

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXI, No. 6

December 2015 (No. 118)

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Protected Area Update

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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 significant development in KMTR

Spread over nearly 900 sq km in southern Tamil Nadu, the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) is a rich mosaic of different forest types and a treasure trove of climatic, geological, plant and animal diversity. An important, even indelible part of this landscape is the estate of the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC), a smaller mosaic that is constituted by tea, coffee and cardamom plantations, human settlements, and natural forests. It appears at first sight to be a dimension of the landscape that is completely out of place; a tea and coffee estate is, after all, the last thing that comes to mind in the context of a tiger reserve. And yet, it is a reminder that what are tiger reserves and protected areas today have a much deeper and complex history than is visible on the surface.

Spread over an area of 34 sq km, the estate stands on land leased in 1929 to the BBTC by the then zamindar of the area for a lease period of 99 years. It is, in many ways, representative of the situation across the length of the Western Ghats, where plantations of different exotics cover large areas including within protected areas. These plantations have also been sites of conflict and contestation – history, livelihoods and economic activity on the one hand; ecological degradation, fragmented forests and human-wildlife conflict on the other.

The issue of the BBTC lands has also been at the heart of an ongoing legal battle between the forest department (FD) and the estate owners. While the FD says the land belongs to the state and should revert back when the lease expires in 2028, the estate owners have a completely different take on the issue. In a significant order passed recently (see News from Tamil Nadu, pg. 12), and one which could be the first step in the land coming back to the FD in 2028, the Tirunelveli Sessions court said

that the BBTC was only a lessee and the land did indeed belong to the state. The FD and the conservation community has been very pleased with the development but it is to state the obvious that the matter is not yet settled and the legal battles will only intensify as the end of the lease period draws closer.

There is also the opinion that BBTC has been an important player in conservation initiatives here in the past, and this has continued into the present. There is also the issue of the economic activity of the tea estate as also the thousands of livelihoods that are dependent on it. One only hope that all of this will be taken into consideration as we move into the future and decisions will be taken that are in the best interests of the forests that constitute the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and the rich and varied wildlife that finds refuge here.

It could well set the template then for how similar situations in other parts can also be resolved.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Evidence of tiger presence in Sri Lanka Malleswara WLS



An amateur photographer recently got photos in the Sri Lanka Malleswara Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) of what are believed to be tiger pugmarks. This includes one male, one female and a cub, and is believed to be the first evidence of tigers in the sanctuary after many years. Wildlife officials had similarly reported tiger presence here in April, earlier this year, but camera traps they put up had failed to get any

pictures of the large cat. Officials said that the tigers may have moved south from the Gundla Brahmeswaram WLS in Kurnool district.

The Lanka Malleswara WLS is at the heart of a controversy with ruling party leaders from Rayalaseema making efforts to get the ban on night traffic through the sanctuary that connects Siddavatnam and Badvel lifted. Officials have said that opening up of night traffic will put these tigers at risk and also increase red sanders smuggling here. They have noted a decrease in timber smuggling following a ban on night traffic, and fear this could change if traffic is allowed again at night.

Source: Balakoteswara Rao, 'Tigers foray into Kadapa forest?' *The Times of India*, 09/10/15.

Exotic plant species pose a threat to Seshachalam BR

Exotic plant species planted in the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve (SBR) as part of the special afforestation drive are reported to have been frequently causing forest fires. According to a senior forest official, the exotic species were of short rotation and they attained quick maturity. This has resulted in increasing the combustible load in the forests, causing an increase in the frequency of forest fires here. The exotics are also threatening native species such as the critically-endangered *Cycas beddomei*.

The afforestation drive which began in 1980 had continued till 2005 through block plantations. Pointing out that the exotic species were planted near the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) enclosure, the official said around 25% of exotic trees had already died in an area of 1,300 hectares.

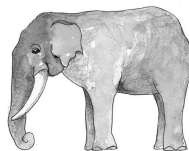
While plantation of exotics continues in the enclosure and the surrounding reserve forest, plans are afoot to replace exotic plants with native species, now that the forest department has intervened.

Source: Y. Mallikarjun, 'Exotic plant species a threat to Seshachalam biosphere', *The Hindu*, 26/10/15.

ASSAM

Numaligarh Refinery's golf course violates environmental rules; poses threat to elephants near Kaziranga NP, Deopahar RF

The Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL)'s golf course project has come under serious criticism for destroying a vital elephant corridor adjoining the Kaziranga National Park, and leading to increased human-animal conflict and elephant mortality here. The NRL has constructed a wall and put up barbed wire fencing and razor edges to prevent elephants moving along the corridor of the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong reserve from entering the golf course.



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed NRL to show how many trees have been cut for the golf project, how many were planted in compensation and what has been their survival rate. The NGT has also directed the Assam government to inspect the location.

The divisional forest officer (DFO), Golaghat, has written to the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) complaining about the activities of NRL such as removing forest cover and cutting and mining highlands and hillocks for the creation of the golf course very close to the Deopahar Reserve Forest. The NGT has directed the SEIAA to take a final view in the matter.

Source: Akanksha Jain, 'Refinery to share how many trees felled for golf course in elephant corridor', *The Hindu*, 08/10/15.

Forest guards awarded for their contribution in anti-poaching drive

The Assam Forest Department recently awarded 49 forest guards and security personnel for their successful anti-poaching operations in the state in the past year. The forest protection personnel were handed a citation and a cheque for Rs. 2,000 each during the concluding function of the 61st Wildlife Week.

During the operations between September 2014 and August this year, the forest guards and personnel of the State Forest Protection Force killed over 10 poachers, arrested some and foiled poaching of one-horned rhinos. They also seized arms and ammunition from the poachers.

Those who were awarded had taken part in anti-poaching operations in the Kaziranga National Park (NP), the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP, the Pobitora and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries and the Garbhanga reserve forest.

Source: 'Awards for forest guards', *The Telegraph*, 08/10/15.

Bridge across rail line in Gibbon WLS to connect Hoolock Gibbons

The Assam Forest Department (FD) has built an iron bridge measuring 10.5 metres in height and 9.5 metres in width to connect Hoolock Gibbons living on either side of a train track that divides the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary. Iron ropes have been tied on both sides of the green-coloured bridge and fixed to trees on either side of the tracks as an approach way to the bridge. The bridge has been constructed by the Northeast Frontier Railway with a funding of Rs. 8.34 lakh by the state FD.

Forest officials said that the bridge will help movement of the animals, restore gene flow and also prevent inbreeding. In the past few years, fruit-bearing and canopy trees have been planted by the FD in association with Aaranyak, an NGO, to extend the forest cover near the bridge area. Creepers would be planted in the area so that the bridge is camouflaged and the animals can start using it.

A decade ago there were about 20 gibbon families with a population of below 70. According to a census carried out six years ago, there were about 30 families of gibbons with a population of 110, a majority of whom are residing on the northern side of the forest. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XV, No. 4; Vol XIV, No. 1 and Nos. 57 & 50)

Source: Wasim Rahman. 'Bridge to connect gibbon families', *The Telegraph*, 14/10/15.

Kaziranga tiger poisoned in Karbi Anglong; poachers arrested

Two persons from Bagori were arrested recently by the Assam Forest Department (FD) along with their vehicle, a tiger skin and 31 pieces of bones. The parts are believed to be of a tiger from the Kaziranga National Park that was reportedly poisoned in the adjoining Karbi Anglong Hills. One of the arrested was a casual worker with the FD.

