at the Royal Geographical Society, London, and the Princess Royal presented the awards; each of them receiving a Whitley prize that is worth £35,000.

Source: Salome Phelamei, 'Two Indians win Whitley Awards for wildlife conservation', www.zeenews.india.com, 30/04/15.

Rescue centres planned for orphaned, injured wild animals

The Central Zoo Authority has, reportedly, asked chief wildlife wardens of all States and Union Territories to open rescue centres for orphaned and injured wild animals and those involved in human-animal conflict. The information was provided in parliament recently by Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Mr Prakash Javadekar. At present, there are 15 such recognised rescue centres functioning in various parts of the country. Of these, ten facilities are being run by non-government organisations, societies, trusts and individuals.

Source: 'Rescue centres for orphaned, injured wild animals on cards', *Business Standard*, 08/05/15.

Task Force on interlinking of rivers constituted

The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has constituted a 'Task Force' on Interlinking of Rivers comprising experts and senior officials. The Task Force would be chaired by Mr BN Navalawala and expert members on it will include Mr Sriram Vedire, Adviser in the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Mr Prodipto Ghosh, Former Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Mr AD Mohile, Former Chairman, Central Water Commission (CWC), Mr M Gopalakrishnan, Former Member, Central Water Commission and Mr Virag Gupta, Advocate. Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Water Resources, Chairman, Central water Commission, Director General, National Water Development Agency and Joint Secretary (Finance), in the Ministry of Water Resources will be the other members of the Task Force.

The Task Force will take up all issues for expediting the work on interlinking of rivers in the country. Apart from examining the existing links that are laid out as per the National Perspective Plan under both Himalayan and Peninsular components, the task force would also consider alternative plans in place of infeasible links in the present plan. The Task Force would facilitate interlinking of intra-state and intra-basin Rivers also along with that of inter-state and inter-basin links. The Task Force would recommend the time schedules for completion of feasibility studies and DPR's of all the links, implementation schedule of all the links and also suggest various means of funding mechanisms for the Interlinking of Rivers.

The Task Force would also provide guidance on norms of appraisal of individual projects in respect of economic viability, socio-economic, environmental impacts and preparation of resettlement plans. It would also devise suitable mechanisms for bringing about speedy consensus amongst the states and also propose a suitable organizational structure for implementing the Interlinking of Rivers. The

Task Force would also try to forge a consensus amongst the states in order to take forward the speedy implementation of the Interlinking of Rivers Program.

Source: Task Force on Interlinking of Rivers Constituted,
<http://pib.gov.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=0>, April 2015.

India signs MoU with France for setting up marine research institutes

India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with France for establishing an Institute for Frontier Marine Science and Technology Research. Under the MoU, India's Department of Biotechnology would join hands with the Université Pierre Et Marie Curie (UPMC) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) to set up a National Institute of Marine Biology and Biotechnology in India.

France will contribute expertise in developing high standard marine stations for collaborative research programmes, help train human resources, and facilitate setting up of efficient research infrastructure, facilities and technologies. The institute will carry out fundamental science research with a multidisciplinary approach and will help address the most important topics in marine biology and marine biotechnology.

The collaboration will help set up a high-tech hub and two major 'spokes' in mainland India. These centres will train a new generation of marine biologists and biotechnologists in the use of the best scientific methods and techniques. In parallel, India will develop its own marine stations while learning from this collaborative hub. The smaller stations will be set up in chosen locations from the Andamans to Kutch and Lakshadweep escalating the development of the country's own programmes.

Source: 'India & France sign an MoU to establish a Marine Biology Institute', Press Information Bureau, 12/04/2015.

