

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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Vol. XXI, No. 4, August 2015 (No. 116)

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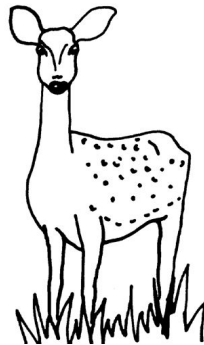
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## EDITORIAL

### A rich and diverse menu

A complaint is often heard that conservation in India and, as an extension, conservation related journalism is fixated on the big and the charismatic, on the big events and the big controversies. Conservation related reporting is disproportionately focused on the tiger and other large animals like the elephant, the rhino and the lion and it is similar where protected areas themselves are concerned. Even a quick analysis of reporting in the *PA Update* over the years, reveals that there are certain high profile PAs that are (almost) always in the news. At the same time there is a larger proportion of PAs in the country that barely ever find a mention, if they find one at all.

While the complaints and the concerns are justified to a great extent, this might not be the entire truth. Or there is evidence, at least, that some of this is changing. With conservation science growing and spreading into diverse areas of research, the media also seems to be taking the cue. Reporting is growing wider, be it related to species, to research work or to geographical areas and reports in this issue of the *PA Update* might be seen providing an illustrative example: declaration of a part of the Tungabhadra river as an otter conservation reserve, declaration of Maharashtra's state butterfly, a report on Honey badgers in the Cauvery WLS and issues in the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary.

There is the underlying theme, of course, of the diversity of the conservation landscape in the country itself – both in the challenges that we face but also in the opportunities that are constantly offered to us. We have pilgrims demanding to enter PAs to visit temples and we have those resettled from PAs entering again, attacking and burning down forest property because they feel they have not been compensated appropriately. We continue to get the distressing news of the government

relentlessly giving away natural resources and wilderness in the name of development just as we have the 'happy' news from the Chambal of a successful new generation of gharials entering the waters of the river. New technologies are being adopted for research, surveillance and protection, which while welcome seems unaware, sometimes, of the ethical and larger implications (see Perspective, page 24). New PAs are sought to be declared at the same time that existing ones are opened up for tourism and other commercial extraction.

It really is a rich and diverse menu and one that is in alignment with the richness of the land, its people and its biological diversity. The challenge is for us to make meaning and find a path through all of this towards a future that is just, equitable and sustainable. It is not easy, but we have no choice in the matter, either.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ANDAMAN & NICOBAR

#### Wildlife training for foresters and police

A two-day capacity building and training programme on wildlife intelligence for forest and police officers of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was organised jointly by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and the Department of Environment and Forests. The programme was primarily meant for field functionaries involved in prevention, detection and prosecution related to wildlife crimes. 35 officers at the level of sub inspectors, SHOs, forest range officers and assistant conservators of forest participated.

WCCB officials gave an overview about the bureau and its activities. Issues related to investigation of wildlife cases, prevention and detection of wildlife crime, registration of FIR/PoR and case documentation, collection, preservation of samples and exhibits, intelligence collection and analysis, prosecution of wildlife cases: its problems and solutions, law

related to wildlife crime, and identification of wildlife parts and products were covered during the programme.

Source: 'Forest and Police Officers Trained on Wildlife law, Intelligence and Investigation', *Andaman Chronicle*, 19/06/15.

### **Six more Andaman islands to be opened up for tourism; five part of the PA network**



The Department of Environment and Forests (DEF) has identified six more islands in the Andamans to be opened up for tourism. These are the Inglis, Sir Hugh Rose, North Button, Middle Button, Tarmugli and Aves Islands. All these islands except Aves are protected areas by themselves or as in the case of Tarmugli part of the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park.

The Lt. Governor, of the islands had made an announcement in January, earlier this year that the DEF will try to identify some islands where tourism activities may be taken up so as to boost the economic development of region and also to find employment for its youth. The six sites were accordingly identified in a meeting held in June.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) has been asked to submit a concept note for tourism development in these islands.

Source: '6 Islands to Be Opened for Eco-tourism Activities in Andamans, Andaman Chronicle, 04/06/15.

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### **Inglis, Sir Hugh Rose, North Button, Middle Button, Tarmugli, Aves – islands in Andamans to be opened up for tourism**

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#### **ASSAM**

### **Rhino killed near Orang NP, third this year**

The body of a bullet-riddled rhino with its horns removed was found by forest guards in Sonitpur district of Assam in the last week of June. This is the third rhino to be poached in Orang this year. The carcass of the adult male rhino was found by patrolling forest guards at Nichalamari area under Dhekiajuli police station. The rhino had come out from the park and was suspected to have been killed by poachers near a paddy field fully covered with water.

Source: Rhino killed by poachers near Orang National Park', *The Eastern Today*, 23/06/15.

### **Eight rhino horns recovered from poachers this year**

Sustained operations against rhino poachers in Assam have started yielding results with recovery of eight rhino horns so far this year, the highest in the past decade. The rhino horns were recovered from Nagaon, Gohpur, Sootea, Bokakhat, Pulibor, Numaligarh and Dhekiajuli areas. In 2014, four rhino horns were seized while five were seized in 2013. The number of poachers arrested has also gone up this year. In the first five months of the 2015, 79 poachers have been apprehended compared to 44 arrested in 2014 and 65 in 2013. The number of poachers killed by security forces so far this year stands at 14.

There had been an alarming rise in rhino-poaching incidents in the state with 27 rhinos killed each in 2013 and 2014. According to an official, this year, too, the poachers were preparing to strike by setting up a camp in the hills of Karbi Anglong near Kaziranga National Park, but the security forces busted the camp on

May 18 and arrested three persons, including two from Dimapur. Ammunition of AK-series rifles, .303 rifles, camouflage uniforms, searchlights and solar lights were recovered from the camp.

Operations against rhino poaching are being supervised by a task force constituted by the state government last year. It is currently headed by additional director-general of police (special task force), AP Raut.

Source: Pankaj Sarma. 'Rise in rhino-horn seizures', *The Telegraph*, 08/06/15.

### **Biometric survey of people living in Kaziranga NP**

The Gauhati High Court has ordered collection of biometric data of people living in and around the Kaziranga National Park (KNP). The court has asked a high-powered committee constituted by it to count the number of residences in the park area, including all six additions to the KNP, and to take biometrics of the people residing there. Biometric data to be collected could be fingerprints and iris images. The court had asked the committee to submit its report by June 26. Civil rights activist Bhaskar Dev Konwar, who is one of the petitioners in this case, has said the exercise will prevent any further illegal encroachment of the park area.

The KNP authorities have said to the court that expansion of the park's area needs serious consideration because the number of rhinos in the park has increased substantially. Six additions from the adjoining areas were made to Kaziranga under an expansion plan. However, some portions of these areas are yet to be brought under the jurisdiction of the park administration because of stiff opposition by the people living in these areas as well as legal hurdles (also see following story).

Source: 'HC orders biometric survey in Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 03/06/15.

### **KMSS halts eviction drive at Kaziranga NP**

The Krishak Mukti Sangram Samity (KMSS) has claimed there are no illegal migrants in the second, third and fifth additions of the Kaziranga National Park (KNP). It has been claimed that these people have been living here for a long time and that some of them are *myadi patta* holders, while some others have either *eksoniya patta* or government land allotment certificates.