Experts have said that the incidence is proof that tiger surveillance has suffered in Kaziranga on account of the focus on the rhino and that efforts are needed to address this gap.

Source: 'Tiger poisoned in hills, ripples in Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 15/10/15.

DELHI

Rs. 20 crore worth of ivory, ivory products confiscated in Delhi

In what is believed to be one of the biggest hauls of its kind, elephant ivory and ivory products worth Rs. 20 crore were confiscated recently from the thickly populated Vijay Park area in East Delhi. Officials had to hire a lorry to transport the material that was stored in 39 boxes and weighed 520 kg. It is believed that a part of the contraband was also intended for foreign markets.

Two people who were arrested in the matter are Umesh Agarwal who provided the ivory and products to buyers in Delhi and Eagle Rajan, who provided the tusks to Agarwal.

The tusks are to be brought to Malayattoor in Kerala after official procedures are completed.

Source: Jayan Menon. 'Large stash of ivory confiscated in Delhi', *Malayala Manorma*, 12/10/15.

GUJARAT

Stray dogs biggest threat to blackbucks in Mehsana district



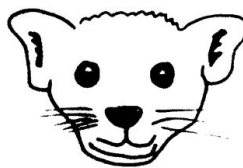
HS Singh, member of the National Board for Wildlife, has in his recent paper titled 'Stray dogs – Major threat to wildlife' noted that stray dogs are the biggest threat to Blackbucks in the Mehsana district of Gujarat. Dogs are the main reason, he concludes, for the population of the blackbuck here falling from 5,000 to 1,000 in the last decade.

Blackbucks in Gujarat are concentrated in an area of 3,000 square km spread between Velavadar in Bhavnagar and Kadi in Mehsana and the population is said to have dwindled to half – from 25,000 in early 2000 to 12,000 in 2015. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Gujarat, has said, however, that except for Velavadar, which recorded 4,000 blackbucks, no systematic count has taken place elsewhere in Gujarat.

Singh has also noted that apart from the blackbuck, the dogs are also responsible for killing the common fox and desert fox in the Wild Ass Sanctuary in the Little Rann of Kutch where they are reared as pets by salt pan workers.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Did dogs kill 80% of Kadi's blackbucks?' *The Times of India*, 25/10/15.

No funds for lion conservation in greater Gir area



The Centre has once again denied funds under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) for the long-term conservation of the Asiatic Lion in the greater Gir area. The state had first drawn up a project worth Rs. 264 crore for the long-term conservation of the lions in the area outside the protected area during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime. The then Planning Commission asked for the project to be scaled down, following which a Rs. 150 crore proposal was sent to the centre. It had been agreed then that Rs. 135 crore would be provided by the Centre, while the remaining would be the state government's contribution.

However, in 2011 the UPA government, in a reply to a question in the Lok Sabha stated that "the Planning Commission did not provide additional funds for supporting the project, and advised the ministry that it should be supported within the budget allocated for the centrally sponsored scheme of IDWH. Despite a paucity of funds under the scheme, financial assistance of Rs. 6.74 crore was provided to the Gujarat government for the year 2010-11 for some activities proposed during the first year of the project.

In 2015, BJP Junagadh MP Rajesh Chudasma sought to know whether the Centre proposed to grant necessary funds for the conservation of Asiatic Lions and also the quantum of funds to be released for the project. Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar, replied in the Lok Sabha that the requisite funds were not available under the IDWH.

The state has 523 lions according to the 2015 census. Of these, 170-odd lions were reported from outside the Gir sanctuary.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Lion conservation: NDA says no funds under IDHW', *The Times of India*, 20/10/15.

Nearly 100 lion cubs sighted in Gir

Forest department (FD) officials have said that they have sighted nearly 100 lion cubs in Gir in the four-month period of June 15 to October 15 when the park is closed for tourists. The 14th lion census conducted in May 2015 had reported 523 lions in the Gir forest, other protected areas and revenue areas in Junagadh, Gir Somnath, Amreli and Bhavnagar districts of Saurashtra. The FD has said the increase in lion numbers here is expected to boost tourist arrivals as well.

Source: 'Gir roars after sightings of 100 Asiatic lion pups', *Mid-Day*, 16/10/15.

KARNATAKA

Karnataka starts process of reclaiming encroached forestland

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has said that it has completed the process of identifying forestland under encroachment in the state and a process for reclaiming these lands has also started. An affidavit in the matter has been filed before the Supreme Court. A majority of the encroachment in the state is said to be in the Shivamogga district followed by Chikkamagaluru and the Canara region. A decision has been taken by state government that all encroachments above three acres have to be removed in the first instance. For encroachments of less than three acres the government will take a separate decision on rehabilitating people in those lands.

According to data by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) at least 81,776 hectares of forestland in the state is under encroachment. Madhya Pradesh tops the list with 3.7 lakh hectares of forest land encroached, followed by Assam and Telangana. Karnataka is sixth on the list.

Source: Stanley Pinto. 'Reclaiming encroached forest land in Karnataka has started: PCCF', *The Times of India*, 06/11/15.

CIC for information on projects proposed at Challakere in Chitradurga to be made public

The Central Information Commission issued an order on 23rd October 2015 directing the Central Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the Karnataka Government and project proponents to make public immediately, information relating to the projects proposed at Challakere in Chitradurga district. The CIC also slammed the authorities and fined guilty officers for not providing the information and also for non-compliance with National Green Tribunal (NGT)'s August 2014 orders in the matter.

The NGT orders had been issued in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Bangalore based Environment Support Group (ESG) questioning the decision to develop a massive nuclear-military-industrial complex in the ecologically sensitive Amrit Mahal Kaval grassland ecosystems of Challakere taluk, arguing that the projects were proposed in comprehensive violation of land use, siting, environmental and wildlife protection laws and also in total secrecy.

The NGT in its decision issued on 27th August 2014 had directed the MoEFCC and Karnataka Government to allow the projects to move forward only if they were in accordance with law and on ensuring clearance conditions were "verifiable and measurable" and open to public review. The NGT also decided to restore cultural, economic and social rights of local pastoral, artisanal and agrarian communities that suffered following the illegal transfer of 10,000 acres of the Kaval and specifically instructed project proponents not to build walls and obstruct in any manner Right to Life and



Livelihoods and access to water of about 70 villages directly dependent on the Kavals.

The NGT had recorded that the Kavals are an important habitat

for critically endangered species like the Great Indian bustard and the Lesser florican in addition to blackbuck and a range of endemic flora and fauna. The orders of the NGT had, however, been ignored forcing the ESG to take up the matter with the CIC.

Source: Press release by the ESG, dated 28/10/15.

Conservationists to challenge HC order allowing Navy to resume target practice on Netrani

Conservationists in Uttara Kannada district have decided to challenge in the Supreme Court the Karnataka High Court order allowing the Indian Navy to resume target practice on Netrani Island. The Navy had been restrained from using the islands for target practice in 2011 after environmentalists pointed to the dangers it poses to the terrestrial and marine life here.

As per the findings of the Karnataka biodiversity board, corals in the peripheral waters have begun to grow and vegetation on the islands had started to regenerate. The biodiversity board members have argued that the Navy has not taken the permission of the local government to use the island by saying that it was out of Indian territory. The Bhatkal Taluk Panchayat, too has said that the island is charted within its territorial waters at a distance of 19 nautical miles from the coast.

