

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXI, No. 5

October 2015 (No. 117)

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	3	Odisha	10
A small hole in the fence for the elephant		Deficit rainfall may cause water shortage in Chandaka WLS	
NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES		13 arrested for fishing in the Bhitarkanika NP	
Assam	3	Rajasthan	10
Centre and Assam differ over number of personnel for rhino protection force		NTCA directs Rajasthan to bring back T-24 to the wild	
Three get seven years rigorous imprisonment for poaching in Nameri NP,		Sikkim	11
Rhino translocated to the Manas NP gives birth to her second calf		Concern over Red Panda habitat degradation in Sikkim	
Delhi	5	Tamil Nadu	11
Scientists to develop biodiversity parks in Delhi		Madras High Court gives priority to restoration of Shola forests	
Six new species of butterflies recorded in Delhi in the last decade		Uttarakhand	12
New species of spider found in Asola Bhatti WLS		NGT asks for clarifications over helicopter service impact on wildlife in Kedarnath WLS	
Karnataka	6	River rafting camps along the Ganga come under NGT scanner	
SC Central Empowered Committee says no to railway line cutting across the Western Ghats		Human-leopard conflict on the rise in Pauri district	
Bandipur TR steps up vigil in the wake of Kerala elephant poaching case		West Bengal	13
Kerala	7	Railways reduce night trains running through PAs in Assam, West Bengal	
Camera trap records leopard attack on Nilgiri tahr in Eravikulam NP		Ivory worth Rs. 8 lakh seized in Jalpaiguri; three arrested	
Steep increase in human-wildlife conflict in Kerala		Remove Sundarbans BR from purview of CRZ: State govt.	
32 elephant poachers arrested in Kerala		NATIONAL NEWS	14
Madhya Pradesh	7	Centre may conduct simultaneous elephant census in West Bengal, northeastern states to avoid duplication	
NBWL gives a go ahead to four-laning of NH-6 and NH-7 within 10km boundaries of PAs		Nine out of 58 protected areas meet criteria for IUCN Green List	
Bandhavgarh NP staff demands powers to shoot-at-sight at villagers in conflict situations		TSR Subramanian report rejected by the Parliamentary Standing Committee	
Maharashtra	8	Trawl ban benefits benthic fauna	
Wild water buffalo photographed in the Kolamarka Conservation Reserve			
Expert panel ignores wildlife and biodiversity in Aarey Colony in Mumbai			
Two new species of spider discovered in Mumbai			

SOUTH ASIA		
Bangladesh / India		
Bangladesh and India to co-operate on keeping elephant corridors open		
Bhutan		
103 wild tigers in Bhutan		
INTERNATIONAL NEWS		
UN General Assembly passes resolution to tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife	17	
IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE		
Andhra Pradesh		
State proposes to reduce size of Kolleru WLS		
Himachal Pradesh		
Two month fishing ban in Pong Dam reservoir lifted		
Maharashtra		
A booklet on 'Birds of Thane Creek' released		
Odisha		
	16	Efforts on to get 'World Heritage Site' status for Bhitarkanika NP and Chilika Lake
		Punjab
		Forest department alleges illegal construction inside Harike WLS
		Tamil Nadu
		Recovery of Curlew sandpiper at Point Calimere in July points to a possible shift in migratory pattern
		Uttar Pradesh
		Final notification for ESZ of Okhla Bird Sanctuary to be issued soon
	19	
		A DECADE AGO
		Readers Respond
		22
		23
		PERSPECTIVE
		Matheran - Forest on the head
		24

Protected Area Update

Vol. XXI, No. 5, October 2015 (No. 117)

Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

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

Illustrations: **Shruti Kulkarni, Madhuvanti Anantharajan & Peeyush Sekhsaria**

Produced by

The Documentation and Outreach Centre

KALPAVRIKSH

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

Tel/Fax: 020 – 25654239

Email: psekhsaria@gmail.com

Website: <http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods/protected-area-update>



Publication of the PA Update has been supported by

Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) <http://fes.org.in/>

Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, C/o FES

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India

Bombay Natural History Society/ Indian Bird Conservation Network

Donations from a number of individual supporters

EDITORIAL

A small hole in the fence for the elephant

This is the time of the year when the large parts of South Asia are celebrating the festival venerating Ganesha, the fun loving elephant headed god with a little mouse as his companion and carrier. The existence of an elephant headed god and a festival celebrating him has been long portrayed as a marker of the love and respect for wildlife in the sub-continent, the inherently tolerant ethic of the landscape and the deep rooted association that people here have with wildlife and forests.

There is, however, a deeply unsettling and uglier side to the picture too – the intolerably high levels of noise that citizens have to endure when the festival is on and the monstrous pollution that rivers, lakes and smaller water bodies suffer when idols of the god are immersed when the festival comes to an end. There is also the deep irony that is pointed out poignantly by those involved in conservation and protection of the elephant in the wild.

The animal that millions of people worship as god and which is also India's National Heritage animal continues to suffer a fate in the real world that is sad, unfair and even gruesome as they are poached regularly across their range, killed month after month in horrific train accidents and continue to be electrocuted by sagging high voltage power lines even as habitat is being destroyed rapidly and traditional migratory patterns are being ruthlessly snapped by roads, railway lines, dam construction and industrial projects.

There is also the other, international dimension; the large bodied animal that needs to move constantly is perhaps the most affected by conflicts along country borders in South Asia. The *PA Update* has regularly reported on the fate of elephants trying to cross the border between India and Nepal on the one side and India and Bangladesh on the other. There was a report and an edit many years ago (*PA Update* Vol. XIV, No. 4) that dealt with the problem being faced by elephants crossing India's border with Bangladesh.

The relations between the two countries had reached such a low that Bangladeshi authorities had threatened to shoot down the wild elephants that had crossed the border if India did not 'take back' her elephants. The security concern along that border has over the years, also led to erection of a barbed wire fencing, leading in turn to a serious problem for the elephant and an escalation in human-elephant conflict in the region.

There is a news item in this issue of the *PA Update* (News from South Asia, Pg. 16) that suggests, however, that all may not be lost yet. There is space for hope in all the doom and the gloom and one such decision was made recently in a joint meeting of Indian and Bangladeshi authorities. Small gaps are to be opened up in the barbed wire that currently separates the two countries, but which elephants have kept connected for centuries. Corridors will be opened up so that the elephants can move freely. We have to still see how this will be operationalized on the ground, but a better gift could not have been offered to the elephant in the season of its veneration and hopefully, more such sensible decisions will be taken across the length and breadth of this magnificent creature's range throughout the sub-continent.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Centre and Assam differ over number of personnel for rhino protection force

The plan to raise an elite force for protection of rhinos in Assam with central funding is experiencing problems following differences between the Assam state government and the Centre over the number of personnel to be recruited. The Centre wants to create a force with 100 personnel while Assam wants to start the force with a strength of 1,000 individuals.

Union minister of environment, forests and climate change, Prakash Javadekar, had announced a fund for the formation of a special rhino protection force in September last year. He had asked the state government to submit a

proposal in this regard. The proposal submitted by the Assam government asked for the recruitment of 1,000 youth, who were to be trained in modern techniques, provided proper infrastructure for high mobility on land and water, and be armed with sophisticated weapons and communications system. Rs. 250 crore had been estimated for raising the force. However, the Centre recently asked the State to start with recruiting 100 persons and did not give any assurance for expansion.

Assam has said that a force of 100 people will not serve the purpose as the park area is spread over 800 sq km over four districts, and the south and the north banks of the Brahmaputra. The State has written to the Centre that it would go ahead with the plan only if the Centre agrees to recruit a 1000 personnel.

According to the forest department, 10 rhinos have been killed in Kaziranga so far this year while the park's forces have killed 15 poachers and arrested 45. A large number of arms and ammunition have also been recovered. Most of the 32 rhinos killed in Assam in 2014 and the 41 that were killed in 2013 were in Kaziranga NP.

Source: Wasim Rahman, 'Govts lock horns over rhino force - Dispur proposes 1000 men, Delhi 100', *The Telegraph*, 25/07/15.

