

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXII, No. 2

April 2016 (No. 120)

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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXII, No. 2, April 2016 (No. 120)

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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

Bombay Natural History Society/ Indian Bird Conservation Network

Donations from a number of individual supporters

EDITORIAL

A generational shift

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), the Salim Ali Centre for Nature and Ornithology (SACON)... it is unlikely that readers of the *Protected Area Update* do not know these names and these institutions. These are amongst the country's most prominent environment and wildlife organisations that have, over the years, led conservation research, action and policy initiatives. They have worked across the geography of the subcontinent, across species and ecosystems and with issues at multiple levels in society and in the political and administrative systems. There are many others who have performed similar roles, but there is a particular reason that these three find a mention here.

This is about a change that is in the natural order of things, but a change that in this particular context is the marker of a significant shift - a generational shift in leadership. Three prominent individuals have in the last few months taken over directorship at these three organizations – Deepak Apte in the BNHS, Kartik Shanker in ATREE and K Sankar in SACON. A new generation of scientists is now at the helm and the 'new generation' is much more than just the age of each of these individuals. It is prominently about the new challenges and opportunities that lie on the horizon going forward. The science and technology of today is paradigmatically different from what was available even a decade ago, the challenges and understanding of conservation have themselves changed dramatically in recent years and all of this is within a political and social system that is as complex and sometimes more incomprehensible than it has ever been.

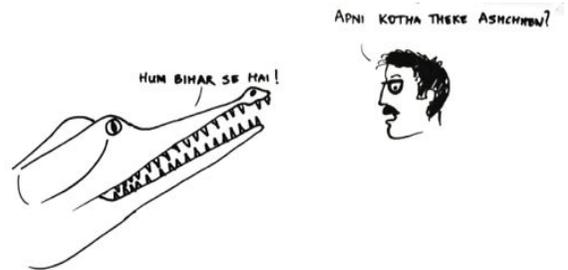
Each of these organisations has a very strong history and tremendous credibility, and

the job of shepherding them into the future is also in very capable hands. More of such organisations in the country will see this shift in leadership in the coming months and years, as the old guard will give way to the new. It's an exciting prospect and the times ahead will surely be as challenging as they are...well, exciting!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

BIHAR/WEST BENGAL

Gharial released in Bihar; captured in West Bengal



Born in captivity in Patna Zoo, a young gharial, which was released into the wild in the river Gandak near the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 2) was captured recently in West Bengal's Malda district. The nine-year-old sub-adult female was released in the Gandak last year along with 24 others by the Bihar Forest Department (FD) as part of a conservation programme.

The gharial swam more than 1000 km over the next few months to reach the River Mahananda, which flows in the northern part of West Bengal. There, in Malda district, local fishermen raised an alarm after spotting the gharial in the river and the West Bengal FD then captured it. It has been kept at Rasik Bill in Cooch Behar since October.

The release of the animal has now become complicated as it is a trans-state issue.

Source: 'The gharial which lost its freedom after traveling 1000 km', *The Hindu*, 13/01/16.

GOA

Goan farmers want monkeys, wild boar, porcupine declared vermin

Goan farmers have submitted a memorandum to the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF), Panaji, suggesting that four animals – two species of monkey, the wild boar and the porcupine - be declared as 'vermin' in Goa. Signed by members of the Gomantak Shetkari Sangh and representatives of progressive farmers of Goa, the memorandum says that the four species be declared 'vermin' as they are causing damage to their plantations and that permission be granted to cull them as they are in the 'least endangered' category as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature; and Schedule 3 and 4 of the Wildlife Protection Act.

In a different though related development, Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar announced that State Agriculture Minister, Ramesh Tawadkar's statement about listing peacock and bison as vermin will not be implemented. The statement has evoked criticism from environmentalists and activists who feared it may encourage poaching.

Source: 'Farmers want 4 animals declared vermin, culled', *The Times of India*, 18/02/16.

GUJARAT

Govt drops lion conservation plan

The Gujarat government has officially dropped its Rs 750 crore 'Long term Conservation of Asiatic Lion Plan' that it had been pursuing aggressively with the former UPA government when the present Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. The state had been aggressively pursuing the project with the central government and had also asked all the Members of Parliament (MPs) to follow up in the matter. It is not clear why the state government has now dropped the plan, which has also been removed from the official list of

pending issues of Gujarat with the Government of India recently given to the state MPs.