Source: M Raghuram and Marx Tejaswi, 'Uttara Kannada Greens to Fight Karnataka HC Order on Netrani Islands', *The New Indian Express*, 07/10/15.

Activists seek ban on night traffic inside Bhimgad WLS

Wildlife activists have demanded a ban on vehicular movement at night on the Sindhanoor-Hemmadaga stretch of the state highway passing through Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). One national and four state highways pass through wildlife habitats in the region and the Sindhanoor-Hemmadaga state highway passes through the heart of Bhimgad WLS. A

number of wild animals including gaur, chital, jackal, civets and langur have been killed here by speeding vehicles over the past five years. The roads where such incidents occur include the Belagavi-Chorla state highway and the Alnavar-Ramnagar state highway, which passes through the Nagargali forest.

It has been suggested that traffic should be diverted along the NH-4A, which is being considered for widening. The activists have also said that sign boards warning drivers in forest areas could also be installed and that mitigation measures are required on the roads passing through forest areas where realignment was not possible.

Recently, a sub-committee appointed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests has recommended that a ban on night-time traffic should be declared in critical tiger habitats, national parks and sanctuaries. It also mentioned that night passes may be provided for villagers/communities living within the PAs so that the ban did not impact them.

Source: Vijaykumar Patil. 'Wild animal deaths: ban sought on vehicle movement at night', *The Hindu*, 19/10/15.

KERALA

Foresters nab a gang of elephant poachers

A gang of elephant poachers has been nabbed by officials from the Periyar east forest division. Those arrested have confessed to poaching elephants in Meghamala, Ooty, and Kunoor. They had killed 20 elephants in the forests on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border and sold about 200 kg of tusks till last February. Two guns and a car were also seized from them. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI. No. 5)

Source: 'Gang of elephant poachers nabbed', www.english.mathrubhumi.com, 15/10/15.

KERALA/TAMIL NADU

Study counts 3,122 Nilgiri tahr; discovers 17 unrecorded pockets of tahr habitat

A comprehensive assessment of the Nilgiri tahr population in its habitat spread over 5,790 sq km in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, has estimated the population of the animal to be 3,122. The study carried out by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India in collaboration with the Kerala and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments is believed to be the first and most comprehensive of its kind study on the Nilgiri tahr.

The study identified sizeable conservation units along the tahr's range as well as the key threats faced. These include incidents of forest fire destroying fodder, spread of diseases through unregulated cattle grazing in areas close to the habitat, unsustainable non-timber forest produce collection, poaching and unabated human intervention in the habitat in the name of pilgrimage to sacred places.

It also discovered 17 new areas inhabited by the tahr with a total population here of 131 animals.

Source: V.S. Palaniappan. 'Nilgiri tahr population over 3,000: WWF-India', *The Hindu*, 03/10/15.

MADHYA PRADESH

Mahseer on the verge of extinction in MP

Of the three species of Mahseer found in Madhya Pradesh two are believed to be already extinct. And, in the last few years the average size of the fish has also reduced. Mahseer, which used to be 15 to 20 kg in weight and five feet long, has now reduced to around one kg.

The Mahseer constituted more than 50% of the catch in the Narmada till a decade ago but has now reduced to less than 4%. Mahseer is a cold-water fish and prefers fresh, clean and flowing water. Construction of dams has stopped flow of water and created huge lakes in the form of backwaters, thus destroying the habitat of Mahseer. It is feared that with

more dams becoming operational in the coming years, a larger part of the breeding grounds of the fish will be further destroyed.



Source: [Bagish Jha](#), 'MP's Mahseer fish now faces extinction', *The Times of India*, 13/10/15.

Radio-collared tiger in Satpura TR killed for witchcraft

Investigations by the Special Task Force (STF) of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has revealed that a radio-collared tiger that had been shifted from Bandavgarh to Satpura a couple of years ago was poached for witchcraft. The STF recently confiscated the hide and also arrested 13 people, including a government school teacher of Chhindwara district in the matter. The tiger was killed by poisoning its kill.

In a joint operation two months ago, the STF and the Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR) officials confiscated two bottles of suspected tiger fat oil from a poachers' network in Sakhai village in Hoshangabad and from Itarsi. The samples have been sent to the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and the Wildlife Health Monitoring Centre (WHMC), Jabalpur, for DNA tests. Teams have also been dispatched to Delhi and other areas for more arrests in the case.

Inputs on the killing of a tiger surfaced during interrogation of a gang of pangolin poachers arrested by STF officials from Sakhai village which is located in the tiger reserve's core area. During interrogation, one of the accused told STF officials that they had also killed a tiger by poisoning its kill near Sakhai

village and that it had a radio collar around its neck.

Source: P Naveen. Satpura radio-collared tiger killed for witchcraft', *The Times of India*, 17/10/15.

MAHARASHTRA

6,724 ha of forest land diverted for development projects in last three years

Recent data released by the Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) indicates that a total of 6,724 hectares of forestland was diverted in Maharashtra in the last three years for development projects. Though private agencies give equivalent non-forest land that is transferred and mutated as forest land, it has been noted by forest officials and environmentalists that compensatory afforestation and non-forest land are not enough for they can never make up for the indigenous species of flora and fauna lost to development activities.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Land (ha)	1,790.15	1,845.11	2,380.18	708.85	6,724.29

The total forest land diverted in the entire country for developmental projects this year stands at 1.74 lakh hectares.

Source: 'Projects consume over 6k ha forest-land in Maharashtra in 3 years', *The Times of India*, 02/11/15.

Mega project for scat DNA analysis of wildlife in Maharashtra

The wildlife wing of the Maharashtra Forest Department has approved a mega project on scat DNA analysis of tigers, leopards, sloth bears and dholes in the state. A MoU is expected to be signed soon and it is likely the project will be implemented early next year.

The Rs. 74 lakh project will be implemented by the Wildlife Institute of India

(WII) in six tiger reserves — Navegaon-Nagzira, Sahyadri, Melghat, Tadoba-Andhari, Pench and Bor - and other tiger-bearing national parks and sanctuaries, and areas outside PAs as well. The forest areas to be surveyed will be around 15,000 sq km. It is hoped the scat analysis will help understand landscape history, genetic structure of tigers and their co-predators and forest connectivity at a finer scale.

Similar analysis done by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, a few years ago had provided evidence of movement of tigers from Pench to Kanha, Nagzira to Kanha, Kanha to Nagarjunsagar and to Pench.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Scat DNA of four carnivore species to be studied across Maharashtra', *The Times of India*, 20/10/15.

Fresh petition challenges four-laning of NH 7

Even though the entire 37 km forest stretch along national highway (NH) 7 between Mansar and Khawasa has been cleared of trees for four-laning, a Mumbai-based NGO has filed a fresh petition before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) challenging the permission granted to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). Apart from fresh petition in the NGT, the NGO, Conservation Action Trust (CAT), has also filed a special leave petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court and another application to transfer the NH 7 matter from the Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court.

CAT's contention is that the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) violated the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, by initiating felling of trees without issuing the necessary final order under Section 2 of the Act. CAT has also argued that the then deputy conservator of forests, Nagpur, while filling up the requisite forms recommending permissions to the NHAI, lied that no endangered or rare wildlife species are found in the vulnerable patch. Besides, the SLP also argues that the recommendations on NH 7 made by the SC's

centrally empowered committee (CEC) were also ignored.