Three get seven years rigorous imprisonment, for poaching in Nameri NP,

Three poachers, who would lace venison with highly toxic pesticides to prevent putrefaction and committed a host of other wildlife crime at the Nameri National Park (NP), were convicted by a district court recently. The Sonitpur additional sessions judge, S Das, sentenced Arjun Basumatary, Bijoy Basumatary and Debeswar Pogag to seven years rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 50,000 each under the Wildlife (Protection) (Assam Amendment) Act 2009. According to Nameri officials, this is probably the first instance in the state when poachers have been convicted under this Act. The verdict came within 14 months of their arrest, making it one of the fastest conviction cases against poachers.

Pogag, who had been evading arrest for years by shuttling between Sonitpur and southern states like Karnataka and Kerala was, in fact, on the most wanted list. The conviction of the three came a week after the Darrang sessions court also sentenced two poachers who had attempted to kill a rhino at the Rajiv Gandhi Orang NP in 2011. The two at Orang were convicted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

Last year, a mother-son duo, Picholi Doley and her son Gautam, were also convicted by the Golaghat sessions court in connection with rhino poaching at the Kaziranga NP. The last time poachers were convicted for killing rhinos at Kaziranga was in 2008.

Source: Naresh Mitra, 'Three Assam poachers get 7-year RI', *The Times of India*, 28/07/15.

Rhino translocated to the Manas NP gives birth to her second calf

Mainao, the female rhino that was the first to be translocated to Manas after being rescued from floods in Kaziranga NP in 2002 has given birth to her 2nd calf. The rhino population in Manas now stands at 32. Mainao had been rescued as a few-weeks old calf and was hand-raised at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation near Kaziranga (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 3)

In the meanwhile, the World Heritage Committee, in its 39th meeting which concluded at Bonn in July, welcomed the progress made by the authorities to protect Manas and address the conflicts in the area through the establishment of a high-level security committee, engagement with local communities and increased patrolling. The committee has asked the Centre to increase the number of frontline staff, take appropriate action to boost forest staff morale, ensure adequate equipment for staff to protect animals from armed poachers and insurgent groups in order to secure the park. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XVII, No. 4)

Source: Roopak Goswami, 'Translocated Mainao increases baby rhino count in Manas', *The Telegraph*, 02/8/15.

DELHI

Six new species of butterflies recorded in Delhi in the last decade

At least six new species of butterflies – Red Pierrot (*Talicauda nyseus*), Common Jay (*Graphium doson*), Common Baron (*Euthalia aconthea*), Indian Tortoiseshell (*Aglaia kaschmirensis*), Conjoined Swift (*Pelopidas conjuncta*) and Common Bluebottle (*Graphium sarpedon*) – have been seen in Delhi over the past ten years.

These were recorded as part of the research carried out between 2003 and 2013 by Dr. Surya Prakash, a zoologist from the School of Life Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Areas covered as part of the research project included the Delhi Ridge, the Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhatti mines, Sanjay Van, Yamuna Biodiversity Park, Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Okhla Bird Sanctuary and Lodhi Gardens. A scientific paper on this was presented at the Tropical Ecology Congress organised at JNU in December 2014.

The last butterfly study, conducted in Delhi in 1986, had recorded 86 species of butterflies in the city. Similar researches had been carried out in 1943, 1967 and 1971.

Source: Baishali Adak, 'Six new species of butterflies spotted in the Capital', *Mail Today*, 17/08/15.

Scientists to help develop biodiversity parks in Delhi

A team of scientists is working under the Delhi Development Authority (DDA)'s Delhi Biodiversity Foundation to develop biodiversity parks (BDPs) in the capital city. Besides Yamuna and Aravalli BDPs, Tilpat Valley, Neela Hauz, Kamla Nehru Ridge, and Phase 2 of the Yamuna BDP will be developed soon. The project is being executed under the leadership of Professor C R Babu, Head, Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems, Delhi University.

There were more than 400 wetlands in Delhi earlier. Now, only two or three are left. One of the tasks before the scientists will be to transform the sites into rich wetlands, which will act as a recharge zone and an aquifer for groundwater and also purify sewer water before it mixes with the river.

The Yamuna BDP in North Delhi was a pilot project in that direction. The work started in 2005 on barren land that had sodic soil and development of any kind of vegetation was difficult. Today, the area of 157 acres acts as a habitat for 75 species of butterflies, 200 species of birds, 10 species of snakes, 900 species of plants, and mammals like porcupine, civets, and wild boars. The Phase 2 of the park will be spread over 300 acres of active floodplain and is in the development stage.

Work is also currently on in the Northern Ridge or the Kamla Nehru Ridge and at Neela Hauz near the Jawaharlal Nehru University. While development of the Neela Hauz BDP will be completed in another three-four months, scientists at Kamla Nehru Ridge have started pruning the exotic *Prosopis juliflora*, which has encroached upon more than 90 per cent of the area and eliminated native species. Similarly, Tilpat Valley, bordering the Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary, has also been encroached upon by *Prosopis juliflora*.

Source: Shagun Kapil, 'Scientists engaged to develop four biodiversity parks', *Deccan Herald*, 25/08/15.

New species of spider found in Asola Bhatti WLS

A new species of spider has been discovered in Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary. The 'jumping spider' has been named *Stenaelurillus jagannathae* due to its unique colour pattern, which resembles the Hindu deity Lord Jagannath's face. The discovery was made by herpetologist and assistant professor, Dr. Sanjay Keshari Das of the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, and his team of students. Their finding was published in the International Journal of Science and Research

(IJSR) and has been endorsed by the World Spider Catalog (WSC) — the database, maintained by the Natural History Museum, Bern in Switzerland.

The male of the specie is 3.75 mm in length while the female is almost double at 6.50 mm. It has two large black eyes on the anterior, akin to the headlights of a car, typical of its 'Salticidae' spider family. Its genus is *Stenaelurillus*, which has only 34 known species — 27 found in Africa and eight in Asia. The number now increases to 35 worldwide and nine in Asia.

Source: Balshall Adak. 'New species of 'jumping spider' found in Delhi sanctuary', www.dailymail.co.uk, 04/08/15.

KARNATAKA

Bandipur TR steps up vigil in the wake of Kerala elephant poaching case

The Edamalayar elephant poaching case in Kerala has triggered alarm bells in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) where anti-poaching camps have been put on high alert. Though there is no contiguity of habitat or forests between south Kerala and Bandipur, the officials said they did not wish to take any chances. The director, BTR, also said that one was coming across organised elephant poaching after a long time in this part of the country and hence the anti-poaching camps had been asked to maintain utmost vigil. The 874 sq. km national park has an elephant population in the range of 1,600 to 1,800 with a density of 1.8 per sq. km as per the 2011-12 estimation.

There are 50 anti-poaching camps in Bandipur, each manned by two permanent staff and three daily wage labourers. They are fully trained and equipped with weapons and communicate over wireless sets. Mobile handsets have also been given to each team. Their movements are monitored by using a software that gives the higher authorities real-time information about the area covered by foot patrolling. In case of any eventuality, the anti-poaching camp personnel can send photographs

using mobile phones, which enable the senior staff to analyse the ground situation and take appropriate action.

In the meantime, non-governmental organisations such as Wildlife Conservation Foundation too have stepped up their campaign in the villages adjoining BTR. In addition to the anti-poaching camps, the Special Tiger Protection Forces deployed at Maddur and H. D. Kote too have been alerted.

Source: R. Krishna Kumar. 'Poaching in Kerala triggers alarm bells in Bandipur', *The Hindu*, 17/08/15.

SC Central Empowered Committee says no to railway line cutting across the Western Ghats

The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has said no to the Rs. 2,315-crore Hubli-Ankola railway line cutting across the Western Ghats in Karnataka. It has said that the project is huge and irreparable ecological impact on account of its implementation would far outweigh any benefits that are accrued.

The CEC has noted in its recent report that the net present value of the modified requirement of 727 hectares (ha) of forestland works out to more than three times the project cost. These figures demonstrate the extraordinary high ecological and economic value of the forestland involved in the project, leading the CEC to recommend to the apex court that it may direct the Environment Ministry not to reconsider or approve the project it had earlier rejected. The CEC's opinion follows a series of adverse reports the project has attracted since its foundation stone was laid in May 2000 by the then Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee (see box).