The Gauhati High Court constituted high-powered committee comprising officials from the central and state government, had recently conducted a survey of the KNP. During the day-long survey, the committee detected several tracts in the additions that they said were encroachments. Similar encroachments were also found in the animal corridors at Bandardubi and Deusar areas. Following this, the committee had directed local authorities to clear them within one month. Accordingly, sub-divisional authorities of Biswanath and Bokakhat launched simultaneous drives to clear the encroachments in the additional areas of the KNP, but had to suspend it half-way in the wake of protests led by the KMSS.

Claiming that the committee has prepared a "very slack" report, the KMSS said that the Bokakhat circle officer has assured to conduct a survey of the settlers before embarking on an eviction drive. Also, government officials held a meeting with the protestors and agreed that discussions will be held with settlers before carrying out further eviction.

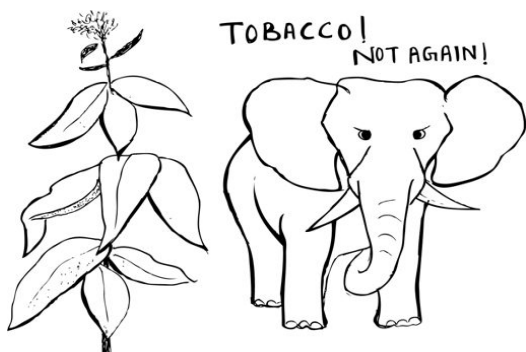
The National Green Tribunal too has issued notices to commercial encroachers in KNP asking why they should not be made to pay compensation for damaging the environment.

Source: 'Settlers halt Kaziranga eviction', *The Sentinel*, 01/06/15.



## CHHATTISGARH

### State may try cultivation of turmeric and tobacco to curb human-elephant conflict



Chhattisgarh is considering promotion of crops like turmeric and tobacco to deal with the problem of human-elephant conflict in the northern part of the state. For the last several years, the conflict has been severe in many districts of North Chhattisgarh, including in Sarguja, Jashpur and Korba – causing damage to life and property.

### Conflict is most severe in districts of North Chhattisgarh

Alternative cropping is being suggested instead of crops like sugarcane and mahua as they are attractive to elephants and result in them visiting areas of human habitation. The suggestion was made by the state chief wildlife warden during a national workshop to reduce elephant-human conflict that was held at Sarguja recently. Wildlife experts and officials from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra attended the two-day workshop.

Source: Joseph John. 'Can turmeric, tobacco crops keep wild elephants aloof?' *The Times of India*, 08/06/15.

## GUJARAT

### Farmhouses, guesthouses on Gir periphery given permission as homestay establishments

The Gujarat State Tourism Department has given permission to 55 farmhouses and

guesthouses on the periphery of Gir for use as homestay establishments. It is not clear, however, if the permission is legal as the Gujarat High Court (HC) had recently declared many of these farmhouses illegal because they were being used as hotels. It has been pointed out that these farmhouses don't qualify for approval under the homestay policy because the owners of the farmhouses don't stay on the premises.

52 of these properties are in Sasan while three are in Junagadh district. Of the farmhouses in Sasan given approval under homestay policy, a majority is at Bhojde, about five km from Sasan. The villages here have been constantly under the scanner of the forest department (FD) for illegal shows. Moreover, the department has caught people here quite frequently moving in suspicious circumstances.

In May, earlier this year, the HC had also asked the forest department to prepare an eco-tourism policy and submit the same in court. The forest department had identified 128 such 'encroachers' who had been running hospitality units in the buffer zone around the sanctuary across three districts - Junagadh, Amreli and Gir-Somnath. Of them, the authorities first targeted farmhouses and 72 such places were sealed. Out these 72, the owners of 50 farmhouses had moved the high court and complained that sealing had taken place indiscriminately. Their appeal had, however, been turned down.

They are now reopening under the homestay policy though they have been given permission for this without the knowledge of the forest department.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Gir hotels back as homestay units', *The Times of India*, 17/06/15.

## MoEFCC to oppose relocation of lions to MP

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is reported to be filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court citing difficulties in relocating lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh. A few experts were

said to have expressed their concern over the relocation during a recent meeting of the MoEFCC, chaired by Union environment minister, Mr Prakash Javadekar. They argued that the population lions in Gujarat had stabilized after a lot of hard work and their relocation would destabilize it. A decision to file the affidavit was taken subsequent to the meeting.

The need for relocating the big cats from Gir has been highlighted on account of the fear that an epidemic or natural calamity could wipe out the species if it is concentrated in a single forest. In April 2013, the Supreme Court too had ordered the shifting of some of Gujarat's lions to the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, but not a single animal has been moved so far. (Also see PA Updates Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, Nos. 6, 5, 4 & 3).

Source: Mayank Aggarwal. 'Gir lions' relocation to Madhya Pradesh faces hurdle' *Mint*, 18/06/15.

## HIMACHAL PRADESH

### 306 cases of leopard attacks in Himachal Pradesh in a decade

Himachal Pradesh has recorded 306 cases of leopard attacks on humans during last 10 years. 219 cases of these were reported in the last seven years in a few pockets of Shimla, Mandi and Hamirpur districts of the state. Wildlife officials claim, however, that there has been decline in leopard attacks on humans. A survey conducted about a decade ago had counted around 700 Leopards in the state.

A study on human-animal conflict in Himachal Pradesh found that most of the times the attacks on human beings by leopards lead to grievous injury or permanent disability or death of the person. People have become used to attacks on livestock, but the attack on human population is the main reason for conflict with this animal. The incidences of leopard attack are common in the districts of Hamirpur, Una, Ballarpur, Mandi, Kangra, Sirmaur, Solan,

Shimla, Chamba and Kullu. A strong resentment against the animal is reported to have developed in the people on account of these incidents.

While addressing a workshop on 'Living with Leopards: Himachal Pradesh' held in Shimla, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh said that there was a need to create awareness amongst the people and sensitize them about the habit, movement and activities of the leopards so that humans could develop an approach to live with them harmoniously.

Source: Anand Bodh. 'Himachal witnessed 306 leopard attacks on human in last decade', *The Times of India*, 11/06/15.

## KARNATAKA

### Study records 41 Honey badgers in Cauvery WLS

Scientists have, for the first time, got photographic evidence of the occurrence and distribution of Honey Badgers (*Mellivora capensis*; also called ratels) in an extensive study across Karnataka. The research conducted by wildlife conservationist Sanjay Gubbi and four others – V Reddy, Deputy Conservator of Forests of Cauvery wildlife sanctuary, H Nagashettihalli, R Bhat and M D Madhusudan – recorded 41 camera trap records from the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), encompassing forests surrounding the Male Mahadeshwara hills. The study was carried out between January and March this year.

Before this, the only two sightings of the animal in the wild were reported from Karnataka – in 1986, after the animal was caught from Srinivasapura in Kolar district, and an earlier sighting in the 1960s. An animal was also rescued from a well in Sathanur of the then Bangalore Rural district decades later.

### Honey badgers found in different forest types of the Cauvery WLS

The current study has shown the existence of the animal in the sanctuary's different forest types, from scrub to riverine to deciduous forests (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 2).

Source: 'Honey Badger thrives in K'taka forests, finds study', *The Times of India*, 01/06/15.

### **Otter Conservation Reserve declared in Ballari district**



The Karnataka Department of Forest, Environment and Ecology has recently notified a 34 km stretch of the Tungabhadra riverbed as an 'Otter Conservation Reserve'. The only reserve of its kind, it stretches from Mudlapura village near the dam in Koppal taluk till the bridge over the river in Kampli of Hosapete taluk in Ballari district. The decision to declare this area a reserve had been taken a year ago, during a meeting of the State Board for Wildlife of Karnataka held on July 15, 2014.