The CEC had suggested an alternative route via Chhindwara to save the tiger corridor in 2010. NGOs are now questioning the basis of curtailed mitigation measures as suggested by the Wildlife Institute of India. The NHAI has agreed to construct curtailed mitigation measures, which includes two 750-metre underpasses and one 300-metre underpass for wild animals, besides nine 50-metre structures.

The next hearing is slated for December 2, when the apex court opens after vacation. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 5)

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'NGO moves SC, green tribunal afresh on NH7 widening in Nagpur', *The Times of India*, 20/10/15.

Ban on plastic bags, wrappers, bottles in Mahabaleshwar

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) and the Mahabaleshwar Hill Station Municipal Council (MHSMC) have planned to introduce strict restrictions on plastic from November 1 in the hill station, which is also an Ecologically Sensitive Area. Stalls at tourist spots maintained by the joint forest management committee will not be permitted to sell polythene bags, food packaged in plastic and plastic water bottles. The civic body will also introduce a similar ban on all polythene bags that are less than 50 microns in the first stage to make the hill station a plastic-free zone.

The stalls will be allowed to keep large 20-litre cans of mineral water. They can refill the bottles carried by tourists for a fee, but they will not be allowed to dispense smaller bottles that are often dumped after the water is consumed. In a bid to encourage tourists not to litter, they will be handed out bags at the points of entry. They will be expected to dispose the garbage in the bags which will be collected from them when they are leaving.

To make the ban effective, the MHSMC has planned a series of meetings with shopkeepers within the hill station's limits to

discuss the restrictions and inform them about the penalties for any violation.

Source: Ananya Dutta, 'Restriction On Sale of Bags, Food, Bottles From November 1', *The Times of India*, 07/10/15.

State appoints four non-official members on SBWL

The Maharashtra state government has added four non-official members on the state board for wildlife (SBWL), thus completing the quorum of six experts. The four new non-official members are Dhananjay Bapat, owner of a resort outside the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, wildlife photographer, Mayur Kamath, wildlife expert, Kiran Shelar, and president of Wildlife Conservation Trust, Anish Andheria.

The SBWL had been dissolved by the BJP government before completion of its three-year tenure, which was to end in August 2016. The new board was limited to just 20 members and had included only two expert members, environmentalist, Bittu Sahgal, and social worker, Prakash Amte.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Four non-official members appointed on wildlife board', *The Times of India*, 21/10/15.

RAJASTHAN

NGT asks for GIS and specialised cell for monitoring tree cover

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Rajasthan government to set up a specialised cell in the forest department to undertake tree/plant translocation. It has also asked for the setting up of a Geo Information System (GIS) cell in the state for monitoring of forest cover alongside roads.

The NGT bench sought a reply from the government while hearing a petition moved by environmentalist, Babulal Jaju, who contended that there is negligence in carrying out avenue plantation along highway projects. On the argument of the Indian Road Congress about the

non-availability of the land along the roads for avenue plantation, the bench said that provisions could be made for the same by acquiring or setting apart the land for the projects.

The bench reiterated the need of a GIS cell in the light of huge difference between the data provided by the officials and the reality about the forest cover on the ground.

Source: 'NGT asks govt. to set up specialised cell on forest cover', *The Hindu*, 13/10/15.

TAMIL NADU

Community-based eco-tourism at Kanyakumari WLS

The forest department (FD) has started eco-tourism activities in the Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) under the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity and Greening Project. Kalikesam and Zero Point have been identified for eco-tourism activities as per this plan. The Kalikesam site is ready while work is in progress at Zero Point. Rs. 40 lakhs is being spent at each of the sites to get them ready for tourists.

The initiative follows a community-based eco-tourism model that involves nearly 5,000 members of the Kani community living in 47 settlements in the sanctuary. The individuals selected to be part of the project have been trained to row coracles, act as eco-guides and cook in canteens. The earnings derived from these eco-tourism activities will be used for camp maintenance, conservation of the ecosystem and for tribal community development.

Source: J Arockiaraj. 'Eco-tourism project commences in Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 19/10/15.

Court directs BBTC to return Manjolai estate land in Kalakad Mundanthurai TR to government

A sessions court in Tirunelveli has declared that 8,373 acres of the Manjolai estate that is part of the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) belongs to government and that

Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC) is merely a lessee. The land had come into the possession of BBTC after the Singampatti zamindari leased it to them in 1929 for 99 years.

A total of 22,972 hectares, including the leased lands belonging to the zamindar, had been taken over by the government in 1952 under the Estate Abolition Act, 1948. The BBTC then executed a fresh agreement with the government and retained the Manjolai estate land by agreeing to abide by additional conditions. The present petition was filed after the area's tahsildar refused to give patta and other ownership documents to BBTC. The additional district and sessions judge, Tirunelveli, upholding the tahsildar's decision, concurred with the submissions of the government pleader in the matter that the land belonged to the government.

The judge also rejected BBTC's argument that it had spent huge sums on developing the land. He said it would be entitled to claim money through separate proceedings as per the lease deed.

Source: 'BBTC directed to return 8,000-acre tea estate to TN', *The Times of India*, 04/10/15.

Action plan for sea turtle and dugong conservation in the Gulf of Mannar

The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park has drawn up an action plan for the conservation of sea turtles and dugongs in the Gulf of Mannar region. The plan is to be implemented under the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project and will include a demonstration of the efficacy of the 'Turtle excluder devices' (TED). The TEDs would be distributed to fishermen as part of the project.

As part of the dugong conservation project, the park had completed sea grass mapping from Rameswaram to Adhirampattinam near Point Calimere in Palk Bay. A boat survey was also done to assess dugong population from Rameswaram to Thondi, but no dugong could be sighted. However, traces of dugong feeding on sea grass

were found. Part of the action plan envisages educating the fisherfolk population on the need to conserve the dugong and also providing them compensation for the rescue and rehabilitation of dugongs.

Source: DJ Walter Scott. 'Action plan for conservation of sea turtle, dugong ready', *The Hindu*, 15/10/15.

Plea to exclude 135 villages from proposed Western Ghats eco-zone

The Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association has called upon the Tamil Nadu State Government to press upon the Central Government to exclude 135 villages in Coimbatore, Dindigul, Theni, Tirunelveli, Virudhu Nagar and Kanyakumari districts of the state from the proposed Eco Sensitive Zone of the Western Ghats as recommended by the Kasturi Rangan Committee.

The association has said that inclusion of these villages would seriously affect the livelihood of the farming and tribal communities here. It has also asked for the deadline to make submissions in the matter to be extended by two months from its current date of November 3. It threatened to stage block level demonstrations if their concerns were not taken on board.

Source: 'Plea to exclude 135 villages from proposed eco-zone', *The Hindu*, 30/10/15.

TELANGANA

Concern over Telangana move to allow killing of wild boar

The Telangana Forest Minister's decision to allow killing of wild boars has raised concern over the larger implication of the move and the possibility that this could pave the way for rampant killing of wild animals. A statement allowing hunting of wild boar was issued recently by the minister's office. It was issued in response to concerns from across the state that the wild boar population was increasing and this was resulting in substantial damage to

agriculture. Forest officials will be allowed to team up with locals to shoot wild boars and locals will be allowed to shoot the animals on their own as well.