The 168 km rail link was conceived in 1998 primarily to transport iron ore from the Bellary-Hospet mines. A joint venture between the Railways and the Karnataka government, the original project involved construction of 329 bridges and 29 tunnels, and required felling of more than 2.5 lakh trees on 965 ha of forestland. The proposal was rejected by the

Environment Ministry in 2004 but revived with modifications in 2006. Pushing the rail link in 2008, the Karnataka government claimed it was “inevitable that the Western Ghats has to be pierced through at some point to ensure this connectivity between coastline and eastern plains of the state.”

2000: Prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee lays foundation stone.

2002: Karnataka Forest Department says no national interest would be served by dissecting forest.

2003: Karnataka forest chief says forest and terrain “do not permit” railway line.

2004: Environment Ministry panel says project will “be a tragedy on the prime forests”.

2005: Railways cuts forest requirement to 720 hectares.

2006: CEC finds work in progress on a 40-km non-forest stretch.

2012: Indian Institute of Science says link would cut through elephant corridor.

2006-2013: Railways says will implement project in stages, Karnataka cuts forest requirement to 687 hectares.

2015: SC panel says “no amount of mitigation measures would be adequate to contain the severe adverse impact on the biodiversity-rich dense forest.

Source: ‘Supreme Court panel says no to mega rail link through Western Ghats’, *The Indian Express*, 24/08/15.

KERALA

Camera trap records leopard attack on Nilgiri tahr in Eravikulam NP

In what is said to be the first record of its kind, the Munnar Wildlife Division has caught on camera a leopard attacking an adult male Nilgiri tahr on the grassland cliff of Rajamala inside the Eravikulam National Park (ENP). The images taken on July 21, 22 and 23, earlier this year, show a leopard devouring the carcass of the tahr after dragging it to the shola forest. Nearly 50 pictures were taken using the camera trap.

The camera trap had been set up after continuous monitoring of Nilgiri tahr of different ages, including newly born, on the cliff. The skull of an adult female tahr was found near Pettimudy recently. It is suspected that the tahr may have been attacked by a similar predator.

Source: Giji K. Raman. ‘Camera trap creates history at park’, *The Hindu*, 26/07/15.

Steep increase in human-wildlife conflict in Kerala

There has been a 160% increase in compensation claims for loss of lives and crop damage due to wild animals in Kerala in the past five years. The total number of these claims touched 7,416 last year and was seen prominently around the Wayanad, Idukki and Kottayam forest divisions. 20 people were killed in wild animal attacks last year, majority of which were elephant attacks. A majority of those killed were either tribes-people or tourists who strayed into the forest areas. The forest department (FD) paid a compensation of Rs. 6 crore as damages, which is almost six times the amount as compared to five years ago.

The FD pays a compensation of Rs. 75,000 for injuries caused due to wild animal attack. The compensation paid for loss of lives in wild animal attack is Rs. 3 lakh and for loss of lives due to snake-bite is Rs. one lakh.

Source: Viju B, ‘Wild animal attack claims increase by 160% in 5 yrs’, *The Times of India*, 30/07/15.

32 elephant poachers arrested in Kerala

As many as 32 persons have been arrested so far after the Kerala Forest Department launched an anti-elephant poaching drive in the state following the discovery of six carcasses of elephants in different forest regions of Kerala. Those arrested include six persons considered to be sharp shooters and seven who facilitated ivory trade.

The information was shared by the Kerala State Forest Minister during a one day Southern Forest Minister's conference that was held recently. One of the main agenda points of the meet was to chalk out a strategy to combat elephant hunting in the southern states.

Source: '32 persons arrested in connection with elephant poaching', *Business Standard*, 05/08/15.

MADHYA PRADESH

NBWL gives a go ahead to 4-laning of NH-6 and NH-7 within 10km boundaries of PAs

The National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) has, in its 35th meeting that was held recently, given a go ahead to four-laning of national highway (NH)-7 and NH-6 in patches that fall within 10 km of national parks and sanctuaries. As wildlife mitigation measures, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) will construct two 750-metre underpasses and one 300 metre underpass on NH-7 and three 750-metre underpasses on NH-6.

The NHAI wants 49.246 ha forest land on NH-7 and 38.21 ha on NH-6, where work in vulnerable patches — Sirpur-Nawatola (6.3 km); Marhamjob-Dongargaon (4.150 km); Bamhani-Duggipar (3.05 km); Sakoli-Mundipar (3.2 km); and Suandad-Sendurwafa (3.5 km) has been stalled. The NHAI had refused to accept wildlife mitigation measures leading to a bitter legal battle. Later, a high-level meeting of concerned institutions arrived as a consensus in a meeting in Nagpur on June 2 wherein the NHAI agreed to take wildlife mitigation measures on both the highways.

Conservationists have, however, questioned the move, pointing out that the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority have progressively reduced the length of underpasses suggested as mitigation measures – first, from 5.5 km in May 2012, to One km in January 2015, and then to 750 metres in May 2015. They have questioned the scientific rationale behind this reduction.

Also, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had submitted before the High Court and the principal bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) that a NBWL nod was not needed, forcing the NGOs to challenge the road widening that cuts Central India's biggest tiger corridor. The NBWL permission was sought after Justice Swatanter Kumar, chairperson of the NGT questioned how permission was granted without a nod from the NBWL when the diversion of forest land was sought within 10 km of the tiger reserve and sanctuary.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'NBWL okays NH-7, NH-6 widening project', *The Times of India*, 19/08/15.

Bandhavgarh NP staff demands powers to shoot-at-sight at villagers in conflict situations

The forest staff of the Bandhavgarh National Park has asked for shoot-at-sight powers to control villagers in difficult situations. This comes in response to recent situations when local villagers have been aggressive following incidents of human-tiger conflict here.

The most recent such incident involved the death of a shepherd in a tiger attack in the Dhamokar area. The villagers blocked the state highway in protest, demanding Rs. 10 lakh as compensation for family of the dead. The police had to be deployed to control the situation as forest employees did not turn up fearing mob fury. A similar incident had occurred in October 2014 when villagers had attacked forest employees and set their properties on fire. The forest employees association had written a letter to the forest department at that time as well, asking for permission to shoot-at-sight.

The authorities have not taken any decision in response to these demands and a study is being considered to understand the conflict situation around the park.

Source: 'Foresters want powers to shoot violent villagers', *The Times of India*, 24/08/15.

MAHARASHTRA

Expert panel ignores wildlife and biodiversity in Aarey Colony in Mumbai

After the authorities said there was “no wildlife” at the Metro III site in the Aarey Colony in Mumbai, the Chief Minister’s expert panel also failed to mention wildlife or biodiversity in its report. The Metro-III project continues, therefore, to threaten the 2,298 trees as well as the wildlife at the Aarey Colony, which is situated in the vicinity of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

The expert panel has now submitted its final report suggesting that Kanjurmarg, not Aarey, is the best possible location for the Metro car depot. It has, at the same time, also hinted that if acquiring land at Kanjurmarg is not possible, a “double-decked” car shed can be built in Aarey Colony itself. The report says that this will increase the project cost by Rs. 750 crore, but will only displace 446 trees and will need less space – 20.82 hectares instead of the 30 hectares proposed initially. The committee has not mentioned existence of wildlife or biodiversity at the proposed Metro site in Aarey Colony; instead it has mentioned only the threat to native and exotic species of trees there. A source from the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority is reported to have said that if they had mentioned that wildlife is also found at the plot, then constructing a car depot in Aarey would have become next to impossible.

Environmental activists have expressed objections to this viewpoint, insisting that the Metro poses a threat not just to the trees but also to the rich biodiversity in Aarey, including species such as the leopard and the Indian rock python.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav, ‘Mumbai Metro-III car shed: Expert panel’s report also ignores wildlife in Aarey’, *Mid Day*, 17/08/15.