Centre considers a proposal to make lion India's national animal



The Centre is considering a proposal to make the lion India's national animal. The honour has been held by the tiger since 1972. A proposal to this effect was sent to the Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change by industrialist and Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand, Mr Parimal Nathwani. It was subsequently passed on to the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and was taken up for discussion by the standing committee of the NBWL in March. The committee is reported to have requested the MoEF to consider wider consultations in the matter. Nathwani had made the same proposal in 2012 as well, but the matter was not pursued by the then government. In December, the MP again raised a question in parliament and the Environment Minister, Mr Prakash Javadekar, had replied there was no such proposal. The issue was, however, discussed at a committee meeting, chaired by the minister on March 14, 2015.

Wildlife experts have expressed concern that such a move would dilute the campaign to save tigers and pave the way for clearance of industrial projects near tiger sanctuaries. They have also pointed out that tigers are found across 17 states in India, whereas the lion is found in only one. Also, due to inbreeding, the single population of lions at Gir is susceptible to genetic disorders. An epidemic or a natural disaster may wipe out the entire population. A relocation project was proposed in 2004 but the Gujarat government vehemently opposes it to this day (*PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, Nos. 6, 5, 4 & 3).

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee, 'Lion as national animal? Central panel discusses idea', *The Times of India*, 18/04/15.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH & INDIA

India and Bangladesh to jointly protect forests, primates of the Patharia Hills



India and Bangladesh have decided to make joint efforts towards the protection and conservation of the rare Spectacled monkey and other primates found in the Patharia Hills Reserve Forest (PHRF) on either side of the fenced border of Assam's Karimganj district. A decision to this effect was taken at the last meeting of deputy commissioners of

Karimganj and Cachar districts along with their counterparts from Sylhet and Moulvibazar districts of Bangladesh.

The PHRF is spread across both the countries and loss of habitat poses a major threat to the wildlife present here. Spectacled monkeys have been sighted here in large numbers, though a proper survey is yet to be conducted. Several colonies of the Hoolock gibbon and some Golden langur have also been seen here.

The PHRF, spread over an area of 7647.30 hectares on the Indian side, is predominantly a natural forest on the western border of Karimganj and consists of two blocks Patheria 'A' and 'B'. In Assam, this is the only forest where the Spectacled monkey or the Phayre's leaf monkey is found while Mizoram and Tripura, where it is the state animal, are the other two states that the animal inhabits.

Source: 'India-Bangladesh join hands to protect spectacled langur', *The Times of India*, 24/04/15.

BHUTAN & INDIA

India and Bhutan plan to halt habitat loss and degradation in Manas landscape

Officials of Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) and Manas National Park (MNP) in India have agreed to a plan that seeks to halt all wildlife habitat loss and degradation in the trans-boundary Manas landscape by 2020. The Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) draft action plan has been endorsed by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and the same has been agreed to by RMNP authorities for submission to Bhutan's Forest Department. The decision was taken at a meeting of the TraMCA held in Bhutan recently that was attended by officials of RMNP, MNP, BTC and wildlife NGOs of both countries.

The meeting recommended inclusion of a habitat restoration programme as one of the components in the action plan and monitoring of the forest cover every five years with 2010 as the base year to understand the impact of the conservation initiatives. A core group has been formed to look into issues of habitat loss and to follow-up or lobby with authorities concerned to ensure that the forestland is freed from encroachment. The meeting decided on an inventory of the ongoing and planned developments in the infrastructure sector and also deliberated on the tourism scenario across both the parks.

The key issues of concern in the landscape include forest degradation, land encroachment and poaching on account of the porous border between the two countries.

Source: Roopak goswami, 'Resolve to protect Manas habitat - Officials of India, Bhutan to explore tourism potential in area', *The Telegraph*, 13/04/15.

NEPAL

Nepal rhino population increases by 21%

Nepal's rhino population has increased by 21% - from 534 animals in 2011 to 645 in the latest

census that was conducted in April-May 2015. The count that was led by the Nepal government's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Department of Forest in collaboration with the World Wide Fund, Nepal, was conducted in Chitwan National Park,

Parsa Wildlife Reserve, Bardia National Park, Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and their buffer zones in the Terai Arc Landscape.