### **From Mudlapura in Koppal taluk till the bridge over the river in Kampli of Hosapete taluk in Ballari district**

The area is home to a healthy population of Eurasian and Smooth-coated otters. The notification points out that otters are threatened due to several factors such as poaching, water poisoning, sand mining and discharge of untreated effluents. Villagers on both sides of the river cultivate sugar cane, banana, paddy, groundnut and maize. This increasing presence of humans is also a threat. (Also see Edit, *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 5)

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'A safe haven for otters in TB river bed', *Deccan Herald*, 23/06/15.

### **Karnataka notifies Dandeli Elephant Reserve**

Following a nod from the centre, the Karnataka government has notified the Dandeli Elephant Reserve that spreads across Uttara Kannada, Belagavi, Haveri and Dharwad and covers an area of 2,321 sq km. This includes the core area of 475 sq km and a buffer zone of 1,846 sq km.

The Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (wildlife) said that as the notified area already comes under the reserved forest category there will be no rehabilitation challenges. Measures will be put in place, however to mitigate human-elephant conflict here.

The Anshi-Dandeli forests in Uttara Kannada and neighbouring districts are home to 60-odd elephants.

Source: Rohith B R. 'State gets new elephant reserve', *The Times of India*, 10/06/15.

### **KERALA**

#### **Agasthyamala BR may become a part of World Network of Biosphere Reserves**

The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve (ABR) may be included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves by the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the UNESCO if legal protection is ensured for the northern part of the site. The ABR is currently listed in the category of "nominations recommended for approval, pending the submission of specific information."

There are 18 biosphere reserves in the country, only nine of which, including the Nilgiris, Nanda Devi, Nokrek, Gulf of Mannar, Sundarban, and Great Nicobar, have been included in the world network. Globally, 621 biosphere reserves from 117 countries are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Source: K.S. Sudhi. 'Agasthyamala likely to be part of World biosphere reserves', *The Hindu*, 04/06/15.



## MADHYA PRADESH

### **Four sanctuaries may be added to Panna TR for forest lost to the Ken-Betwa river link**

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is reported to have suggested that four wildlife sanctuaries (WLS) – two each from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh – should be brought under the ambit of Panna Tiger Reserve in lieu of the area that will be submerged by the Ken-Betwa river linking project.

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### **Nauradehi and Rani Durgawati WLSs in MP; Ranipur and Mahavir Swami WLSs in UP to be added to the Panna Tiger Reserve**

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The Ken-Betwa link project envisages diversion of surplus waters of Ken basin to the water deficit Betwa basin and will result in the submergence of almost 10 per cent (nearly 5426 hectares) of the area of the TR. The four sanctuaries proposed for the inclusion in Panna are the Nauradehi and Rani Durgawati WLSs in Madhya Pradesh, and the Ranipur and Mahavir Swami WLSs in Uttar Pradesh. The Madhya Pradesh government has reportedly agreed to the proposal, but the concurrence of the Uttar Pradesh government is still awaited.

The ambitious river link project is to get last stage environment, forest and wildlife clearances and is likely to face an uphill task in obtaining them given the vast area of Panna TR that will be adversely affected. The project's impact on the reserve had even prompted the ex-field director R. Sreenivasa Murthy to write to the state government against it and he was subsequently transferred (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 3 & 1).

The Ken-Betwa project involves transferring 591 million cubic metres of surplus water in the Ken basin through a 231.45 km canal to the Betwa river. Land needed for this project is an estimated 6,000 hectares and the cost of resettlement Rs. 333 crore.

The project will involve construction of a dam near Daudhan village in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. This dam will allow

diversion of 1,074 million cubic meters of surplus water to Betwa river basin annually, providing for irrigation and for generation 60MW of energy, besides drinking water for villages and towns.

Source: 'Four sanctuaries may be added to Panna to mitigate Ken-Betwa impact', *DNA*, 15/06/15.

### **Approval to broad conversion of Kanha-Pench rail link**

The Central Government is reported to have given its approval for a railway link connecting the Pench and Kanha Tiger Reserves, raising concerns over the impact this will have on forests and on the wildlife here.

The proposal, which has been turned down twice in the past, was approved by the forest advisory committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in December last year. The project aims to convert the existing narrow gauge rail line to broad, leading to an increase in railway traffic. Fears that the project will disturb and damage the corridor had led to the plan being rejected in 2010 and 2013.

In 2010, the Madhya Pradesh government had sought the diversion of around 76 hectares (ha) of forestland in Balaghat district for south-east central railway for gauge conversion in the Gondia-Jabalpur stretch. When the project first came to MoEF, the FAC set up a panel including the National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) then director, Dr Rajesh Gopal, as the forestland that was required to be diverted was an important wildlife habitat and located in the Kanha-Pench corridor. The panel in its report noted that the project cuts across intervening parts of forests located within the Kanha-Pench corridor. It said the corridor in itself is fragmented and that the rail line will further compound the problem.

In August 2013, FAC rejected the proposal for a second time, for the same reasons. The report said the project will result in an increase in train traffic and that there have

been numerous rail accidents, killing wild animals like tigers and elephants.

The project came up before FAC yet again for reconsideration in December 2014 and the FAC again sought the NTCA's help, which carried out a joint inspection with railway authorities. In their note on the inspection, NTCA said the project cuts across the vital corridor and that the corridor is "essential for the long-term survival of the tiger as it permits gene flow in a meta- population framework in central Indian landscape". It was also noted that the corridor was already disturbed due to NH7 (national highway 7) and other state highways (*PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 6; Vol. XVIII, No. 3 and Vol. XV, Nos. 4 & 1).

This time, however, the FAC, after noting concerns regarding the corridor, recommended forest clearance for the proposal but laid down several precautionary measures like restriction of speed limit in sensitive sections, a cap on train density during hours of peak animal activity, round-the-clock electronic surveillance and removal of waste along railway tracks.

Source: Mayank Aggarwal. 'Nod to Kanha-Pench rail project draws flak from wildlife experts', *Mint*, 27/01/15.

## MAHARASHTRA

### **Tadoba Andhari TR to get high-tech surveillance system**

The Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve would soon have a high-tech surveillance system. Aerially-mounted 360-degree view cameras would be installed to provide 24x7 inputs on movements of animals and villagers, forest staff, guards and poachers. Thermal cameras would be mounted on an elevated platform or masts and the mount would also have solar panels to keep the cameras running. The feeds would reach a control room, which would have multiple-screens to have real-time view.

State Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar said that this is being done on a

pilot basis and the experiment, if successful, would be replicated elsewhere in the state.

Source: Mrityunjay Bose, 'Tadoba tiger reserve to have hi-tech surveillance', *Deccan Herald*, 14/06/15.

### **48 tigers outside protected areas in Chandrapur district**

As many as 48 tigers have been found inhabiting forests outside protected areas in the Chandrapur district in Maharashtra. The estimation was done jointly by the Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) and the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD), in forests situated outside PAs in the Chandrapur, Bhandara, Wardha, Nagpur, Gondia and Yawatmal districts of Maharashtra. The first phase, which covered 2,000 sq km of tiger habitat outside PAs in Chandrapur district, was conducted under the WCT-USAID Tiger Programme, in collaboration with the FD and the NGO, Panthera.