Two new species of spider discovered in Mumbai

A team of young naturalists has discovered two spider species at Aarey Milk Colony, near the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. The species, which belong to the families of spitting and lynx spiders, have been named *Dictis mumbaiensis* (after Mumbai city) and *Peucetia phantasma*, after the silvery ghost tree (*Sterculia urens*) on which it is found to nest and hunt.

The records were published recently by the Indian Society of Arachnology in its journal *The Indian Journal of Arachnology*.

Source: Vijay Singh, ‘Two new species of spiders found at Mumbai’s Aarey Milk Colony’, *The Times of India*, 29/07/15.

Wild water buffalo photographed in the Kolamarka Conservation Reserve

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has managed to spot and photograph a herd of wild water buffaloes in the Kolamarka Conservation Reserve, laying to rest the speculation that only one female was left in the entire central Indian landscape – at least four females were spotted in the herd.

The monitoring team has confirmed existence of at least two herds of nine and six members and an individual bull living separately. The finding is an outcome of a project to document the diversity of the area that was declared a conservation reserve in 2013. The team was led by Range Forest Officer (RFO) Atul Deokar, and included FD ground staff and a small group of local villagers. Nine volunteers were selected to form a monitoring team and they were given geo-tagged cameras to get the exact GPS location of the photographic evidence. The villagers also earned up to Rs. 7,500 per month in wages in the exercise.

Over 65 species of butterflies, 114 species of birds, 1,200 nests of giant squirrel, 33 types of grasses, over 180 individual White backed and Long-billed vultures, 19 different reptiles, leopards, pangolins, crocodiles, wild

boars, spotted deer, sloth bear, mouse deer, langurs and red-faced macaques were also recorded. At least four butterflies — Common Banded Peacock, Common Palm Fly, Monkey Puzzle and Common Evening Brown — were recorded for the first time in Vidarbha. No tiger, however, was cited despite the proximity of the Indravati Tiger Reserve in neighbouring Chhattisgarh. The findings have been compiled in a book named 'Treasure of Kolamarka'. A separate study is now being undertaken to register plant biodiversity.

There are four villages - Chintarev, Chitveli, Tonder and Bangaram Petha- that are located inside the reserve; and four - Nayangodam, Asha, Damrancho and Mudumudgu – that are situated on the fringes. The FD has formed eco-development committees in the villages and carried out some developmental activities. The villages here have domesticated buffaloes but chances of these breeding with the wild variety are believed to be negligible, since the wild buffaloes never come close to these villages. However, the FD has chalked out a cattle replacement plan where the buffaloes would be taken off and villagers would be provided with cows and bullocks. The FD has also formed chain-link fenced "vulture restaurants" away from villages where villagers would be paid Rs. 250 for each dead animal they would provide for the vultures to feed upon.

Source: Vivek Deshpande. 'Young forest officer leads first wildlife survey in 'liberated' Naxal heartland', *The Indian Express*, 03/08/15.

ODISHA

13 arrested for fishing in the Bhitarkanika National Park

Thirteen fishermen were arrested for alleged trespassing and illegal fishing in the Bhitarkanika National Park (BNP) in the month of August. A patrol squad of forest officials seized four fishing vessels, including three mechanised ones, a 50-metre-long net and other

fishing equipment, and took the 13 fishermen into custody. The interception took place in the northern part along the Ekakula deltaic region. The arrested persons are traditional inland fishermen and they belong to Dangmal, Gupti and Prabhati villages located in the vicinity of the BNP.

Source: 'Fishermen arrested for fishing in Bhitarkanika National Park', www.oneindia.com, 24/08/15.

Deficit rainfall may cause water shortage in Chandaka WLS

A deficit in rainfall this year is likely to have an adverse impact on the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary. The torrential rains during Phailin in 2013 and Hudhud in 2014 had helped revive the water bodies, but forest officials have said that the rainfall deficit of 16% in Odisha this year could mean very little water in the sanctuary by next summer.

Spread over 193 sq. km, the sanctuary has 23 natural water bodies. Of these, Deras and Jhumka reservoirs are spread over nearly 10 acres each but these have very little water in them. It is feared that the water scarcity will eventually force the elephants to move out of the sanctuary resulting in increased human-elephant conflict.

A total of 23 elephants were found in the sanctuary during 2012-13 census. This year, the number has dwindled to eight.

Source: Riyan Ramanath V. 'Deficit rain may hit Chandaka reserves', *The Times of India*, 24/08/15.

RAJASTHAN

NTCA directs Rajasthan to bring back T-24 to the wild

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has said that tiger T-24 (also known as Ustad) — shifted from the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve to Sajjanganrh zoo recently (Editorial, *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3) — was not a man-

eater and that the state government should release the big cat back into the wild. Tiger T-24 was shifted from the tiger reserve on May 16 after the reserve declared it a man-eater for killing a forest guard.

The NTCA had constituted a three-member expert committee to look into the translocation of T-24. It has, in its report, questioned the state government over shifting T-24 to a zoo instead of another location in the wild against legal provisions, established norms and standard operating procedure. The report also notes that the reasons considered in arriving at the conclusion that T-24 cannot be rehabilitated in the wild as required under Section 11 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 are not mentioned in the orders of the Chief Wildlife Warden. The NTCA report has also pointed out that all three attacks by T-24 on humans — cited by the state government — occurred when humans ventured too close to the tiger inside his territory. There was “considerable time gap between the attacks” and rest of the time T-24 had stayed in his territory depending on the natural prey base. The report takes the state forest department to task for not keeping the NTCA in the loop and proceeding with translocation without its prior permission. The first formal report on translocation reached the NTCA nine days after the tiger had been transferred to the Sajjangarh zoo in Udaipur.

The NTCA has also called for regulation of tourism and for developing a master plan to facilitate movement of pilgrims through the reserve. It has also noted that the staff at Ranthambore required “training in many domains related to tourism and skills on field craft in wildlife science”.

Source: Mahim Pratap Singh, ‘T-24 not a maneater, bring him back to the wild: NTCA to state govt’, *The Indian Express*, 26/07/15
Sudhanshu Mishra, ‘Tiger board tears into Rajasthan government for shifting Ustaad’, *Mail Today*, 25/07/15.

SIKKIM

Concern over Red Panda habitat degradation in Sikkim

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India, has expressed concern over the dwindling and degrading habitat of the Red Panda in Sikkim. Though the population of the animal is on the rise in the state, habitat degradation and increased tourism activities are creating disturbances, especially since a large part of the animal’s habitat falls outside the protected area (PA) network. An increase in the population of feral dogs and other predatory animals is also leading to predation of the animal.

WWF India’s initiatives for Red Panda conservation in the Eastern Himalayas began in 2005 by identifying potential habitats in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. In Sikkim, a 1341 sq. km area was identified, of which above 60% is outside the PA network.

As part of the WWF-India’s ‘Long Term Survival of Red Pandas in Sikkim’ project, habitat surveys were carried out along with the forest department along Pangolakha (2008- 10), Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary (2010- 12), West district and Khangchendzonga National Park and Biosphere Reserve (2014-15). The surveys revealed that there are around 300-350 Red pandas in the state. This, however, is believed to be a rough and conservative estimate and there is a need for more surveys to come up with a more precise number.

Source: Tamanna Tamang, ‘Under threat from humans Sikkim Red Panda’, *The Statesman*, 15/08/15.

TAMIL NADU

Madras High Court gives priority to restoration of Shola forests

The Madras High Court has decided to give top priority to restoration of Shola forests in Kodaikanal, the Nilgiris, Palani and the entire Western Ghats in the state. A division bench of Justices R. Sudhakar and V.M. Velumani

directed the forest department (FD) officials to file a report listing out steps taken by them pursuant to interim directions issued by the court in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) petition on February 27 last year. The interim order stated that the authorities concerned should take steps to remove exotic species such as wattle and eucalyptus that had invaded marshes, Shola forests and grasslands on the Western Ghats and formulate a comprehensive scheme for restoration of Shola forests.