Wildlife activists and scientists have said that the problem needs to be studied scientifically before a solution of this nature is suggested. They have said that the minister's directions not to book cases against those who kill the animal could lead to its killing for the meat trade, which in turn could also impact other species. It has also been pointed out the wild boar is an important source of food for predators like the tiger in the otherwise prey-poor regions.

Source: Rohit PS. 'Concern over Telangana move to kill wild boars', *The Hindu*, 30/10/15.

UTTARAKHAND

Railway track passing through Rajaji tiger reserve to be electrified soon

An 18-km rail track that passes through the Rajaji Tiger Reserve (RTR) will soon be electrified. Nine km of the 18 km section is sensitive as elephants have been killed here in train accidents in the past. According to the Chief Wildlife Warden, Uttarakhand, railway authorities have agreed not to increase the speed limit of trains in this section. It is also likely that the frequency of trains might come down, with more bogies being attached to the existing trains.

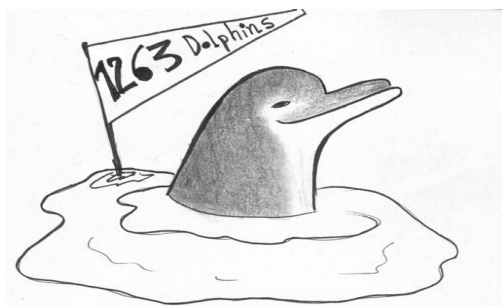
The National Board of Wildlife had asked the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to conduct a study on the possible hazards and their mitigation, owing to the electrification of tracks in RTR, before giving an approval to the project. The WII has submitted its report suggesting measures such as clearing of silt from the rivulet to allow passage to the animals, joint patrolling by forest and railway employees as well as NGOs around the tracks in order to give advanced warning to the station master about animals on the tracks. Construction of three watchtowers has also been recommended to keep a vigil.

Other recommendations include clearing of bushes to help animals clearly an approaching train as also to help railway authorities see animals near the tracks, leveling of embankments and raising the height of electric poles to avoid electrocution, and raising awareness among passengers and locals to not throw food from the trains.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'Rail track inside Rajaji to be electrified', *The Times of India*, 23/10/15.

UTTAR PRADESH

1,263 river dolphins counted in the state



A recent survey conducted jointly by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and the World Wide Fund for Nature – India has reported 1,263 dolphins in the rivers in the state. The census was conducted from October 5 to 8 under the National Mission for Clean Ganga and involved a number of other NGOs working for conservation awareness and education. As many as 116 dolphins were seen over a 215 km stretch of the river from Laakshagrih in Allahabad to Kaithi in Varanasi, which is a confluence of rivers Ganga and Gomti.

The total number, 1,263, is nearly twice the 671 dolphins that were counted in the state in 2012. Experts have warned that the doubling in number notwithstanding, the threats to the dolphin continue to be serious. These include, among others, pollution of the water due to industrial effluents and sewage, and indiscriminate fishing.

Source: 'Census counts 1,263 Gangetic dolphins in state', *The Times of India*, 12/10/15.

Pilibhit TR to be expanded; forest land from Uttarakhand to also be included

The Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR) authorities have proposed an increase in the area of the tiger reserve. Forests of the Surai range and Khatima range in Pilibhit district are set to be included as part of the buffer zone and an additional 2,300 hectare of forest land from Uttarakhand will also be included in the PTR.

A proposal for this increase in area is to be sent soon to the state government.

Source: Kanwardeep Singh. 'Plans on to extend Pilibhit Tiger Reserve to U'khand', *The Times of India*, 18/10/15.

WEST BENGAL

Community reserve for river dolphins

The West Bengal government is proposing a community reserve for river dolphins in the stretch of the River Hooghly between Malda and the Sunderbans. It will extend across the districts of Malda and South 24 Parganas. A committee is being set up to examine the best way forward for this. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the state wildlife board.

According to Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal, the concerned stretch is not within a forest or a sanctuary and needs, on account of this, some formal framework for protection.

Source: Tanaya Singh. 'West Bengal Will Soon Have India's First Community Reserve for Dolphins', www.thebetterindia.com, 12/10/15.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

New catalogue on butterflies of India

'The Synoptic Catalogue of the Butterflies of India' edited by RK Varshney and Peter Smetacek featuring 1,318 species of butterflies in the country was released recently. It is

available as a free download from the site www.researchgate.net.

The catalogue gives details of state-wise distribution of butterfly species and sub-species. These belong to six families, the Swallowtails (Papilionidae) which have 89 species; Skippers (Hesperiidae), 277 species; Whites and Yellows (Pieridae), 92 species; Punches and Judies (Riodiniidae), 19 species; Blues and Hairstreaks (Lycaenidae), 380 species and the Brush-footed butterflies (Nymphalidae) which have 461 species.

The team of contributors to the catalogue included experts from Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Russia, France, Czech Republic, Nepal and India.



Source: Seema Sharma. 'New Indian butterfly catalogue has 1,318 species', *The Times of India*, 26/10/15.

Environment ministry considers sterilization to reduce elephant population

The government is reported to be considering the possibility of injecting female elephants, in West Bengal and Odisha, with a contraceptive vaccine to control their population in the wild. The technique has never been tried on Asian elephants, but has been used successfully in Africa. The technique does not manipulate gender hormones and has no physical or behavioural side effects. The vaccines will be administered using darts and at no stage requires target animals to be caught or immobilized. One shot is effective for two years and is also said to be reversible.

The move is an effort in the direction of dealing with the escalating human-elephant conflict in different parts of the country. According to the ministry, 116 elephants and 147 humans died annually in West Bengal and Odisha due to human-elephant conflict between

2010-11 and 2014-15. The conflict also resulted in injuries to at least 200 humans, damage to around 5,000 houses and crop damage in around 30,000 acres.

Source: Mayank Aggarwal. 'Sterilization to control elephant population?' www.livemint.com, 15/10/15.

North Eastern regional consultation workshop held on review and revision of National Forest Policy

The third regional consultation workshop for the review and revision of the National Forest Policy was organized on 13-14th October, 2015, at the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. Representatives from forest departments of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and West Bengal along with academic institutions, civil society organizations and students participated in and contributed to this two-day workshop to deliberate on issues in the forestry sector in North eastern region and suggest the course of action through policy intervention.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each north-eastern state, the group work was conducted state-wise. The sub-groups deliberated on the issues in the forestry sector, ongoing policy interventions, gap areas and the future policy initiatives. The issues discussed included those of 'declining forest cover and fragmentation', conservation of unclassified forests, jhum cultivation, wildlife, community based forest management and importance of watersheds and their management.

Source: National Forest Policy – Review and Revision, *IIFM e-newsletter*, 23/10/15.

WWF –India, Apollo Hospitals joint initiative for welfare of forest staff



The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India and Apollo Hospitals have announced a one-year

partnership for the welfare of forest guards. The partnership will entail the hospital chain providing treatment and recovery support for frontline staff in case of a severe medical emergency, while on field. This support will be provided in 10 priority landscapes where WWF-India is actively working along with the state forest departments of Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

The services made available to the forest staff would include air ambulance and other emergency medical rescue services. For other cases, WWF-India and the state forest departments involved will admit the sick/injured staff to the nearest Apollo Hospital or its franchisee at their own expense.