As many as 600 camera traps were deployed simultaneously across forested areas in Chandrapur. The forests of Chandrapur were divided into several blocks for logistical convenience. Every block was further divided into 3 sq. km. grids and one camera trap pair was installed in each block for 25 days, fulfilling the guidelines mandated by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The technique of DNA identification through scat collection was also used to identify the movement of tigers. The exercise involved data collection of over 18,000+ camera trap nights, through which the WCT's research team was able to identify 48 adult tigers, including 15 breeding females.

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### **Total number of tigers in Chandrapur district – 120; 60 in the core of TATR, 12 in the buffer**

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As per the survey, the total number of big cats in the district stands at 120, including 60 in core area and 12 in buffer area of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. A particularly interesting aspect of the study was that tiger density in some

reserve forest blocks was found to be higher than that of some tiger reserves. For instance, tiger density in the Kanhalgaon (a proposed wildlife sanctuary)-Central Chanda block - is 2.34, which is more than that of the Melghat Tiger Reserve. In the Junona-Central Chanda block, tiger density stood at 1.77, higher than that of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.

Source: '48 tigers in non-protected Chandrapur forest areas: survey', *The Hindu*, 26/05/15;  
Anish Andheria, 'Tigers Outside Protected Areas In Chandrapur', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com)

### **The Blue Mormon is Maharashtra's 'State butterfly'**

The Blue Mormon *Papilio polymnestor* has been declared the state butterfly of Maharashtra. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the State Wildlife Board, making Maharashtra the first state to have a state butterfly.

The Blue Mormon is a large, swallowtail butterfly found primarily in Sri Lanka and India, the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, South India and coastal belts. It may occasionally also be spotted in the Maharashtrian mainland between Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra.

Source: Omar Rashid. 'Maharashtra gets 'State butterfly' *The Hindu*, 23/06/15.

### **State wildlife board meets sans experts, clears 11 projects**

The Maharashtra State Wildlife Board (SWB), in its meeting in June, cleared 11 projects that fall within the 10 km eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of a number of protected areas. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of chief minister (CM), Mr Devendra Fadnavis and was its first meeting under the new BJP-Shiv Sena government in the state. The last meeting of the SWB had been held in February 2014 when the state was being ruled by the Congress CM, Mr Prithviraj Chavan. The new board meeting was

held sans the mandatory number of eight experts. The government has appointed only two experts on the board and the meeting agenda too was given out only at the last minute.

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### **Mansinghdeo Nandur-Madhmeshwar, Koka, Dnyanganga Painganga WLSs to be impacted**

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The projects cleared by the board include, among others, the Karajkheda project in Bhandara that will irrigate 5,000 hectares (ha) of cultivable land between 22 villages. Of the 36.088 ha forest land, 32.278 ha have already been transferred to irrigation department. The balance 3.81 ha in compartment number 162 was not transferred as the area was declared as the Koka Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in 2013. The state chief wildlife warden (CWLW) has recommended the project suggesting four overpasses to keep wildlife connected. Also cleared was the Kanhan (Kochhi barrage) in Saoner for the purpose of irrigating 3,960 ha of agricultural land and also supplying water for drinking and to the Koradi thermal power plant. The proposed site is within 10km from the boundary of the Mansinghdeo WLS.

The board also approved deletion of the Nanded district area of Painganga WLS that is currently spread over an area of 324.62 sq km in Yavatmal and Nanded districts. Out of total area notified, 21.19 sq km reserved forest area along with non-forest land of 21 villages belonging to Kinwat taluka in Nanded is situated on the other bank of Painganga river, which is the boundary of these two districts. The area falling within Nanded is thickly populated and the board has cleared it for deletion from the sanctuary. The Nandur-Madhmeshwar WLS in Nashik too is being reduced from 19.63 sq km to 17.58 sq km though the irrigation department has argued that only 9.71 sq km of its land should be included in the sanctuary.

Another irrigation project approved is the Lower Dnyanganga in Buldhana district. The project is to be implemented on 301 ha private land of Nimkawda, Kalegaon, Rohana, Warna and Diothana villages of Khamgaon. The

dam site is nearly 7 km from the boundaries of Dnyanganga WLS. The CWLW recommended this proposal on the condition that the project proponent will provide 2% of the project cost to the Melghat Tiger Foundation, Amravati.

The board is reported to have rejected the simplification of the proposal for hunting wild boars and nilgais damaging crops.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Wildlife board meets sans experts, clears 11 projects', *The Times of India*, 23/06/15.

### **Pench tigress re-captured**

The tigress TF2, who was radio-collared and released in the wild on May 17, had to be re-captured after she came close to Khapa village in Pench. Her stay in the wild lasted for only 24 days. The decision to re-capture her followed threats from villagers that they would attack her after she was spotted 50 metres from their cluster. The monitoring team tried to drive away the animal by bursting crackers but was unsuccessful.

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### **The emaciated tigress was unable to hunt on her own**

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Unable to hunt on her own on being released into the wild, the tigress had been offered a goat on May 21, which she killed and consumed. Wildlife officials felt, however, that more time should be given to her to develop her hunting skills, and continued rigorous monitoring.

According to the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (APCCF) for wildlife, looking at the rapid movement of the tigress, it seemed it was being chased or not being allowed to settle by other tigers. She lost 17 kg from the time of her release and was down to 80 kg by the time she was captured. She had turned anaemic too and an injury was also found on one of her front legs.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. '24 days after release, TF2 tigress back in cage', *The Times of India*, 10/06/15.

### **Relocated villagers return to Navegaon NP and set forest afire**

Over 300 villagers shifted from the Navegaon National Park in Gondia district, stormed back into the park and set fire to the meadows that had come up on their abandoned agriculture fields. The villagers were demanding payment of their balance compensation money.

Gondia deputy conservator of forests (DCF) said that 357 families of Kawlewada, Zankargondi and Kalimati villages were relocated to Shree Rampur near Saundad in 2013 under the option of package of Rs. 10 lakh per adult. Under the package, money towards individual's assets is paid first and while the rest is distributed equally among the project affected persons. Accordingly, each adult received around Rs. 7.16 lakh. As per rules there is no provision of land to be given under this option. According to this official, the relocated families are now making additional demands that include payment of the balance amount of around Rs. 2.50 lakh, agricultural land and a government job. The villagers plan to take up agriculture activity on the land that they had vacated.

This is the second time since February 2014 that the villagers have entered the park for their demands. They had stayed inside for 20 days last time, had destroyed forest department property and had also beaten up forest officials and field staff that had gone to persuade them to move out as it was illegal for them to continue inside the national park.

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### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> time since 2014 that the relocated villagers have entered the park for their demands**

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Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Relocated villagers storm Navegaon park, set forest afire', *The Times of India*, 13/06/15.

### **Zoo, night safari to come up in Nagpur**

A zoo, a night safari, a rehabilitation centre for wild animals with facilities for veterinary intervention, and a 'human development trail' that will explain human evolution are some of

the facilities that are being planned at the proposed international zoo at Gorewada in Nagpur. The zoo, which will come up on 1,914 hectares of land, was first proposed in 2005. The project, which will be developed on public-private partnership basis, was handed over to the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) in 2011.

FDCM authorities have informed that the project, which has an estimated cost of Rs. 451 crore, will be developed in six years' time, and that approvals from the Central Zoo Authority have already been received. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the Maharashtra Animal and Fishery Sciences University, Nagpur, to take care of the wild animals housed there.

According to officials, quality tourist attractions like a butterfly park, African safari, bird park and a bio park will be set up, apart from a rail tour and a wildlife museum. Walking tracks and tribal village trails will also be created to enhance tourist experience.