The Special Government Pleader informed the court that pursuant to the interim order, a meeting of forest and revenue officials was convened on March 18 last year by the then Additional Chief Secretary, and an expert committee was formed to study wattle and eucalyptus menace. According to proceedings issued by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests on March 26, 2014, the expert committee was to be headed by the then Chief Conservator of Forests (Research), who urged the court to give some more time for the committee to file its report. The petitioner, on the other hand, has contended that the forest officials were hesitating to remove the eucalyptus and wattle trees by misinterpreting an order passed by the Supreme Court on November 25, 2005 with respect to removal of dead and wind fallen trees.

The division bench directed the government as well as the petitioner counsel to submit all relevant documents including the 2005 apex court order and said that it would hear the case on a weekly basis and issue appropriate directions. They also permitted the counsel for an intervening petitioner, to submit the arguments to support the apprehension that the FD officials might use the annihilated wattle and eucalyptus trees for commercial purpose.

Source: 'Top priority to restoration of Shola forests: High Court', *The Hindu*, 05/08/15.

UTTARAKHAND

NGT asks for clarifications over helicopter service impact on wildlife in Kedarnath WLS

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought responses from the Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Uttarakhand State Government, and the National Board for Wildlife in response to an NGO plea raising concern over the threat to the flora and fauna due to regular operation of helicopters in the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary. A large number of pilgrims, intending to avoid the 16 km trek to visit the Kedarnath shrine in Rudraprayag district, opt for the chopper services to reach the destination. The NGO, Doaba Paryavaran Samiti, has contended that helicopter operations in this area for religious tourism were seriously disturbing the ecosystem and wildlife of the sanctuary.

In its plea, the NGO has said that a senior forest official has written a letter to the authorities citing the impact of helicopters on the wildlife here. The noise of the low-flying helicopters is said to be adversely affecting the breeding of endangered species. The plea pointed out further that the Conservator of Forest, Kedarnath Wildlife Division, has also written a letter to the Van Sanrakshak, Nandadevi Biosphere Reserve and apprised him that no aviation company had taken consent from the authorities and were, therefore, flying illegally over the sanctuary.

Source: 'Chopper services in Kedarnath: NGT notice to Centre, Uttarakhand', www.zeenewsindia.com, 24/08/15.

River rafting camps along the Ganga come under NGT scanner

River rafting camps in Uttarakhand have come under the scanner of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) following a petition filed by a non-profit organization, Social Action for Forest and Environment (SAFE), alleging that the rafting camps violate the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the Environment (Protection) Act,

1986, and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. The camping area along the Shivpuri-Rishikesh stretch of the River Ganga has increased from 2,000 sq. meter in 1994-1995 to 1,80,000 sq. meter in 2009, and SAFE has said that this is due to haphazard and unregulated licensing without any consideration of the carrying capacity of the river.

The petition says that land has been flattened and a number of trees cut for the 30-40 camping sites and almost 800-1000 river rafting beach camps that have come up along the river. Locals also argue that the camps and trekking activities have contributed to the deforestation in the region. The problem of solid waste disposal has also gone up because the campsites do not have adequate sewage and sanitation facilities and it ends up eventually in the river due to rains. Vehicular traffic has also increased on account of the rafting camps and this has brought its own set of problems.

According to a study conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India in June 2010, camping activities situated in the forests force or attract the animals to use the edges of the beach. Further, camp-owners play loud music at night, which disturbs the wildlife. These are the reasons for which the petitioner has petitioned the NGT to set up a proper mechanism of regulating these activities.

Camp-owners have said, meanwhile, that they too are concerned and not every rafting camp is guilty. Many follow rules and regulations and it is only some who do not comply with the rules in a bit to attract people to their enterprise.

Source: Deeksha Teri. 'City's popular weekend sport comes under scanner', *The Hindu*, 16/08/15.

Human-leopard conflict on the rise in Pauri district

Reports indicate that human-leopard conflict is on the rise in the Pauri district in Uttarakhand. Of the six forest ranges in Pauri district, the Pokhra, Pauri and Damdaval areas are said to be the worst affected. In May this year, the

Ekeshwar block of the Damdaval forest range witnessed a series of killings by leopards, and at least 22 persons have died in leopard attacks in the Garhwal forest division alone in the last three years.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had long back initiated a study to assess the level of the human-leopard conflict in Pauri district. The report had attributed the existence of high-conflict zones in the district to the rise in human habitations and domination of high scrub. The WII has strongly advocated area-specific wildlife management plans to mitigate the conflict. The forest department says they are taking measures to deal with the conflict including ensuring that the compensation amount in case of loss of human life or livestock reaches the victims immediately.

Source: Jotirmay Thapliyal, 'Man-animal conflict: Pauri bears the brunt during winter season', *The Tribune*, 05/08/15.

WEST BENGAL

Railways reduce night trains running through PAs in Assam, West Bengal

The Indian Railways has reduced the number of night passenger trains passing through protected areas – especially those having large elephant populations – in Assam and West Bengal by 76 percent. Only about a quarter of the trains are running in the wildlife section in the region which comes under the Siliguri and Alipurduar junctions of Alipurduar division. All the goods trains passing through this stretch have been put under the speed limit of 25 km per hour and the Sampark Kranti Express that used to originate from Guwahati has been diverted from its earlier route that passed through a wildlife sanctuary.

The information was provided recently to the Supreme Court by the Railways in response to a public interest litigation seeking directions to regulate the movement of the trains to prevent deaths of elephants on account of collision with the fast moving trains.

Source: 'Trains passing through wildlife sanctuaries in east reduced, SC told', www.canindia.com, 24/08/15.

Ivory worth Rs. 8 lakh seized in Jalpaiguri; three arrested

Ivory worth Rs. 8 lakh, which was on its way to Bhutan, was seized in Jalpaiguri by the forest department (FD) officials in the month of August. The ivory was said to have come from two elephants who had been killed in the forests of Buxa. The tusks had been cut and packed in boxes.

Acting on a tip off, FD officials stopped a car with three men coming from Buxa. Five pieces of ivory were recovered from a bag. The three men were arrested. The total weight of the ivory was four kg and it was to be sold to a contact in Siliguri at Rs. two lakh per kg.

Those arrested are believed to have links with Assam based poachers and one of them is known to have procured ivory in the past as well to sell it in Bhutan.

Source: 'Ivory worth Rs 8 lakh seized in Jalpaiguri', *Hindustan Times*, 05/08/15.

Remove Sundarbans BR from purview of CRZ: state govt.

The West Bengal state government has written to the Centre asking for deletion of the Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve (SBR) from Section 7iA(e) of the coastal regulation zone (CRZ) notification. As per this particular section, biosphere reserves are included in CRZ-I as a result of which even the thickly populated parts of the reserve will come under the provisions of the CRZ.

The SBR includes all areas south of virtual Dampier-Hodges Line (an imaginary line, passing through 24 Parganas South and North districts, which indicates the northernmost limits of estuarine zone affected by tidal fluctuations) encompassing thickly populated blocks of Haroa, Minakhan, Hasnabad, Sandeshkhali, Hinaglaganj in North 24 Parganas and Canning, Gosaba, Minakhan, Joynagar,

Mathurapur, Sagar, Kultoli, Patharpratima, Kakdwip, Namkhana, Sagar in South 24 Parganas. The administrative blocks are mostly built-up area with an estimated population of 38 lakh. The letter written by the state principal secretary, environment, Chandan Sinha, says that the inclusion of the entire area under CRZ-I would deprive thousands of people in the region of livelihood opportunities and defeat the very purpose of creating the biosphere reserve.

It has been argued that inclusion within the CRZ would hit the Sundarbans inhabitants hard as it would make difficult the implementation of even small projects like the construction of a school building, dispensaries, public rain-shelters, or a toilet. Tourism related activities will also be affected and it has been pointed out that a number of people have already been affected because of the closure of 15 hotels and resorts following a West Bengal Pollution Control Board closure notice.

It is also feared that the West Bengal Chief Minister's ambitious mega tourism development project for the Sundarbans (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 2) would be affected if SBR is included under CRZ-I. Even the government run tourist bungalow at Sajnekhali would have to be shut as it is in the heart of the sanctuary.