The plan was first submitted to the Deputy Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in 2009 for funding under the centrally sponsored scheme. The centre was expected to contribute 90% of the project cost, components of which included relocation of the Maldharis (Rs 97.50 crore), habitat improvement (Rs 15 crore), wildlife protection (Rs 30 crore), veterinary care, rescue and conflict management (Rs 7.50 crore) and eco-development, awareness, participation and ecotourism. The proposal also included a Rs 600 crore project for the construction of a ring road around the Gir Protected Area System - Gir National Park and Gir, Pania, Mitiyala and Girnar Sanctuaries.

The project was downsized by the Planning Commission of India to Rs 150 crore (the ring road component was left out) and then dropped completely by the then central government. The state government forwarded these proposals to the government of India again after Modi took over as PM in May 2014. No response was however received and now, the entire proposal has been scrapped. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 6)

Source: Kapil Dave. 'Govt drops lion conservation plan', *The Times of India*, 24/02/16.

HARYANA

WII to identify potential wildlife areas in Haryana Aravalis

A study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will soon point out potential wildlife areas in the Aravalis in Haryana that require special conservation measures and protection from urbanisation. The Haryana Forest Department had commissioned the WII to carry out a survey to identify vulnerable areas that needed government intervention.

The WII team comprising two field biologists along with local villagers recently finished scouting a 30 km area around Damdama Lake, Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary and parts of Mewat. They found ample evidence of wildlife, particularly around Damdama, including a 2.5 km long trail of leopard pugmarks. They have been conducting carnivore surveys based on pugmarks, scat and direct sightings as well as an ungulate survey based on the line-transect method.

The team will submit its initial report in a couple of months after which camera trapping will begin to corroborate the findings.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Wildlife study to find focus spots', *The Times of India*, 05/02/16.

FD suggests demarcation of Mangar Bani as a forest



Environmentalists have welcomed the Forest Department's move to suggest to the Haryana State Government to demarcate 1,943 acres of land in the Aravali hills, located along Gurgaon-Faridabad Road, as the Mangar Bani forest. They have expressed a hope that the move is the first in a series of decisions, to protect the Aravalis in Haryana.

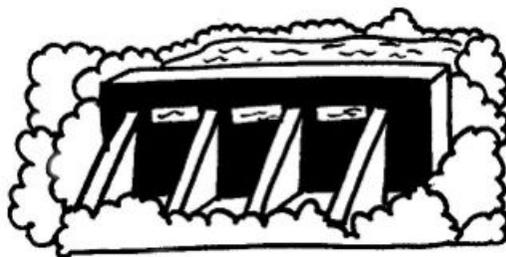
Mangar Bani is very important for Gurgaon and the entire National Capital Region as it facilitates recharge of groundwater. The

forest area was actually panchayat land that had, over the years, been transferred in the names of private people for constructing farmhouses and other purposes by allegedly dubious means.

Source: Bagish K Jha. 'Proposal for Mangar Bani forest demarcation', *The Times of India*, 04/02/16.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

NGT sets up expert panel to study Renuka dam project



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has set up an eight-member experts' panel to study various aspects of the proposed Rs. 5,242 crore Renuka dam. The panel will give its suggestions within four months for the construction of the dam without damaging the environment.

The panel is to be headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Himachal Pradesh, and includes representatives from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Central Water Commission, Chief Irrigation Engineers of Himachal Pradesh and Delhi and the Wildlife Institute of India. The committee is required to report whether there was a comprehensive resettlement and rehabilitation policy in place and if any modification was required to protect the environment and ecology of the region, including the river and the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary. The committee would also decide if the environmental clearance given on 20th October 2009, had been vitiated.

The NGT noted that the Supreme Court had already acknowledged that the project was of national importance as it would provide drinking water to Delhi and areas of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh such as Faridabad and Noida

that are part of the National Capital Region (NCR). The project will come up across the Giri river, a tributary of the Yamuna, in Sirmaur district.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XV, No. 3; Vol. XIII, No. 1; Vol. XII, No. 6 and Nos. 55 & 32)

Source: R Sedhuraman, 'Renuka Dam: NGT sets up panel to study green aspects', *The Tribune*, 03/02/16.