Source: 'India's first night safari coming up at Nagpur', [www.nagpurtoday.in](http://www.nagpurtoday.in), 04/06/15.

## **RAJASTHAN**

### **Stress impeding breeding in Sariska tigers: Study**

Chronic stress, potentially triggered by encounters with humans and related human activities, appears to be preventing tigers reintroduced in the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) from reproducing adequately. Scientists at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and the University of Pretoria, South Africa have documented high levels of glucocorticosteroid residues in faecal samples of Sariska tigers that, they say, could explain their low breeding success since their reintroduction in 2008 (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 3; Vol. XVIII, No. 5 and Vol. XVII, No. 5).

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### **Study asks for relocation of villagers, moving water holes away from tarmac roads and curbing of traffic**

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The study, just published in the scientific journal PLOS One, is the first from India to examine how the presence of humans, villages and vehicular traffic can affect the physiology of tigers and even interfere with their attempts to breed. The study involved examining faecal samples of the Sariska tigers and using radio collars to track tiger movements across the reserve for two years.

STR is inhabited by about 100,000 people and their estimated 190,000 livestock scattered across 32 villages located across the reserve. With the tigers going extinct here, the Rajasthan forest department, supported by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the WII, reintroduced tigers here from the Ranthambhore tiger reserve in 2008. Sariska received nine tigers between 2008 and 2011, and has only managed to increase its population size to 13 tigers. The story of Panna, the other reserve where tigers were also re-introduced is completely different. Panna, which began with three introduced animals - one male and two females - and received three more females later, has increased its tiger population to over 35. The researchers observed that that tigers in Sariska are exposed to more humans, more traffic, more roads and more livestock than tigers in Panna.

The WII-CCMB scientists have recommended that eight villages within the core area should be relocated, water holes used by the tigers should be moved away from tarmac roads, and the flow of vehicular traffic be curbed within the reserve. The relocation of the eight villages is expected to make about 300 sq km of area available for tiger breeding

Source: 'Human encounters tell on tiger count' *The Telegraph*, 18/06/15.

## Committee to look into man-animal conflict in Ranthambhore TR



The Rajasthan government has formed a four-member committee to look into the human-animal conflict in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (RTR).

Rajya Sabha MP, VP Singh Badnore will head the committee that will include conservationists Valmik Thapar and Rajpal Singh Shekhawat as members. The Chief Wildlife Warden of the state has been appointed as a coordinator. The committee will give its report to the state government in two months, following which the government may form a policy to deal with relocation of tigers and other related issues. The move comes in the wake of the incident in Ranthambhore involving tiger T-24, who was moved to a zoo in Udaipur after he allegedly attacked a security guard and mauled him to death inside the park (see edit, *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3).

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### Members of the committee - Rajya Sabha MP, VP Singh Badnore, conservationists Valmik Thapar, Rajpal Singh Shekhawat

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The committee will study all recent cases of tigers attacking humans in RTR. It will also suggest ways to monitor behavior of wild animals on a regular basis and how the guards who patrol the reserve can be better equipped to protect themselves from wild animal attacks. The committee will also study the current policy of compensation to villagers in cases of human-animal conflicts, and recommend if there should be any changes in the policy.

Source: 'Panel to look into man-animal conflicts in Ranthambhore', *The Times of India*, 30/05/15.

## Wildlife activists oppose road widening in the core area of Sariska TR

Wildlife activists have criticized the Rajasthan government's decision of widening the road that passes through the core area of the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR). Experts including the honorary wildlife warden have pointed out that the government cannot take the decision to widen the road without consulting the state wildlife board and the National Tiger Conservation Authority as it would be a violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Observers say if broadened to four lanes, the highway will bisect the territory of at least two tigers that frequently cross the road. STR currently has 13 tigers, including two full-grown males, seven females and four cubs.

STR field director, Mr. RS Shekhawat has written a letter to the superintending engineer of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) against the proposal, asking him to get permission from the Supreme Court and the National Wildlife Board before beginning construction. He has also asked the NHAI to plan flyovers as corridors for the movement of wildlife. He has stressed on the need for a scientific study to assess the impact of the project and called for suggestions and measures to reduce negative impacts.

The existing highway also passes through the historical and ecological site Talvraksh, which has rare trees.

Source: Devendra Bhardwaj. 'Proposed four-lane Sariska highway to invade tiger territory', *Hindustan Times*, 03/06/2015  
'Where do the tigers go? Proposed highway through Sariska encroaches through tiger territory', [www.firstpost.com](http://www.firstpost.com), 03/06/15.

## TAMIL NADU

### Pilgrims allowed inside Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary after protests

Around 500 pilgrims staged a demonstration at the base of the Sathuragiri hills after authorities

prevented them from entering the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary to reach the Sundaramahalingam temple. Access to the forest had been restricted by the Virudhunagar and Madurai district authorities after flash floods killed eight pilgrims on May 17. Of the eight killed, one body remains untraced while another body could not be identified.

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### **Six pilgrims, had died inside the the sanctuary in flash floods on May 17**

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Following the tragedy, the district administrators had decided that pilgrims would be allowed to visit the temple only on six days in a month – three days during the full moon and three days during the new moon.

However, around 500 devotees assembled at the entrance point of the forest and staged a demonstration. Forest staff posted at the check post prevented the pilgrims from entering and alerted the Watrap police. Police rushed to the spot and started controlling the crowd. However, the authorities finally buckled under pressure and had to allow the devotees inside.

Source: J Arockiaraj, ‘Protesting pilgrims enter forest temple’, *The Times of India*, 15/06/15.

### **113 butterfly species found in Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary**

113 butterfly species were found in the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary during a two-day butterfly survey carried out by the Tamil Nadu Butterfly Society. Thirteen volunteers of the organisation participated in the survey, led by butterfly experts Pavendan Appavu and Mohan Prasad from Coimbatore and Manoj Sethumathavan from Coonoor. Wildlife officials supported the survey team with necessary logistics and guidance.

The wildlife warden of the sanctuary said the survey would be helpful to the forest department (FD) while preparing management plans. An earlier survey carried out by the FD a few years ago had recorded 56 butterfly species here.

Source: J Arockiaraj, ‘113 butterfly species found in sanctuary’, *The Times of India*, 16/06/15.

## **UTTAR PRADESH**

### **Over 2000 gharial hatchlings at Chambal nesting site this season**

Over 2000 gharial hatchlings have emerged at nesting sites on the banks of Chambal in Etawah, marking the end of the nesting season of the animal. Nearly 1000 hatchlings were spotted emerging from 20 nests in the Bah range of the National Chambal Sanctuary. Similarly, around 600 hatchlings were spotted in 12 nests at Kheda Ajab Singh and 400 in eight nests in Kasauwa area along the banks of river in the sanctuary. The hatchlings were noticed in the first week of June in the sand beds and forest officials have said that it is the first time that such a large number of hatchlings have been recorded.

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### **20 nests in the Bah range, 12 nests at Kheda Ajab Singh and eight nests in the Kasauwa area**

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The mating season starts from November and goes on through December and well into January. The nesting and laying of eggs takes place in March, April and May. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 2)

Source: Faiz Rahman Siddiqui. ‘Over 2,000 gharial hatchlings spotted in Chambal’, *The Times of India*, 13/06/15.

### **Pesticides kill five tigers in UP**

Five tigers found dead in different parts of Pilibhit and Lakhimpur Kheri forests of Uttar Pradesh between May 2012 and April 2015 are believed to have fallen prey to the pesticides. Organochlorene pesticides, especially DDT, were found in the viscera of all the five tigers, according to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute.