Source: 'CRZ puts Sundarbans in jeopardy', *The Times of India*, 03/08/15.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Nine out of 58 protected areas meet criteria for IUCN Green List

Of 58 protected areas evaluated in India, only nine (16%) would possibly meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Green List criteria. This is the conclusion drawn by IUCN's Global Protected Areas Programme authority that conducted this evaluation recently. It noted however that a further 38% could reach this level with some

targeted improvements in performance and that 14% of the assessed protected areas were poor in terms of management.

The IUCN has expressed willingness to collaborate with India on using the Green List standard to improve the performance of the country's conservation efforts. Officially launched in November last year at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, the Green List is the first global standard of good practices for protected areas. So far, eight countries – China and nations from Europe, Africa and South America – have partnered with the IUCN and have Green List protected areas as part of the programme.

Source: 'Few national parks, sanctuaries meet criteria for IUCN Green List', www.zeenews.india.com, 16/08/15.

Centre may conduct simultaneous elephant census in West Bengal, northeastern states to avoid duplication

The central government is considering the idea of conducting a simultaneous count of elephants in West Bengal and the states of the northeast in 2016. The idea of the simultaneous count has been made by West Bengal to ensure that repetition and counting errors are minimized as the elephants move between these states.

The range of the elephant extends from the eastern border of Nepal in north West Bengal through western Assam along the Himalayan foothills as far as the Mishmi hills in Arunachal Pradesh. From here it extends into eastern Arunachal Pradesh, the plains of upper Assam, and the foothills of Nagaland. Further west, it extends to the Garo and Khasi hills of Meghalaya to parts of the lower Brahmaputra plains and Karbi plateau in Assam. Isolated herds also occur in Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, and the Barak valley of Assam. The elephant population here is contiguous with that in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar.

Source: 'Bengal, northeast speculate joint elephant census to prevent repetition', www.firstpost.com, 24/08/15.

TSR Subramanian report rejected by the Parliamentary Standing Committee

A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has rejected the high-level committee (HLC) report that reviewed various acts administered by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The department-related PSC on Science & Technology chaired by Ashwani Kumar that was reviewing the HLC report has instead recommended that the government should constitute a new committee to review the laws. The report on the rejection was tabled before parliament recently. The committee noted that some of the essential recommendations made by the HLC "would result in an unacceptable dilution of the existing legal and policy architecture established to protect our environment".

The HLC, chaired by former cabinet secretary TSR Subramanian, was entrusted with the task of reviewing and suggesting amendments in environment-related laws in 2014. It was required to review the Environment Protection Act (1986), the Forest Conservation Act (1980), the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act (1974), and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act (1981) and the Indian Forest Act (1927) to bring them in line to their intended objectives. It was given three months for the task and the committee submitted its report in November 2014 (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 1 and Vol. XX, No. 5).

When the report of the HLC was taken up by the standing committee for review, it invited memoranda from various stakeholders on the recommendations made by the HLC. Considering the concerns and recommendations, the standing committee noted that the three-month period given to the HLC for reviewing six environmental acts was "too short" and that "there was no cogent reason for hurrying through with the report without comprehensive, meaningful and wider consultations with all the stakeholders". The standing committee said further that if the "government wishes to consider specific areas of environmental policy afresh, it may consider appointing another

committee by following established procedures and comprising acclaimed experts in the field who should be given enough time to enter into comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders so that the recommendations are credit worthy and well considered”.

Source: ‘Parliamentary Standing Committee rejects TSR Subramanian report on environmental laws’, *Down to Earth*, 24/07/15.

Trawl ban benefits benthic fauna

Researchers have found that the annual monsoon trawl ban is helping the bottom-dwelling benthic fauna recoup significantly. As the benthic fauna is the chief food source of demersal fishery, the recoupment could better sustain fishery resources, according to a scientific paper published recently by researchers of the Centre for Marine Living Resources and Ecology, Kochi.

The researchers reached the conclusion after assessing the outcome of four surveys on the bottom-dwelling fauna between 30 metre and 200 metre depth off Cape of Kanyakumari, Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam during the pre- and post-monsoon fishing holidays. The samples were collected as part of a research programme to assess the faunal standing stock and composition. The analysis of benthic fauna revealed that their population recorded three- to four-fold increase during the trawl ban period, which coincides with the monsoon season.

The study also revealed that polychaete worms, which constitute a major proportion of benthic fauna, also recorded an increase in species number during the period. The increase in fauna was found significantly supporting the demersal (the species that live in the bottom layer of water bodies) fishery. After the successful completion of the pilot study, plans are afoot to extend it to the South Eastern Arabian Sea, between Kanyakumari and Goa.

The fishing ban for mechanised trawling vessels is implemented for bringing down the fishing effort during peak spawning periods of commercially important species and

to reduce stress on the benthic fauna. The ban period along the Kerala coast is between June 15 and July 31.

Source: ‘Trawl ban favours benthic fauna too’, *The Hindu*, 02/08/15.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH / INDIA

Bangladesh and India to co-operate on keeping elephant corridors open

Bangladesh and India have agreed to keep open the corridors that elephants use to move across the boundary between the two countries. This would entail allowing gaps in the barbed wire fence that has come up along the border and also increasing vigilance to stop poaching and smuggling of wildlife and natural resources. The decision came at a meeting of forest officials from both the countries at Kolkata.

Elephant herds roam regions connecting Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and Nepal, using certain routes in districts that include Sylhet, Mymensingh, Sherpur and Khagrachari in Bangladesh. The construction of the barbed wire fencing a few years ago has increased human-elephant conflict. There are estimated to be around 200 elephants currently in Bangladesh while another 100 migrate from India. In the last 12 years, people killed 62 elephants while 226 people died in elephant attacks in the region.

Source: ‘Corridors for elephants - Dhaka, Delhi move to protect them’, www.thedailystar.net, 22/08/15.

BHUTAN

103 wild tigers in Bhutan

The first ever comprehensive survey of tigers in Bhutan has revealed that there are 103 tigers in the wild in the country. This is much higher than

the previous estimate of 75 tigers, which was not based on actual field surveys in any case. The survey was conducted entirely by Bhutanese scientists with the technical and financial support from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The results were released on July 29, Global Tiger Day.

Source: 'An Amazing 103 Wild Tigers Counted in Bhutan',
www.voicesnationalgeographic.com,
24/08/15.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

UN General Assembly passes resolution to tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recently passed a resolution on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife. It has urged the member states to take decisive steps to prevent, combat and eradicate illegal trade in wildlife within the existing international legal framework. The resolution A/69/L.80 expresses concern that illicit trafficking in protected species of wild fauna and flora is in some cases an increasingly sophisticated form of transnational organized crime that poses a threat to health and safety, security, good governance and the sustainable development of States.

The resolution is aimed at both supply and demand, including by strengthening the legislation necessary for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of offences,

treating certain wildlife offences as a serious crime, providing for illegal trade in wildlife offences to be treated as predicate offences (for anti-money laundering offences), supporting the exchange of evidence between States and taking steps to prohibit, prevent and counter corruption. It urges States to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products using targeted strategies to influence consumer behavior, emphasizes that the protection of wildlife must be part of a comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods and encourages States to address sustainable and alternative livelihoods for affected communities to enable them to benefit from wildlife and wilderness. It recognizes the legal framework provided by and the important role of CITES and the importance of other biodiversity-related international conventions.

The 25-member UN Group of Friends on Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking established in New York in December 2013 and co-chaired by Gabon and Germany has been instrumental in the preparation of the draft resolution. The stage was set by the two high level side events on the issue that were co-organized by Gabon and Germany in September 2013 and September 2014 in the margins of the UN General Assembly.

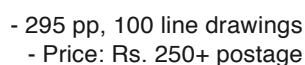
Source: 'CITES Secretariat welcomes UN General Assembly Resolution on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife', Press release issued by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered species of wild fauna and flora, 30/07/15.