This partnership between the two organizations will cover medical cases including (but not restricted to) grievous injury due to attacks by wild animals; fall from elevated areas (like hills or *machans*); accidents while patrolling in vehicles (collision, falling off etc); burns during fire-fighting operations; bullet/sharp weapon injuries inflicted by poachers; injuries inflicted by people during mob control when handling cases of human-wildlife conflict; life threatening diseases like malaria, dengue, etc; venomous bites/stings, and electrocution.

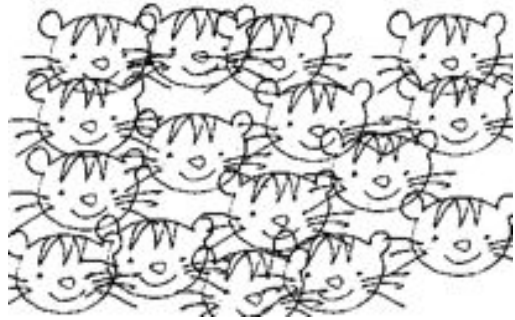
Source: ‘Aid to the frontline: WWF-India and Apollo Hospitals join hands for welfare of forest staff’, Press Release dated 26/10/15

NTCA proposal for old-age home for tigers

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is considering a proposal to develop specific areas as ‘homes’ for old and injured tigers. Though these will be located outside the core tiger reserve areas, they will be part of the tiger safaris. The objective is to not only provide care to the ageing tigers but also to reduce

pressure on the core tiger habitats by attracting visitors to these buffer areas.

The project, officials believe, will also help increase awareness about tigers. The current proposal is in line with the NTCA’s Normative Standards for Tourism Activities and Project Tiger Guidelines - 2012, where it had called for “starting tiger safaris in the buffer areas which experience immense tourist influx in the core and critical tiger habitats, for viewing tiger”.



Source: Richa Sharma. ‘An old-age home for the big cat’, *The New Indian Express*, 17/10/15.

SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN

National monitoring network to combat illegal animal trade

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – Pakistan will be setting up a national monitoring network to combat illegal animal trade in Pakistan. An announcement to this effect was made recently following a meeting of the organization in Lahore. The project would be funded and monitored by the United States Agency for International Development.

Source: ‘WWF to set up national monitoring network’, *The Tribune*, 19/10/15.

Inviting Arabs to hunt bustards is pillar of foreign policy, Govt. tells court

The Pakistan federal government has asked the Supreme Court to reconsider a ban on hunting Houbara bustard by foreign dignitaries, saying the restriction was adversely affecting the country's already-weakened relations with the Gulf states in the wake of turmoil in the region. A three-judge Supreme Court bench, headed by then Chief Justice, Jawwad S Khawaja, had in an order passed in August earlier this year, asked the Pakistan's federal and provincial governments to not grant licences or permits to hunt the endangered bird (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 3).

The review petition pleaded that falconry is a significant feature of Pakistan's relations with Middle Eastern countries. It said that falconry was not merely a sport for Arabs, but also one of their most cherished customs, and also recognised as a cultural heritage by UNESCO. The petition noted further that under the provincial wildlife laws of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the respective provincial governments have statutory power to remove any category of wildlife from the schedule of protected animals. In Balochistan, for instance, the bustard is a game animal under the Balochistan Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act 2014 and the hunting of this species is permissible under the law, subject to certain conditions.

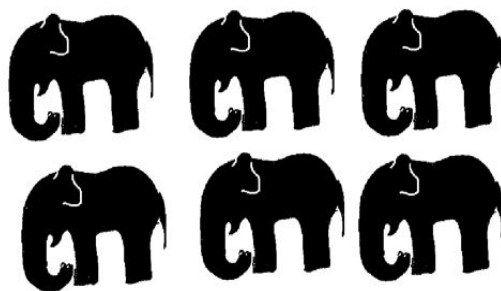
The petition argued that by placing a complete ban on the hunting of the Houbara Bustard, the Supreme Court had gone beyond the scope of law since the provincial wildlife laws were, admittedly, never in question. Besides, none of the provisions of these laws were struck down by the court for being unconstitutional. It said further that determining the actual population of the bird was a complex task that required concerted efforts as it was a migratory bird that was found from Egypt right across to Mongolia and China.

The petition also noted that foreign dignitaries brought with them considerable finances, which were exclusively used for the development of the people in the areas where the hunting was allowed. Locals are also persuaded to arrange for the breeding of the species and, often, a large number of the birds are released.

Source: Nasir Iqbal. 'Inviting Arabs to hunt bustards is pillar of foreign policy, Pakistan tells court', *Dawn*, 19/10/15.

SRI LANKA

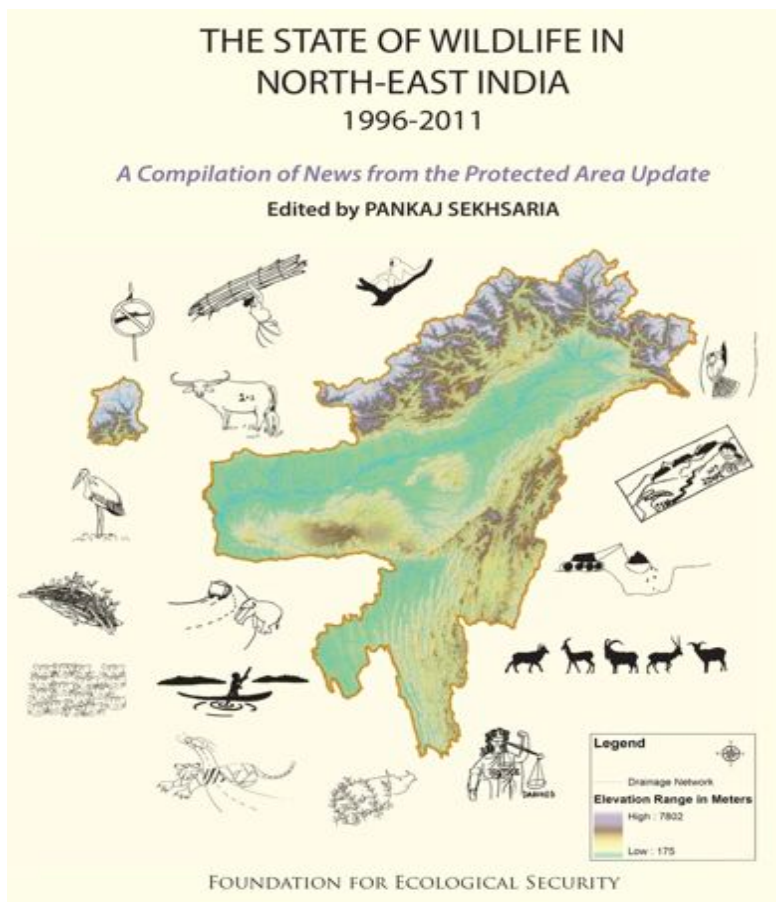
SC rules against bio-fuel project in buffer zone of Yala NP



The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka recently ruled against a bio-fuel project in the buffer zone of the Yala National Park. The order came in response to a petition filed in 2012 by three NGOs, Environmental Foundation Limited (EFL), The Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka (WNPS) and Wilderness and Protection Areas Foundation (WPAF), in which they argued that the project imperiled both migrating elephants as well as local farmers and ranchers.

The area in concern is a scrub forest that also sees traditional shifting agriculture. It is known as the Amerawera forest and is a known habitat of the Asian elephant.