JHARKHAND

Forest cover shrinks in five districts of Jharkhand

The forest cover in Jharkhand's five districts — Ranchi, Dumka, Giridih, Pakur and West Singhbhum — has declined by 0.5% to 0.79% between 2013 and 2015. The figures were put out recently by the Jharkhand Economic Survey (2015-16). The area of moderately dense forests in the state has declined by four sq km since 2013 mainly due to mining activities. Very dense forests have registered an increase of one sq km and open forests have grown by eight sq km, the survey says quoting the Indian Forest Survey Report (IFSR), 2015.

Jharkhand's total forest cover increased from 23,473 sq km to 23,478 sq km — making up 29.48% of the state's total area — in the last two years. Open forests account for 14.08% of the state's forest cover, very dense forests 3.26% and moderately dense forests 12.12%.

The state Forest Department (FD) has said that it is confident that the forest cover would show an improvement in the next survey on account of the Mukhya Mantri Jan Van Yojana and a massive plantation drive during 2015-16. It has claimed to have planted 3.12 crore saplings during 2015-16 and it plans to plant 2.79 crore more during 2016-17.

Source: Sanjoy Dey. 'Forest cover shrinks in five districts of Jharkhand', *Hindustan Times*, 22/02/16.

KARNATAKA

Call data record analysis training for Karnataka forest staff

A training programme was organised recently by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in association with the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) to train their frontline staff in telephone call data record (CDR) analysis. It aims at helping the staff to build strong evidence and prepare watertight cases using technology, in a bid to increase conviction rates in wildlife crimes.

About 25 mid-level officers and staff from the Bandipur, Nagarahole, and BRT Tiger Reserves and the M.M. Hills Wildlife Sanctuary participated in the training that was provided by an expert who has developed a CDR analysis software and is working with the Mumbai police.

Additionally, the FD will also be given special software to analyse the records and the same training will also be offered to the Special Tiger Force personnel.

Source: R. Krishna Kumar. 'Forest staff to undergo special training to fight wildlife crime', *The Hindu*, 19/02/16.

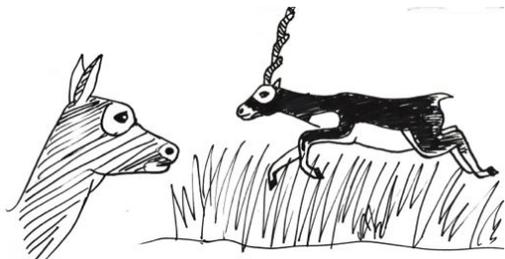
Fires destroy 300 acres of forest in Bandipur, Nagarahole reserves

Two separate forest fires in the month of February are reported to have destroyed at least 300 acres of forest area in the Bandipur and Nagarahole Tiger Reserves. The Forest Department (FD) has said it suspected sabotage in both cases. It registered cases against unknown persons but no arrests have been made.

250 acres of forest were affected in the Moleyur range in Bandipur and about 50 acres were destroyed in the DB Kuppe range in Nagarahole.

Source: HM Aravind. 'Forest fires destroy 300 acres in Bandipur, Nagarahole reserves', *The Times of India*, 21/02/16.

Blackbucks spotted in Cauvery WLS



Blackbucks have been spotted in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) for the first time ever. Forest officials said that the animal was sighted recently in the Mambetta Reserve Forest of the Hanur Wildlife Range.

In another development the Chamarajanagar district minister HS Mahadeva Prasad has favoured the move to declare the Cauvery WLS as a tiger reserve. A five-year study by tiger experts indicated that the Male Mahadeshwara WLS, along with the adjoining Cauvery WLS are home to 14 tigers and have a good potential for the future.

Source: HM Aravind. 'Forest fires destroy 300 acres in Bandipur, Nagarahole reserves', *The Times of India*, 21/02/16.

KARNATAKA/KERALA

Nanjangud-Nilambur rail line approved in Railway Budget; concerns over impact on Bandipur TR

Concerns have been raised over the approval granted in the 2016 Railway Budget to the Nanjangud-Nilambur railway line on account of the impact this will have on the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR). The concern stems from the fact that the track alignment will cut through 10.2 km of the reserve. Wildlifers and environmental activists have noted that permissions for the project have not been obtained from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the national and state boards for wildlife. It has also been pointed out that the project had been rejected earlier on economic and ecological grounds.