Subscribe to the PA Update

(Annual subscription – Rs. 150)

Send a cheque in the name of Kalpavriksh to the editorial address. To get details for making an online transfer, write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com

Edited by PANKAJ SEKHSARIA



Perspective & Opinion: The Print Media's Kaziranga obsession – An analysis (Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi); A case study of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in western Assam (Sonali Ghosh); Snow leopards in the land of the rising sun (Yash Veer Bhatnagar); Karbi Anglong: A little known wilderness of Assam (Anwaruddin Choudhury); Elephants and other memories of the Garo Hills (Nimesh Ved); Dams in the North East (Neeraj Vagholikar) and Community conservation of wildlife (Neema Pathak)

To procure a copy write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com

Important Bird Areas Update

ANDHRA PRADESH

State proposes to reduce size of Kolleru WLS

The Andhra Pradesh government has proposed to redraw the boundary of the Kolleru Lake Wildlife Sanctuary from the +5 feet contour level to +3 feet contour. This will result in the reduction of the area of the sanctuary from the present 308 sq km to 135 sq km. Conservationists have expressed concern that the move favours the interests of commercial aquaculture whose methods and practices, have in the past, driven away the numerous bird species that are found here.

The National Board for Wildlife's (NBWL) standing committee has decided to form a three member working group to study all aspects of the matter. This will be the second time that an expert group will study the contentious issue since one detailed study, which did not recommend resizing of the sanctuary, was already carried out during UPA government's second term.

The new working group will have one expert from the Wildlife Institute of India, one member from the wildlife division and one member from the forest department of state government. They will be required to submit a report to NBWL within two months.

While arguing their case for resizing the boundary, state officials made a detailed presentation indicating that the sanctuary includes about 14,861 acres of private land which is the basis of livelihood of the local population. Inclusion of their land in the sanctuary had affected their livelihood and the state has said it is not in a position to provide compensation to them. The NBWL has, however, noted that the sanctuary was notified after an order of the high court of Andhra Pradesh and even the Centrally Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court ordered

removal of aquaculture fish tanks within the sanctuary area. The apex court had ordered demolition of fish tanks after it was highlighted that pisciculturists drove away the birds. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 1, Vol. XIX, Nos. 3 & 1 and Vol. XVIII, No. 6))

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Andhra Pradesh: National Board for Wildlife shelves proposal to resize Kolleru sanctuary', *DNA*, 24/08/15.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Two month fishing ban in Pong Dam reservoir lifted

The Himachal Pradesh fisheries department lifted the two-month ban on fishing in the Pong Dam reservoir from August 1. The ban is imposed for two months starting June 1 due to the breeding season of fish in the reservoir. 15 fisheries societies having around 2,480 fishermen as members, registered by the Fisheries Department, are not allowed to carry out fishing activities in these two months. Besides, the department also imposes ban on fishing in all rivers, *khuds* and streams during this season across the state.

The department gives an assistance of Rs 1,800 to every licence holder fisherman for the non-fishing season every year. Last year, 473 tonnes of fish had been produced in this reservoir and the department is expecting an enhanced production in this year. *Rahu, Katlam, Mahasheer, Singara, Mali, Kulbansh and Rogal* are the species that are fished in the reservoir.

Source: 'Himachal Pradesh: Fishing ban in Pong Dam reservoir ends', *The Tribune*, 02/08/15.

MAHARASHTRA

A booklet on 'Birds of Thane Creek' released

Maharashtra Forest Minister, Mr Sudhir Mungantiwar, recently released a booklet on the 'Birds of Thane Creek'. Published by the Mangrove Cell under the Central government's Indo-German GIZ Project on Coastal and Marine Protected Areas, it has been authored by noted birder, Sunjoy Monga.

The Maharashtra government recently declared a part of the Thane Creek spread over 1,690 acres as a 'Flamingo sanctuary' (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 4 and Vol. XX, No. 2). As many as 200 species of birds that include among others, greater and lesser flamingos, many species of waders, raptors, sand pipers, gulls and terns, and the osprey are found here.

Source: 'First ever documentation of bird species in Thane Creek released', Press Trust of India, 16/08/15.

ODISHA

Efforts on to get 'World Heritage Site' status for Bhitarkanika NP and Chilika Lake

The Bhitarkanika National Park (BNP) may soon get listed in UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list. According to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (wildlife), the Odisha Forest Department (FD) and Wildlife Institute of India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to carry out a study and for collating a wide-ranging bio-diversity dossier of the BNP for the UNESCO World Heritage Site listing. Once the required data and information is collected, they will forward it to the central government to take further steps. At present, BNP is under UNESCO scrutiny to ascertain if it deserves World Heritage Site status. Officials are also working hard to get the World Heritage Site status for the Chilika lake.

Source: Nikhil Agrawal. 'Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and Chilika Lake to be listed in World Heritage Site', www.pc-tablet.co.in, 15/08/15.

PUNJAB

Forest department alleges illegal construction inside Harike WLS

The Punjab Forest and Wildlife Preservation Department has alleged that a religious group from Bhucho Kalan, Bathinda, led by Baba Sukhdev Singh has entered the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary from the nozzle-area gate and commenced construction of a gurdwara. They say that though they have complained to the district authorities and reported the matter to the department headquarters at SAS Nagar, the encroachment remains. A boundary wall, bathroom and a room have already been constructed.

According to the wildlife officials, the land under encroachment falls in the revenue records of Talwandi Nipla village and stands formally notified in favour of the department, following the Ferozepur deputy commissioner's notification of 1999. It has been alleged that Baba Sukhdev Singh's group has got an illegal registry done of five *kanals* and 10 *marlas* (traditional units of land area) in 2008 from the naib tehsildar, Makhu.

Baba Harjit Singh, who is engaged in the gurdwara's construction has claimed, however, that since the naib tehsildar had undertaken the registry in their favour, they were well within their rights to construct the building.

Source: Vikram Jit Singh, 'Tussle over Harike', *Hindustan Times*, 01/08/15.

TAMIL NADU

Recovery of Curlew sandpiper at Point Calimere in July points to a possible shift in migratory pattern

The recovery of a colour flagged Curlew sandpiper at Point Calimere by ornithologists of the Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study Centre (BMSC) has indicated a possible shift in the migratory trend of the birds that traverse up to 11,000 km from their

breeding grounds in the Arctic region to Point Calimere and the adjoining Great Vedaranyam swamp. The bird had been originally caught and marked in Chilika in Odisha on January 16.

Dr. S. Balachandran of the BMSC, said that it could not be concluded immediately whether the bird went to its regular breeding spot in the Arctic and returned or had simply flown east heading straight to Point Calimere. It is surmised from the findings and the bird's feather pattern that it had returned from an unsuccessful breeding sojourn. He observed further that a bird such as the Curlew sandpiper, weighing 70 gm and flying over 7,000 km in just about a week, arrives here only by late August and its early arrival necessitates a study on whether there might be a shift in their migratory pattern due to any adverse influence on mud flats en route and other habitats that the birds use.

Source: L. Renganathan. 'Sandpiper's early arrival at Point Calimere surprises ornithologists', *The Hindu*, 26/07/15.

UTTAR PRADESH

Final notification for ESZ of Okhla Bird Sanctuary to be issued soon

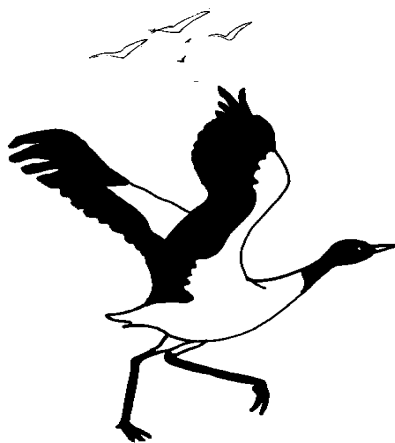
The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) will soon issue a final notification for the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Okhla Bird Sanctuary. As per the notification issued last year by the MoEFCC, the ESZ will be the area up to 100 metre from the eastern, western and southern boundary and up to 1.27 km from the northern boundary of the sanctuary (PA Updates Vol. XX, Nos. 6, 4 & 1).

The move is expected, in particular, to benefit as many as 55,000 home-buyers in and around the area and will also help release several thousand square feet of building area in future. Once the final notification is issued, the government will allow the home buyers outside the ESZ to get occupancy certificates of their

flats, which had been pending for quite some time as the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had passed an order barring development of any infrastructure within 10-km radius from the sanctuary boundary.