Source: Jeremy Hance. 'Environmentalists win 'landmark' case against biofuel project in Sri Lanka' *News.mongabay.com*, 15/10/15.



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Important Bird Areas Update

IBA

Peeyush

NATIONAL NEWS

180 bird species in India on IUCN's Red List

The Red List of birds released by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for 2015 shows that a total of 180 bird species in India are now threatened. The number last year was 173. Eight new species were added to the list while one was taken off.

Of the new additions, five have been up-listed from the Least Concerned to the Near Threatened category, a sign of increased threat. These include the Northern Lapwing and four wetland birds, the Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Bar-Tailed Godwit. Two other wetland birds, Horned Grebe and Common Pochard have been up-listed from Least Concerned to Vulnerable. The Steppe Eagle, which is a regular winter visitor to the Indian subcontinent, has been up-listed from Least Concerned to Endangered.

The latest additions to the list, which are based on studies conducted by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)-India, BirdLife International (UK-based) and other partner organisations, reveal that bird habitats like grasslands and wetlands are under threat.

Source: Alok Deshpande. 'More Indian birds enter list of threatened species', *The Hindu*, 31/10/15.

ASSAM

Villagers honoured for efforts to save greater adjutant storks



Dharmaraj Hazarika, Nirala Bora and Dev Kumar Sharma – residents of Sensowa and Khutikotiya villages in Nagaon - were recently felicitated as 'Hargila mitra' for preserving the trees on which Greater Adjutant storks nest. The Greater Adjutant is locally known as hargila. The felicitation took place during a stork awareness meet held at Sensowa Amar Borkakoti High School in Nagaon. It was organised by the NGO, Aaranyak, in collaboration with the Laokhowa-Burachapori Conservation Society and Green Guard.

The global population of the Greater Adjutant stork is about 1,200, and 80% of this population is found in Assam. A major chunk of the population is found in the Brahmaputra valley, and Kamrup district alone houses almost 50% of stork's population in the state. At least 14 new nests are currently being built on trees protected by the villagers.

Source: Naresh Mitra. 'Nagaon villagers shows way to save greater adjutant stork', *The Times of India*, 07/10/15.
Roopak Goswami. 'Honour for hargila conservation effort - Assam NGO Aaranyak felicitates residents for protecting trees where endangered birds nest', *The Telegraph*, 08/10/15.

Over 400 vultures killed in train accidents in Assam

According to the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) at Rani near Guwahati, railway tracks in the state have become deathtraps for vultures that feed on carcasses of elephants and livestock hit by trains. Records with the VCBC show that train-hits have claimed more than 400 vultures, mainly Himalayan Griffon in recent times.

Conservationists point out that neither the Northeast Frontier Railway nor the Assam Forest Department has taken this problem seriously. The onus, they say, is on the railway authorities to remove the decomposing carcasses from the tracks, and save vultures from meeting the same fate as the animals whose carcasses they are feeding on.

Source: Kishore Talukdar. 'Now, railway tracks turns abattoir for endangered vulture' www.nezine.com, 10/10/15.

MAHARASHTRA

Satellite telemetry project to study vultures in state

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) is initiating a satellite telemetry project to better study the movement and feeding patterns of vultures in the state. Eight vultures - four White-rumped vultures and four, Long-billed - will be tagged as part of the project that got central government approval recently. The tagged birds would be from different age groups so as to differentiate between the ranges of the adults and the fledgling birds. The project is being

executed in collaboration with the Pune based Ela Foundation.

Source: Mayuri Phadnis, 'Vulture tags to track trajectory and feeding', *Pune Mirror*, 25/09/15.

NAGALAND

Satellite tagged Amur falcons return to Nagaland

Naga and Pangti, two Amur Falcons that were satellite tagged in Nagaland's Pangti village in November 2013 have returned to Nagaland as part of their annual migration (*PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, No. 6). The two birds have covered about 44,000 km since they were tagged two years ago.

The Amur falcons start their annual journey from south-eastern Siberia and Northern China to Northeastern India in the first week of October. They roost in Nagaland and some adjoining Assam districts for five to six weeks, and then leave for southern Africa, where they spend the winter.

Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap 'Two birds back in Nagaland from Siberia', *The Indian Express*, 31/10/15.

RAJASTHAN

Drastic decline in GIB population in state

Two recent counts of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) conducted in Rajasthan have reported 28 and 13 birds respectively in the state. The counts were conducted by the Rajasthan Forest Department in the months of September and October. These numbers are substantially lower than the 44 bustards that were counted in Rajasthan by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) a year ago.

Source: Rachna Singh. 'In 1 year, Great Indian Bustard population falls from 44 to just 13 in Rajasthan', *The Times of India*, 10/10/15.

RAJASTHAN/GUJARAT

Bottlenecks for proposal for captive breeding of GIB



A Wildlife Institute of India (WII) proposal for captive breeding of the Great Indian Bustards (GIB) by getting Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority

(CAMPA) funds has run into multiple problems. The implementing agencies were to be the WII and the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra with a proposed budget of Rs 33.85 crore. Under the proposal, Rajasthan was to share the bird's bio-material for a conservation centre to be set up in Gujarat. Rajasthan has, however, refused to share GIB eggs with Gujarat.

A research paper by the International Centre for Birds of Prey (Bustard group) has also noted that captive breeding is not the answer for problems faced in bustard conservation. It has noted that previous attempts to establish captive populations of GIBs at Bikaner and Jodhpur zoos were failures as the survival rate was less than 17%.

Other experts note that growing investments in development projects such as wind farms in Gujarat and Rajasthan were making the situation more hostile for the bustards with loss of habitat and increased threat of mortality.

Source: Rachna Singh. 'In 1 year, Great Indian Bustard population falls from 44 to just 13 in Rajasthan', *The Times of India*, 10/10/15.

TAMIL NADU

Ketoprofen withdrawn from Erode, Coimbatore, Nilgiris districts

The Tamil Nadu State Government has withdrawn Ketoprofen, a non-steroid anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used extensively

for veterinary purposes to save the vulture population in the three districts of Erode, Coimbatore and the Nilgiris. Despite the first batch of the drug being supplied to all the districts in May 2015, the Directorate of Animal Husbandry has decided to discontinue the use of Ketoprofen. The drug had been included in the procurement list of the Animal Husbandry Department in 2014-15. A total of 25,730 vials of the drug were supplied to all the districts, of which 2,190 vials were supplied to the three western districts.

The State government had included Ketoprofen based on an effort to identify an alternative to the banned drug Diclofenac. Wildlife activists have noted, however, that Ketoprofen also caused the same effect on the vulture population. After reviewing the research work by wildlife scientists, the government decided to stop use of Ketoprofen immediately in the said districts. Further use of Ketoprofen will eventually be discontinued for veterinary purposes in the entire state. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XX, Nos. 5, 3, & 2)



Source: VS Palaniappan. 'Tamil Nadu govt. bans Ketoprofen to save vultures', *The Hindu*, 14/10/15.

UTTAR PRADESH

Notification of ESZ for Okhla Bird Sanctuary challenged

The August 19 eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) notification for the Okhla Bird Sanctuary has been challenged in the National Green Tribunal (NGT). An area comprising 100 meters from the boundary of the park on all except the northern side and a distance of 1.27 km from the northern boundary was included in the ESZ as per

the notification (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 5; and Vol. XX, Nos. 6, 4 & 1).