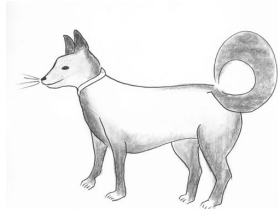
There is still no clarity, however, on how the pesticides reached the tigers.

Unconfirmed reports say *tantriks* may be using pesticides to kill tigers to get whiskers of the dead animal to use in occult practices. This conclusion is being drawn from the fact that the viscera test of the tiger that was found dead in the South Phardhan area of south Kheri forest division on December 9, 2014, revealed that it had consumed pesticides. And, a nail each of its forelimbs and part of the moustaches and jaws were missing from its carcass.

Source: Sudhir Kumar, 'Pesticides killed 5 tigers in 3 years in UP forests', *Hindustan Times* 04/06/15.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### 14 more sniffer dogs inducted to fight wildlife crime



14 sniffer dogs — all German Shepherds — were recently inducted in different forest and police departments in the country for the purpose of handling wildlife crime. A 'Passing Out Parade' for the dogs was recently held in Bhopal. Their induction marks a doubling of India's strength of wildlife sniffer dogs.

The dogs will now be deployed in seven states that are home to large tiger populations: Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Karnataka. The programme, jointly funded and conducted by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade-monitoring network, hopes to train even more dogs to drastically decrease wildlife poaching incidents across the country.

The training for the dogs involved a number of grueling sessions where they were trained to detect wildlife products such as tiger skins, ivory tusks and bones of endangered birds. They are also trained to locate animals

that have sustained injuries, which helps authorities to get hold of poachers swiftly.

### The dogs will be deployed in Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Karnataka

Source: Kunal Sehgal and Maria Thomas. 'India has trained dozens of German Shepherds to protect its tigers, [www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com), 22/06/15.

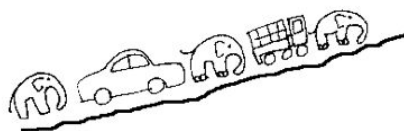
### Ensure timely reporting of wildlife crimes: WCCB

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) has written to various agencies including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), paramilitary forces, customs and state police units, asking them to report all wildlife crimes to it.

The WCCB has, in the advisory, asked these agencies to ensure timely and uniform reporting of wildlife related crime. Raising concerns about the delay in receiving information from these agencies, the advisory said that crime data play a vital role in prevention and detection of crimes, resource allocation and to devise meaningful counter measures. It is, therefore, imperative that authentic data about crimes and criminals are available with the authorities concerned.

The advisory has been issued to Assam Rifles, BSF, CISF, Coast Guard, ITBP, RPF, SSB, DRI, CBI, states/UTs police and their respective principal chief conservators of forests. These agencies are empowered to seize wildlife articles and detain persons involved in an offence under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, within their respective jurisdictions.

Source: 'WCCB seeks timely report on wildlife offences', *The Times of India*, 17/06/15.





## **NTCA says no to tourism in TRs in the monsoon**

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has issued a directive that there will be no tourism in the monsoons in any of the tiger reserves in the country. The primary impact of this will be seen in Maharashtra, the only state to allow partial tourism in its Tadoba and Pench TRs on account of the good conditions of the roads here.

Part of logic of allowing tourists in is that a state transport bus already operates between Chimur and Chandrapur through Tadoba. In Pench too, Madhya Pradesh State Electricity Board and irrigation department staff already work there and hence there is restricted movement of vehicles. Tourists are allowed into Tadoba during the monsoons from the Moharli and Navegaon gates in Tadoba and from Sillari in Pench.

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## **Tadoba and Pench TRs allow tourism in the monsoons**

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Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'No monsoon tourism in Tadoba, Pench this year', *The Times of India*, 26/06/15.

## **NBWL clears 18 projects in its 34<sup>th</sup> meeting held in June 2015**

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) cleared 18 projects, some in crucial wildlife habitats, in its 34<sup>th</sup> meeting held on June 2, 2015. None of the proposals brought before the board, chaired by Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar, was rejected. Only four proposals were deferred; a site visit was asked for in one case; and one was referred back to the state wildlife board.

Six projects cleared are inside or on the fringes of five tiger habitats. These include diversion of one hectare of forest land for a police skills community building inside the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (TR) in Chhattisgarh; upgradation of National Highway-116 on the fringes (just touching the buffer) of the Ranthambhore TR; a pipeline project inside the Mukundra Hills TR in Rajasthan; a new

Land and Custom station in Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary under Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh; and a residential-cum-commercial complex inside the Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand.

The board has also cleared setting up of the South Asian University at Maidan Garhi, just 100 metres away from the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi; an Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management project inside the eco-sensitive zone of Bir Motibagh Wildlife Sanctuary in Patiala; and two optical fibre projects of Idea Cellular in an area under the jurisdiction of the Nagarjunasagar Wildlife Management Division in Hyderabad.

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## **Diversion of one hectare of land inside Udanti-Sitanadi TR, residential-cum-commercial complex in Rajaji NP, road project in Kyongnosla WLS**

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Other projects that were cleared include a road widening project in Lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh; a road construction in 19.50 hectares forest land in Khara Conservation Reserve in Poonch; a road in three hectares of forestland inside the National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh; widening of NH-17 inside the eco-sensitive zone of Karnala Bird Sanctuary in Maharashtra; a road project inside Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary in Sikkim; an underground crude oil pipeline inside the eco-zone of Balaram Ambaji and Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary in Gujarat; and the construction of a bridge across Yamuna River in Etawah inside the eco-sensitive zone of Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh. Besides, the committee also recommended a flyover and transmission line elevation project in Hardwar.

Source: Akash Vashishtha. 'National Board for Wildlife clears 18 projects in some crucial wildlife zones', *Mail Today*, 26/06/15.



### **349 new species of flora and fauna discovered in the country in the last one year**

A list of new discoveries by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) that was released on World Environment Day, June 5, suggests 349 new species of flora and fauna have been discovered in the country in the past one year. This includes 173 species and genera of plants and 176 species of animals.

According to the BSI, the Western Ghats accounted for 22 per cent of the new discoveries, while the Eastern Himalayas and the north-eastern states each accounted for 15 per cent of the new species found. Animal species found include 93 species of insects, seven species of collembolans, 12 species each of arachnid and crustacean and one species of mollusca. Two species of reptiles have also been located for the first time in the country — one in

Tamil Nadu and another in Madhya Pradesh. Apart from the new species, the BSI has also added 105 ‘new records’ while ZSI added 61. Animals and plants that are found elsewhere in the world but have been spotted in India for the first time are called ‘new records’.

Last year, 614 new species of plants and animals — 366 plants and 248 animals — had been discovered in India. As in the previous year, insects have outnumbered other animal groups this year too. However, a large number of amphibians and fish made it to the list with 24 and 23 new species respectively.

96,891 species of animals and 47,791 species of plants have been recorded so far in India.

Source: ‘India richer by 349 new species’, *The Hindu*, 11/06/15.

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A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

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# ***Important Bird Areas Update***

## **ANDHRA PRADESH**

### **EGREE awaits government' nod for declaration as a Ramsar site**

A proposal to notify the East Godavari Riverine Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE) as a Ramsar site has been pending with the state Forest Department. EGREE is a wetland mosaic landscape consisting of 44 fishing villages encompassing the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary.