Real estate developers have welcomed the move. Housing projects of various developers, including Jaypee Green, DLF, ATS, 3C Developers and Supertech, were affected due to order of the NGT. About one lakh homes are currently being developed in this region. The DLF group has been developing a shopping mall in the area.

Source: 'Home buyers to benefit from govt's move on Okhla Bird Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 18/08/15.



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)

A Decade Ago

Protected Area Update 57, October 2005

ODISHA

16 cheetal deaths in Bhitarkanika in August

At least 16 *cheetal* were reported dead in the Bhitarkanika National Park in the month of August. Though the exact reason of the deaths has not been ascertained, it was feared that these had occurred because the animals were affected by pneumonia.

The viscera of the dead animals has been sent to the Veterinary College of the Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology for examination. In a similar incident 12 deer had died last year in a very short span of time and investigations had revealed that the death had been caused by pneumonia.

Source: Surendra Patra. 'Now, spotted deer deaths in Orissa', *Tehelka*, 27/08/05.

RAJASTHAN

Tigers to be re-introduced to Sariska

The Rajasthan government is said to have taken a decision to re-introduce tigers to the Sariska Tiger Reserve. According to the plan, tigers from Ranthambore TR or from the Kanha TR in Madhya Pradesh would be shifted to Sariska but only after Sariska was made safe for them. No timeframe, has however, been fixed for this re-introduction.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of the state has said that the plan would be implemented with the help of experts and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), which has suggested that five tigers be introduced into the forests here. He also pointed out that certain steps would have to be taken before the tigers can be brought here. These include diverting of road traffic from some of the prime areas inside the reserve and the relocation of villages that are presently inside.

Sariska has 28 villages and 15 are to be shifted in the first phase of relocations. The government is said to be working on a five-year plan to remove all villages from the sanctuary. (Also see *PA Updates* 55 & 50)

Source: Saurabh Sinha. 'Rajasthan plots return of big cats', *The Times of India*, 09/09/05.

TAMIL NADU

Demand to include Singara range in Mudumalai WLS

Environmentalists have appealed to the State Government to revive the pending Government Order (GO) MS No. 216 dated July 23, 1998 (Environment and Forests) to merge the 'Singara Forest Range' with the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. Plans for the expansion of the Mudumalai WLS were abandoned eight years ago, when political pressure was applied in support of the settlers, who were said to have encroached upon the forest area in Masinagudi.

As per the GO, around 18,000 hectares of Segur Forest Range and 6,000 hectares of the Singara Forest Range should be brought under the control of the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, on the recommendation of the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF).

The plan was first mooted during the previous AIADMK regime. Later, the DMK Government had issued orders to that effect. The GO was signed by the then secretary to the State Government, K S Sripathy.

If the GO materializes, lands presently under government and private ownership as also the revenue generated by them would come under the control of the sanctuary. The GO was not effected because of opposition to the move by the local population. (Also see *PA Updates* 56 & 50)

Source: 'Demand for merger of Ooty forest ranges', *The New Indian Express*, 08/09/05.

Readers Write

Groans about drones and ‘militarized’ conservation in India

Trishant Simlai, in his *Perspective* article (‘Militarized conservation in the drone age’; *PA Update*, Vol. XXI, No. 4), characterises technological improvements to prevent poaching as ‘militarized’ conservation, resembling a war-like strategy, betraying conservation’s core values.

I argue that there are fallacies in the author’s arguments. First, he generalizes that use of technology (drones, camera-traps, GPS, and satellite images) to prevent poaching borders militarized conservation. This dismisses tremendous advantages of technology in tackling increasingly complex challenges in endangered species conservation. Rhino-horn, elephant ivory, and tiger body parts have enormous demand in illegal markets. In Kaziranga, gangs now carry AK-47s to poach rhinos, threatening lives of forest staff as well. Local hunting threatens large mammals in many forests across India. Effective anti-poaching has ensured that one-horned rhinos and tigers survive in the wild. I argue that such technology is an effective appendage in endangered species protection. For example, camera-traps have been effective in catching poachers in some tiger reserves in India.

Second, he argues that locals find drones (or camera-traps) an attempt to violate their privacy and as pervasive surveillance. The argument is akin to not having surveillance cameras to monitor traffic violators in cities, as it invades privacy of other motorists. I acknowledge privacy issues for local people residing in forests. However, this requires better management, where locals are duly-informed about such technology. An important precursor in using surveillance technology would be to assess why poaching is a grave problem in a region, and employ a case-specific approach to deter poaching.

Poverty plagues millions of people, especially those dependent on forest resources. A worthy target for conservation should be to reduce acute poverty, and offer alternate income

generation; however let’s acknowledge that this takes time and will not alone prevent extinctions. Motivations to poach differ, from abject poverty to greed, and it is a challenging problem at hand. Increasing opportunity costs with poaching of endangered species, if it benefits from better technology, should not be thrown out of a conservationist’s toolbox.

- **Girish Arjun Punjabi** is associated with WRCS (<http://www.wrcsindia.org/>) and RWC (<http://www.rwcindia.org/>).

The views expressed are personal

Trishant Simlai responds:

The purpose of my article was to initiate discussion and debate on the rising militarization in conservation, and I welcome the responses. One of my central argument’s is that the effectiveness of technologies such as drones and camera traps to curb poaching remains untested. Rhino poaching has only increased in Kaziranga inspite of policies like shoot to kill. Furthermore, protecting forest guards via state laws and granting bonuses if they succesfully kill or wound a poacher only amounts to a reactive strategy that invites misuse of power. The example of poachers using AK47’s must be dealt with caution as there is only a single media report that claims so. This is also a narrative that follows the global discourse of linking terrorism and conservation without adequate evidence.

Similarly, the parallel drawn between using surveillance cameras in cities for traffic violators and similar technologies in protected areas is at best a tenuous one. The forest dweller is more susceptible to the invasion of privacy than a city dweller who is socially, economically and politically more powerful.

Militarised solutions fail because they do not resolve the complex underlying factors driving poaching, the role of global trade networks and the continued demand from end-user markets. I agree that addressing complex issues like poverty and the drivers of poaching takes time; however it is imperative that short-term solutions that leave room for exploitation must be debated and approached with extreme caution.

PERSPECTIVE

Matheran - Forest on the head

It takes a couple of hours on an average from any part of Mumbai to reach the hill station of Matheran – a destination that is very popular on account of its weather that is pleasant and welcoming all year round. Hordes of people can be seen visiting the place on weekends and holidays but only few know that this bustling hill-station close to Mumbai is much more than just a hill station.

Part of the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot, it is thickly forested - Matheran meaning ‘forest on the head’ in Marathi, and the forests are rich in plant and animal life. The forest here is dominated by Anjan *memecylon umbellatum* trees and the state animal of Maharashtra, the Giant Squirrel known locally as the Shekharoo is also seen here commonly. Matheran is a bird watcher’s paradise too. More than 80 species of birds have been recorded here, of which at least 20 are seasonal migrants. These include, among others, the Common buzzard, Eurasian sparrow-hawk, Indian blue robin, Malabar whistling thrush, Square-tailed bulbul and White-rumped shama. The forests are also home to many plants that are endemic to the Western Ghats.

A team of two individuals has on a voluntary basis been documenting the biodiversity of the hill station for the last three years. The intention is to prepare a comprehensive checklist of Matheran’s flora and fauna and to use it eventually to create awareness about sensitivity and importance of the hill station. We have found direct and indirect evidence of the presence of a number of mammals as well; this includes among others, the Ruddy mongoose, the pangolin, leopards and civets.

Most of those visiting Matheran are, unfortunately, unaware of the natural wealth and rich biodiversity of Matheran and there is an urgent need to create awareness about this. This

is particularly needed because the place is under tremendous pressure even though it was declared an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) many years ago. The local administration has put up sign-boards indicating the sensitivity of the place but this generally overlooked the visitors. This is where other agencies, NGOs and individuals can and should play a major role.

- **Rajesh Sachdev** is one among the two volunteers (the other is Samrat Godambe), documenting the biodiversity of Matheran.
Email: rajeshdsachdev@gmail.com

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

For private circulation/ Printed matter

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

To