The petition challenging the notification has said that it will not only adversely affect the community at large, but will also result in the violation of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Biological Diversity Act, 2002, the precautionary principle, principle of sustainable development, inter-generational equity, and the principle of eco-centrism.

A Bench headed by the NGT chairperson has issued notices to the central government, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Wildlife Warden, and the government of Delhi seeking their response to the petition in two weeks.

Source: Akanksha Jain. 'Notification on ESZ around Okhla sanctuary challenged', *The Hindu*, 09/10/15.

250 vultures spotted in Amangarh forest range

As many as 250 vultures, most likely the Himalayan Griffon, were spotted recently in the Amangarh Forest Range in Uttar Pradesh. This includes 210 birds in the Amangarh range and 40 in Najibabad and Bijnor. The number is much higher than the 76 vultures that were counted in the region in the 2011 census, 17 of which were in the Amangarh range, while 57 were seen in Najibabad area and two in Bijnor city.

Source: Sandeep Rai. '250 endangered vultures spotted at Amangarh forest range', *The Times of India*, 19/10/15.

The Important Bird Areas Update is being brought out in collaboration with and support from the *Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)*, the *Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN)* and the *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, UK)*

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A Decade Ago

Protected Area Update 57, October 2005

KERALA

Genetic finger printing to help fight wildlife crime



The Thiruvananthapuram based Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology (RGCB) is collaborating with the Kerala Forest Department to harness genetic data of wild animals for scientific investigation of poaching cases. A mission team is already at work on the preparation of DNA fingerprints of threatened species and the application of biotechnology for forensic analysis of genetic samples collected from dead animals. The first phase of the project would involve the DNA fingerprinting of the tiger and elephant, the most vulnerable species in Kerala. Proper investigation of poaching crimes is said to be difficult as the carcass of the slain animal is often mutilated or degraded. DNA forensic analysis examines evidence containing genetic material to link the suspect found in possession of wildlife material, to the slain animal. The scientists will use the blood, skin or tissue from a carcass to identify the species, determine the sex and establish parent-offspring relationship.

The method involves the application of a host of techniques ranging from the complex and expensive DNA sequencing and genotyping to the relatively simple and cheap PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) method. The geographic origin and individual identity of the animal can also be analysed, once the genetic database of the vulnerable species is built up.

The Director of the RGCB, M. Radhakrishna Pillai said that they hoped to submit the project for funding within a year after developing the DNA primers and probes.

Source: T Nandakumar. 'Genetic data to boost wildlife crime probe', *The Hindu*, 16/10/05.

TAMIL NADU

Rs. 2.04-cr. For Kalakad Mundanthurai TR

The MoEF has sanctioned Rs. 2.04 crores during the current fiscal for the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR).

The recurring cost of the scheme, Rs.1.11 crore, will be shared equally by the Centre and State Government. The remaining Rs.93.24 lakh, being non-recurring cost of the scheme, will be treated as 100 % central assistance. The first installment of Rs.90 lakhs will be released shortly, and the balance in due course, after a review of the works undertaken.

The ministry has given guidelines under various heads to spend the amount and no deviation would be allowed without prior concurrence of the Centre. The Chief Wildlife Warden and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest of the State Government would have to ensure, through periodical field inspections, that works are undertaken in accordance with the management plans and the Annual Plan of Operation (APO).

As per the APO, Rs.18.24 lakhs would be spent as follows - 14 wireless sets for anti-poaching camps (Rs.2.24 lakhs), jungle gear for 60 persons (Rs. 3 lakhs), arms and ammunition (Rs. 3 lakhs), construction of Deputy Director's Office at Ambasamudram (Rs. 8 lakhs) and prophylactic immunisation of peripheral livestock (Rs. 2 lakhs). Under the recurring heads, a fire-line would be created and maintained for 385 km and 80 firewatchers would be deployed for six months. Two watchtowers and water storage facilities would be constructed, and as many fire fighting units would be stationed inside the forest. On the eco-development front, Rs. 50 lakhs will be spent for rehabilitation of forest dependents and ensuring proper functioning of village forest committees.

Source: P Sudhakar. 'Rs. 2.04 cr. Sanction for tiger sanctuary', *The Hindu*, 17/10/05.

PERSPECTIVE

Fish sanctuaries in Karnataka

Freshwater ecosystems within India are highly diverse, have a high level of endemism and are of immense importance to livelihoods and economies; they are also among the most heavily exploited. Fish for human consumption forms the most important wetland product at a global scale, and is often referred to as “rich food for poor people”. Asia accounts for 66.4% of global inland catches, and with over 950,000 tonnes landed in 2008, India has the third largest inland fishery in the world.

Karnataka’s state water policy 2002, has ranked fisheries as fourth in order of its importance while operating any water resource projects and we also have the ‘Karnataka Inland Fisheries (Conservation Development and Regulation) Act 1996’, which aims to streamline fisheries schemes offered by the government. These schemes are meant to support local communities by improving household incomes and providing a way out of poverty for a significant section of the population that depend on freshwater habitats. This, however, only emphasises commercial sales of non-native species of fish such as Rohu, Mrigal, Catla, Mahseer (*Tor, Khudree*), etc, which due to periodic stocking through aquaculture are outnumbering native species and posing an even greater threat to the integrity of riverine ecosystems and fish diversity. There is an immediate need to identify native species that can replace present commercial species for aquaculture and consumption, and also providing a sustainable source of protein for marginal, subsistence fisherfolk.

In-situ conservation of fish species through temple and community managed fish sanctuaries are increasingly gaining legal recognition in Karnataka via the Department of Fisheries. The ‘Inland Fisheries Act, 2003’ allows for the ‘Declaration of Sanctuary’ and provides further opportunities for research and identification of locations where there’s potential

for community based conservation of such fish sanctuaries and their riverine habitat. Studies on spatial ecology of Mahseer as an indicator species are underway to determine the area and habitat required to demarcate sanctuaries in Karnataka. Freshwater fish are not recognised by the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, and receive little or no form of protection from the FD. It is a situation that needs addressing and one that certainly needs to be done at the earliest!

Fish sanctuaries in Karnataka (2015)

Cauvery: Ramanathapura, Hassan dist. (1km); Ranganathittu, Mandya dist. (5km); Muttathi, Mandya dist. (-); Nisargadhama, Kushalnagar, Kodagu dist. (-)

Shimsha: Shivanasamudra, Mandya dist. (1.4km)

Tunga: Abhirama, Chikmagalur dist. (500m); Sringeri, Chikmagalur dist. (1km); Jammalagi, Chikmagalur dist. (500m); Chippalagudda, Shimoga dist. (500m); Mattur- Hosahalli, Shimoga dist. (1.5km)

Kumaradhara: Shishila, Dakshina Kannada dist. (500m); Marakatha, Dakshina Kannada dist. (-); Bachanayakanagudi, Dakshina Kannada dist. (2km)

Nethravathi: Dharmasthala, Dakshina Kannada dist. (1km); Nakurgaya, Dakshina Kannada dist. (-)

Seethanadi: Karkala, Udupi dist. (-); Thingale, Udupi dist. (500m)

Chandragiri: Thodikana, Dakshina Kannada dist. (500m)

Kallaje: Uppukala, Dakshina Kannada dist. (-)

Palguni: Kelkaru, Dakshina Kannada dist. (-)

Krishna: Bhagavathi Chaya Kolla, Gulbarga dist.

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