Source: 'Nepal rhino population increases by 21 per cent', *Business Standard*, 06/05/15.

Important Bird Areas Update

NATIONAL NEWS

BNHS project for satellite tracking of Bengal florican

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is initiating a pilot project for the satellite tracking of Bengal floricans. The Uttar Pradesh Forest Department (FD) had already granted a go-ahead to the project and the same is awaited from the Assam FD. The pilot project aims to re-assess the conservation status of the bird, study its movement pattern in non-breeding season and its dispersal by using satellite telemetry. The project, funded by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, involves putting platform terminal transmitters (PTTs) on some birds of the species across its present distribution range. The PTTs will track their movement and ascertain their locations in all seasons for a comprehensive conservation strategy.

The Bengal florican is currently found only in well-protected areas such as Kaziranga, Manas and Orang in Assam, Dudhwa, Kishanpur and Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh, D'Ering Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh and Shuklaphanta, Royal Bardia and Chitwan in Nepal. Occasional birds are also spotted at Laokhowa-Burachapori, the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and river islands in Assam and some private grasslands in Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: 'NGO awaits nod on tracker', *The Telegraph*, 30/04/15

ANDHRA PRADESH

Tension between villages over fishing in Kolleru lake

The first week of May saw mild tension between villages on the Krishna-West Godavari district borders as the Forest Department (FD) authorities permitted the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Environment Development Committees (EDCs) to catch fish for three days in Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary. The permissions were given on account of the decreasing water level in the lake, which was taking a heavy toll on fish life here.

Trouble, however, began when villagers of Komati Lanka village (the other side of the lake which falls under West Godavari district) tried to catch fish in the sanctuary. Atapaka villagers said the entire 300-acre lake was located in Krishna and that the Komati Lanka villagers had no right over any part of the catch. Residents of Atapaka were seen moving with sticks to prevent 'theft' of fish from the neighbouring villages. Police and the forest guards were also seen patrolling the lake bund.

The Komati Lanka villagers have alleged that the forest authorities colluded with some village elders and there was no role of SHGs in marketing the fish. They alleged that lakhs of rupees changed hands in the process. The SHGs and EDC members caught about 100 tonne live fish from Kolleru in three days, a large portion of which was then sent to the Kolkata market.

Source: Rajulapudi Srinivas. 'Tension in Kolleru border villages', *The Hindu*, 08/05/15.

MADHYA PRADESH

Indian skimmer spotted in the Satpura NP

The Indian skimmer appears to have found a new home in the Satpura National Park. Around seven birds of the endangered species were recently spotted along with a big flock of river terns near the Pattan area of Madhai range.

The bird, now mainly seen in and around parts of National Chambal (Gharial) Wildlife Sanctuary, is on the verge of extinction due to illegal fishing and sand mining. Last year, water in the Chambal river dried considerably and the large island where the bird breeds got connected with other sandbanks causing disturbance and also increasing chances of grazing cattle or feral dogs causing harm to the nest. Additionally, locals are also known to take away the eggs of the bird.

According to data in the book – *Threatened Birds of India* – the number of Indian skimmers has come down to 203 in 2014 from 555 in 1995.

Source: 'Endangered Indian Skimmer finds new home in Satpura National Park', *The Times of India*, 03/03/15.

Diclofenac threat to vulture continues in Bundelkhand

A recent survey by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has revealed that 50% of veterinarians in the Bundelkhand Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) continue to use the banned drug diclofenac to treat cattle. The Bundelkhand VSZ was established in 2014 and covers an area of 30,000 sq. km covering parts of Chhattarpur, Tikamgarh, Ashoknagar, Vidisha, Sagar, Damoh, Panna and Satna districts.

It has also been reported that in tourist areas like Pachmari vultures have been killed by moving vehicles when the birds are feeding on a carcass. Such incidents apparently

happen on a weekly basis, particularly in winter when the tourist influx is high.