Though conservation activities are in progress in Coringa, the region outside the mangroves is being severely affected by industrial development. Although the industrial units, including those related to fishing, aquaculture, salt pans, port and shipping, oil and natural gas, and manufacturing units, are observing certain environmental safeguards, they are found to be inadequate to effectively address the special conservation needs of the EGREE region.

Against this background, the UNDP-sponsored EGREE Foundation had sent a proposal to the government to declare the region as a Ramsar site six months ago. An EGREE Foundation representative said that the EGREE region satisfies all the parameters of the Ramsar convention. Once included in the Ramsar list, the region could get support from various organisations for protecting the flora and fauna. The state government has, however, not responded positively to the proposal so far.

Source: 'Move to notify EGREE region as Ramsar site hangs fire', *The Hindu*, 05/06/15.

## **GUJARAT**

### **Narmada overflow altering Nalsarovar ecology**

A study conducted by the Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has confirmed that water overflowing into Nalsarovar from the Narmada

canals from Surendranagar is altering the ecology of the lake. The shallow wetland which usually has three feet of water in winter is turning into a much deeper lake with up to six feet of water.

None of the Narmada canal branches pass anywhere near Nalsarovar or its catchment areas, but the FD study has revealed that the Narmada water released in river Bhogavo and distributary canals of Narmada overflow into small rivulets which empty into Nalsarovar. This leads to a rise in the water level in the lake.

Officials woke up to the issue when the count of migratory birds dropped to half — from nearly three lakh birds in early 2000 to 1.5 lakh in 2014. For the past couple of years, migratory birds gave Nalsarovar a miss during winters, favoring it only in February when water levels receded to three feet or less. Significantly, local birds of the swimmer and diver species that favour deep waters are being seen more frequently now at Nalsarovar.

An official of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Limited said a fixed amount of water is released from the Narmada canal according to the requirement of farmers. On several occasions, the farmers do not use their quota, leaving excess water to flow into Nalsarovar through a number of rivulets.

The FD has now taken up a detailed study to assess the ecological impact of the Narmada water inflow into Nalsarovar.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Narmada making Nalsarovar too deep for birds', *The Times of India*, 04/06/15.

## **HARYANA**

### **Two vultures to be released soon from the Pinjore centre**

After successfully experimenting with the conservation and breeding of three species of vultures in captivity for over 10 years, the

country's first vulture centre, located in the Bir Shikargah Wildlife Sanctuary in Pinjore, is all set to release two vultures (Himalayan griffons) back into the wild. A decision in this regard was taken recently by the governing council of the state government's vulture conservation programme comprising top officials of the Haryana Forest Department and representatives from the Royal Society for Protection of Birds, UK; Bombay Natural History Society and different departments of the government of India.

Two vultures, fitted with satellite transmitters, are to be released first. They would be shifted to another aviary where they would be provided food both within and outside the aviary. Subsequently, the birds would be given an option to go out as their food would be offered to them at a distance from the aviary and once they start feeding at a distance, the food would be stopped completely.

The team will also evaluate an area of 100 km from the site of pre-release for the availability of food and habitat. It will also review threat to vultures with the help of neighbouring states.

Source: Rajesh Moudgil. 'Pinjore Jatayu centre to free 2 vultures', *Hindustan Times*, 24/06/15.

## KERALA

### KSBB seeks Centre's help for conservation of Vellayani lake

The Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) has submitted a proposal to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) seeking assistance for the conservation of the Vellayani freshwater lake and surrounding paddy fields as a biodiversity heritage site for birds.

The Vellayani Lake and its catchment of 490 hectares constitute a unique freshwater ecosystem, providing habitat for several species of birds and fishes. More than 100 avian species, including 23 species of migratory birds have been recorded from the lake and the paddy

fields of Punchakkari. A study of the fish diversity of the lake revealed 42 species, of which four are near-threatened and two vulnerable. Native species such as the Indian mottled eel, Mushi and crocodile-toothed pipefish, which were earlier reported from the lake, have all but disappeared. The introduction of exotic fish species and non-native tree species has altered the ecosystem and affected the indigenous flora and fauna. In addition to this, poaching of birds, land reclamation, and indiscriminate use of pesticides pose a threat for many species.

The Rs.75-crore proposal submitted to the MoEFCC seeks to acquire the fallow land in private ownership and provide suitable incentives for protecting the biodiversity of the area from further degradation. A participatory programme has been mooted to prevent poaching of birds and protect nests with the involvement of local communities. The project also seeks to promote ecotourism by installing viewing platforms and boardwalks and introducing guided walks and bird-watching trips. Establishment of an amphitheatre for special bird shows has also been proposed.

Source: T. Nandakumar, 'Vellayani Lake eyes heritage tag', *The Hindu*, 13/06/15.

## Bird Atlas for Kerala



The Kerala unit of the Indian Bird Conservation Network in association with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Royal Society for Protection of Birds, UK, has initiated a five-year project for the preparation of a Bird Atlas of Kerala. The project will be co-ordinated by PO

Nameer of the College of Forestry.

The entire area of the state will be divided into 'cells' of one square kilometre for the purpose of the project, the first phase of which will cover the districts of Thrissur and Alappuza.

Source; T Ramavarman. 'Atlas to give 'bird's eye' view of nature' *The Times of India*, 17/06/15.

## MAHARASHTRA

### Thane Creek area to be declared as Flamingo Sanctuary



The Maharashtra state government has decided to declare the 17 sq km long Thane Creek area as a Flamingo Sanctuary and to also get the stretch declared as a Ramsar Site. The decision was taken at the recently held meeting of the state wildlife board in the presence of Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis and Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar along with other forest officials.

The area is home to nearly 25000 flamingoes and 205 different species of birds have been reported from here. The area is currently not under the control of the forest department; an initial proposal to have the area protected was prepared and submitted by the NGO, Vanashakti (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 2).

Source: Sujit Mahamulkar. 'Maharashtra to declare Thane creek area as 'Flamingo Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 23/06/15.

### NBWL approves widening of NH-17 through Karnala Bird Sanctuary

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has approved widening of the section of Mumbai-Goa-Kochi National Highway (NH)-17 passing through Karnala Bird Sanctuary near Panvel. Currently, the NH-17 has only two lanes passing

through the sanctuary. Now, the NBWL has allowed for increasing the road width to four lanes. While approving the project, it has asked the state government to add part of the adjacent forest land to the sanctuary and also carry out compensatory afforestation. The widening of the highway will happen on a two-km stretch and involves diversion of close to two hectares of the sanctuary land.

The proposal to widen the highway has been pending approval since the past five years. The NBWL rejected it for the first time in 2009 and later again in 2013. In 2009, the NBWL rejected it on the grounds that the sanctuary area, 12.11 sq km, was not too big but was home to rich biodiversity. In 2013, the NBWL had stated that since alternate routes were available, the proposal to widen the highway inside the sanctuary was rejected. But, when the project was taken up for appraisal last August, the NBWL said alternate routes were not feasible.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Green nod to NH widening cutting through Karnala bird haven', *DNA*, 04/06/15.

## ODISHA

### Rs. 26.74 crore for Chilika lake

A budget of Rs. 26.74 crore (\$4 million) has been approved for the development of the Chilika lake for the current financial year. The approval was granted by the Chief Minister (CM) of the state, Mr Naveen Patnaik, who chaired the 13th governing body meeting of Chilika Development Authority (CDA) that was held recently.