Source: Tara Chettur. 'Vulture Safe zone in state still under threat of vulture killing drug diclofenac', www.ehitavada.com, 05/04/15.

MAHARASHTRA

Forest clearance withheld for Mumbai Trans Harbour Link through the Sewri mudflats

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests has withheld clearance for the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) as it will affect the existing mangroves as well as the flamingo population here. The FAC has directed the Maharashtra government to submit a study report detailing the project's impact. It also advised the state to rope in the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) or the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, for the report. The cost of the report is to be borne by the project proponent, the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA).

The MTHL's starting point poses a threat to around 20,000-30,000 flamingos and the critical mangrove habitat. Though the Sewri mudflats have been enlisted as an 'Important Bird Area', they are already heavily polluted because of the coal storage depots, shipyards and domestic sewage nearby.

For several years, the project's alignment has been opposed by environmental groups and the BNHS had even proposed an alternative alignment 500-700 metres southwards to mitigate MTHL's ecological threat (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 1; Vol. XX, No. 2 and Vol. XVIII, Nos. 4 & 1). It was, however, shot down by MMRDA due to the cost implications.

The FAC, while considering the project earlier, had noted that neither the state's Chief Wildlife Warden nor the MMRDA had made any mention of the alternative alignment. In fact, in lieu of the project's potential impact on flamingos, the state government had planned to

notify the sea link's north end as a flamingo sanctuary. The FAC has now also asked the state government to apprise them on the declaration of the proposed 'flamingo sanctuary'.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar, 'Flamingos hit Rs 11,000-crore Trans Harbour Link; centre holds clearance', *DNA*, 12/04/15.

Conservationists seek higher compensation for coconut growers to conserve vulture nests



Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM), a NGO, has urged the state forest department (FD) to increase the amount of the compensation awarded to coconut growers in Shrivardhan taluka

of Raigad district to encourage them to preserve nests of White-backed and Long-billed vultures. The government recently approved compensation of Rs. 400 per nesting tree every

year and the NGO has suggested that the amount be increased to Rs. 1,000 per annum.

Forest officials from Roha taluka informed that at present there are 30 nests of White-backed and Long-billed vulture species at their Shrivardhan centre which was started around three years back with the aim of increasing the vulture population. The deputy Conservator of Forests said that 'vulture eco-tourism' had been initiated at the venue to further boost the drive. Around 100 vultures of the two species are presently seen here. Another vulture eco-tourism site has also been initiated at the Mhasala range along the Konkan belt.

Protection and conservation initiatives are being carried out in Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts in Konkan and constant monitoring has revealed that while the White-backed vultures are found in Shrivardhan and Chirgaon, the Long-billed vultures nest in Vihali, Nane Machi and Ranavadi.

Source: 'NGO seeks higher compensation for coconut growers to conserve vulture nests', *The Times of India*, 03/03/15. Vijay V Singh. 'Vulture culture atop coconut palms sends bird numbers soaring', *The Times of India*, 27/04/15.

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)

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If you would like to get copies please write to the editor at
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A Decade Ago

Protected Area Update 55, April 2005

CHHATTISGARH

Tiger figure rises at Indravati, raises eyebrows

Recently released tiger census figures from the Indravati Tiger Reserve indicate that the tiger population here is now 41, the highest since 1982, when Indravati was brought under the Project Tiger umbrella.

Several people including Chhattisgarh's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), RN Mishra, have raised doubts over these figures and have asked for them to be verified. It has been pointed out that conducting a census in these forests itself is difficult due to Naxalite presence and that is the reason why the count was abandoned in 2000. Yet, forest officials have been filing records and surprisingly, the tiger population 'increases' year after year.

Interestingly the CPI (Maoist), which is a combination of the PWG and MCC, has also claimed that the tiger population in the reserve has gone up. They say that the number of tigers here is 55. In a handwritten note sent to newspapers from Bijapur in Dantewara, the Naxalite leaders said that forest officials were welcome to visit the park twice a year for 'management activities. They have claimed the creation of a three-tier security ring in the park for wildlife protection – at the village, the *dalam* and the top security level, which is directly supervised by the guerrilla squad.

Source: Ashwani Sharma. 'Tiger figure rises at Indravati, raises eyebrows' *The Indian Express*, 11/04/05.

MADHYA PRADESH

No more stray dog releases into Noradehi WLS

The Municipal Corporation of Sagar, a cantonment town in central Madhya Pradesh, has decided to put an immediate stop to its practice of releasing stray dogs into the Noradehi Wildlife Sanctuary located about 40 km from the town.

The practice had been started by the corporation in response to a huge public outcry over rise in cases of dog bites owing to the flourishing stray dog population in the area. The corporation hired a contractor whose mandate was to catch the stray dogs and release them inside the Noradehi Wildlife Sanctuary. Over a period of about three months starting in December 2004, 724 dogs were caught from the town and released inside the sanctuary. The corporation duly paid Rs 33,000 to the contractor at the rate of Rs 45 a dog.

The decision to stop this practice was taken after an incident on March 20, 2005, when stray dogs killed 10 chital in the Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal. The Sagar Corporation officials now fear that the dogs released by them into the sanctuary may become the hunters, posing a threat to deer and other herbivores in the sanctuary. Significantly, the corporation had not taken the permission of the Forest Department before releasing the dogs into the sanctuary in the first place.

Source: 'Stray dogs not to be freed into sanctuary', *Deccan Herald*, 26/03/05.

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PERSPECTIVE

Tillari Must Not Die

Large carnivores intrinsically require large habitats and large populations of prey species for their survival. These habitats are fragmenting rapidly today, owing to immense demand for land in addressing human needs and development. Protected areas thus underpin conservation of many large carnivores, providing habitat and preferred prey species. In highly populated countries, such protected areas need to be connected in some way by corridors - necks which allow some permeability for large carnivore movement and dispersal and for large carnivore persistence in the future. In parts of the Sahyadris, where I work, three protected areas in Maharashtra (Koyna WLS, Chandoli NP, and Radhanagari WLS) are connected by Reserved forest, privately-owned forest, and in large parts horticultural plantations (such as cashew) interspersed among these forests. One important region in this corridor is the area around Tillari dam, which is the southernmost region bordering Karnataka and Goa, connecting habitats in these states to those in Maharashtra.

Camera-trapping by the Maharashtra Forest Department has revealed that the area is used by elephants, tigers, leopards, dholes, sambar, and gaur among other mammals. A number of bird species such as the Great hornbill, Malabar pied hornbill, Malayan night-heron, Malabar Trogon, Stork-billed kingfisher, Osprey, and the White-bellied sea eagle are also recurrently seen in the forest and around the dam. Both the areas around the Upper Tillari dam, which is located in Kolhapur district and the lower Tillari dam, in Sindhudurg district are sited in dense forest areas, the value of which for biodiversity cannot be overstated.

The construction of these dams and the hydro-power plant has created a number of linear intrusions in the area, such as canals, roads, and power lines. But now larger threats

loom. There is a proposal to construct an additional three dams in the area to provide more water to the hydro-power plant. These new dams will cause a massive loss of forest, with an estimated three lakh trees being cut in their submergence zones. In nearby Mogalgad, which is a lateritic plateau, there is a long-standing proposal for a bauxite mine, which has got an environmental clearance. Other plateau areas and adjoining forests near the ridge-line have been earmarked for a wind farm, with a large network of new access roads demarcated. Lower down in Sindhudurg, monocultures of rubber plantations have already overtaken large areas of privately-owned forests, with hundreds of acres clear-felled. In my view, if all these projects transpire, then Maharashtra should give up any hope of saving tigers in the Sahyadris. The only way forward to save Tillari from further damage is declaring it as protected, through support from the local populace. I do hope better sense will prevail.

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