The state had already provided share capital to the tune of \$1 million as soft loan to primary fishermen cooperative societies' (PFCS) members here. The body also approved the spending of \$172,000 on the Integrated Lake Basin Management Project, as well as \$400,000 on preparing a master plan to develop tourist facilities at the lake and nearby places. It also approved the proposal for establishing a Ramsar Regional Centre for South Asia, a proposal

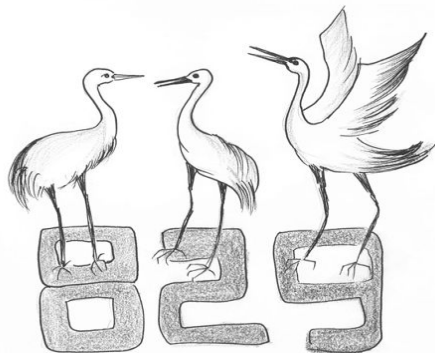
given by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat to include Chilika as a key place for conserving wetlands in South Asia.

The CM urged the CDA to take adequate steps to strengthen various PFCS and also asked the officials to find out ways on how to market fish from Chilika in the state and across the country. He further directed the Forest and Environment Department and the CDA to form a committee for carrying out sustainable and long-term programmes at Chilika for ensuring livelihoods of the fishermen community and for promoting tourism.

Source: 'Odisha to Spend \$4 Million on Lake Chilika Development', [www.thefishsite.com](http://www.thefishsite.com), 08/06/15.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### 829 Sarus cranes counted in eastern UP



In an exercise supported by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), grassroots level Sarus Protection Committees (SPCs) recently conducted a census of the Sarus Crane in the Maharajganj district of

eastern Uttar Pradesh. The counting was done by 14 SPCs. Four volunteers, known as Sarus Mitras, coordinated the entire exercise under the supervision of the WTI team. 829 cranes were counted over an area in nine blocks that included 187 villages and 48 small and large wetlands. 421 of these birds were sighted in wetlands while 408 birds were observed in agricultural land at 166 sites. The largest congregation of 80 birds was recorded in Bereha wetland in Pharenda block.

The WTI has been working in eastern UP as part of the Sarus Crane Conservation Project, spreading awareness and helping identify nesting sites. 126 nests have been protected as part of the initiative with active support of farmers, volunteers and SPCs. The WTI has constituted 20 SPCs in 10 project districts. One committee has 14-16 members including the secretary, president and treasurer.

Source: 'WTI counts 829 Sarus cranes in eastern UP', [www.wti.org.in](http://www.wti.org.in), 22/05/15.

**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)***

## Back issues of the Protected Area Update

Copies of recent back issues of the Protected Area Update are available for organisations who would like to distribute them for awareness and educational purposes.

If you would like to get copies please write to the editor at [psekhsaria@gmail.com](mailto:psekhsaria@gmail.com)

## **A Decade Ago** **Protected Area Update 56, August 2005**

### **KARNATAKA/RAJASTHAN**

#### **Karnataka tigers for Sariska?**

A meeting on tiger population, convened by the Union Ministry of Forests and Environment in May in Karnataka reportedly discussed the proposal of relocating tigers from other parts of the country to certain tiger reserves like Sariska, where the big cats have been poached out of existence. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) which had earlier been asked to suggest ways of reviving the Sariska tiger population has also been asked to look at the relocation possibilities. It has been suggested by some that the WII may consider south Indian tiger habitats to make Sariska lively again, and a prominent possibility would be to look at tigers from Karnataka.

Experts have called for serious caution to be exercised in the matter, including ensuring that Sariska was absolutely safe for tigers and totally undisturbed. It has also been pointed out that most tiger habitats in the south differ substantially from the dry and scrub forest regions of Sariska. They have also said that a careful and detailed feasibility study, including some kind of genetic mapping, should be undertaken before any further decision was taken in the matter.

Source: BS Arun. 'State tigers to be shifted to Sariska', *Deccan Herald*, 02/06/05.

### **MADHYA PRADESH**

#### **Tribals protest displacement from Satpura NP**

Tribals and NGOs have opposed the displacement of nearly 4000 families of 50 villages from the Satpura National Park and Tiger Reserve. A delegation of the affected tribal people under the aegis of Samajwadi Jan

Parishad (SJP) also met the Chairperson of the Tiger Task Force, Sunita Narain in Delhi recently to apprise her of the situation.

Presenting evidence of the inappropriateness of the move the delegation pointed out that the resettlement of just one village had resulted in the felling of 50,000 trees in Dobjhirna forest.

They also highlighted the fact that the successful working of the Tawa Matsya Sangh the co-operative that was conducting fishing in the reservoir of the Tawa dam was being stopped because the entire reservoir was now being considered inside the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary which is a part of the Satpura Tiger Reserve.

Source: 'Tribals protest plan to oust them', *The Hindu*, 25/05/05

### **UTTAR PRADESH**

#### **Heat wave claims over 200 langurs in Kaimur hills**

Over 200 langurs are reported to have died in the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary due to the severe heat wave in northern India. A severe shortage of food and water is said to have forced the langurs to move out of the mountainous regions into the extremely dry hinterlands, with severe impacts on the animals

Officials tried to reach out to the animals but this was not possible due to the extreme heat coupled with difficult terrain. Efforts were also being made to reach water tankers and medicos, mostly on horseback.

Source: 'Heat wave causes death of 200 monkeys in UP forest', [www.news.webindia123.com](http://www.news.webindia123.com), 26/06/05.

## PERSPECTIVE

### **Militarized conservation and the drone age**

The use of military technologies is rapidly being reflected in current conservation practices. This includes the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's) or drones, camera traps, global positioning systems and satellite and thermal imagery to assist guards to prevent poaching. Many tiger reserves in India are now in the process of initiating the use of drones for monitoring anti-poaching and wildlife activity. As part of Google's global impact awards, WWF was recently granted more than US\$ 5 million to develop approaches for drone and camera trap use for anti-poaching operations.

Drones have been synonymous with controversial methods of warfare - the fall in costs of production and high performance provides inroads to new markets such as conservation for UAV manufacturers. 'Conservation drones', a US based non-profit claims that bringing military solutions to conservation's thin green line would be a game changer and a standard item in the toolbox of protected area managers. This rush for new technologies, however, overlooks issues around the boundaries of privacy and pervasive surveillance and is greatly influenced by narratives that describe on-the-ground situation as a war between poachers and conservation practitioners.

Realities on the ground, we know, are much more complicated. A large number of people, for instance, live in and around protected areas in India. Will these people accept drones flying over their houses or keep a track of them when they go about collecting forest resources for their daily livelihood needs? Seen from the ground and through the eyes of local people, the use of drones could be an attempt to violate their privacy. Experienced conservationists involved with anti-poaching initiatives acknowledge the fact that technology is not a substitute for basics such as having sufficient numbers of adequately equipped,

motivated and well looked after field staff. New technologies such as drones too will require personnel on the ground to make them effective, an issue well documented in warfare. In India, where field staff struggle with basics even with basic necessities such as suitable footwear and clothing, the use of drones is a much bigger and complex challenge than is being imagined.

Furthermore, the long term cost effectiveness of drones to control poaching remains untested, drone data may only be useful when fed into robust management and legal systems which are weak in India. With growing constructs and narratives of 'waging a war' for conservation and draconian policies such as 'shoot to kill' already in place, how long before we start hearing calls for armed drones to be used against poachers?

For conservation to clothe its agendas in the blood soaked garments of militarized violence betrays its core values and shrouds the real challenges at hand.

- **Trishant Simlai** is an early career conservation scientist and works as a consultant with the Foundation for Ecological Security. His main research interests include political ecology, systematic conservation planning and human-wildlife interactions.

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