Officials in the Mysuru Railway Division said that a tunnel is proposed in order to offset the impact on wildlife. Divisional Railway Manager Rajkumar Lal said there was a demand for the project from the people in North Kerala as it would cut short their commuting distance to Karnataka.

Source: R Krishna Kumar. 'Greens see red over Nanjangud-Nilambur line', *The Hindu*, 26/02/16.

KERALA

Camera traps to be deployed all over Wayanad WLS

The entire 344 sq km area of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, home to the largest tiger population in Kerala, is to be brought under camera-trap surveillance. A total of 86 pairs of cameras, one each for the four sq km grids that the sanctuary has been divided into, are needed for the purpose. 16 pairs of cameras are already deployed in the forests and the Forest Department (FD) will soon set up another 51 pairs that have been recently acquired. Wildlife conservation organizations will be roped in to get the remaining camera trap sets.

Experts say the initiative would provide wildlife managers access to details of abundance of tigers and co-predators and their social behaviour even in the core areas of the sanctuary, which are remote and inaccessible.

As per the Status of Tigers in India-2014 report, Wayanad WLS is home to around 76 of the 136 tigers in the state of Kerala.

Source: KR Rajeev. 'Now, all of Wayanad tigers to come under camera gaze', *The Times of India*, 22/02/16.

MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh proposes tourism plan with cameras in tiger dens

The Madhya Pradesh government wants cameras installed in tiger dens so that tourists

can have a closer look at the life of the big cat in the wild. The move is a part of the state's efforts to promote tourism through participation of the private sector in wildlife conservation in forest areas outside national parks and sanctuaries.

The proposal was part of a presentation made by the state government to the Central Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and other departments involved in wildlife conservation. It has proposed to create secure habitat for dispersal of tigers, to develop eco-tourism in degraded forestland through public-private partnership models and to have restaurants and picnic areas inside them. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, had in July last year written to the Prime Minister seeking his directions to the MoEFCC to speed up execution of its proposal. The Centre while reviewing the proposal at a meeting asked the state government to take up further consultation in the matter.

A copy of the presentation was received in reply to an RTI query filed by a wildlife activist who said that the state government should first check cases of poaching rather than promoting such private partnership related activities.

Source: 'M.P. tourists may get a closer look at tiger dens', *The Hindu*, 22/02/16.
'Madhya Pradesh government proposes cameras in tigers den to promote tourism', www.ibnlive.com, 21/02/16.

NGT bans shooting at police firing range near Van Vihar NP

The National Green Tribunal has banned shooting at a police firing range allegedly functioning on government land near the Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal on grounds that it was posing a threat to wildlife and migratory birds (*PA Update* XXII, No. 1). The ban order will be in place until the state government files its reply and the relevant documents are placed before the tribunal.

The tribunal had, in December 2015, issued notices to the Madhya Pradesh Police,

Central Zoo Authority and the Forest Department in this case filed by Ajay Dubey, the founder secretary of environment organization, Prayatna. The petitioner had said that the SAF 25 Battalion was holding over 94 acres which was to be allotted to Van Vihar National Park. He also said that the firing range was in the eco-sensitive zone around the national park though the state government has contested this claim.

Source: 'NGT bans shooting at police firing range near Van Vihar in Bhopal', *Hindustan Times*, 19/02/16.

Ken-Betwa river linking project yet to get clearances; won't take off before end 2016

The Ken-Betwa river linking project is yet to receive three crucial clearances – environment clearance, forest clearance and wildlife clearance – from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and is, therefore, not likely to take off before the end of 2016. According to officials of the Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, obtaining all three clearances will take a while and local villagers too need to be rehabilitated by the state government of Madhya Pradesh. The submergence of 41 sq km of forests in the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) and 14 sq km of forest in Chattarpur due to the project and disturbance to tiger habitat are two important issues that have been flagged by MoEFCC's panels and environmental organisations.

The Rs 9,393 crore river-linking project plans to irrigate 6.35 lakh hectares of land but it will split the PTR. The environment appraisal committee (EAC) of the MoEFCC noted, in a meeting in August 2015, that the project will affect a significant part of PTR as nearly 8% of its forest will get submerged, including in the core area. The EAC deferred clearance for need of more scrutiny. In its October 2015 meeting, the EAC specifically pointed out that the Landscape Management Plan that was being prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India was

needed before taking a call on the environment clearance.

According to the officials, the project will be appraised for wildlife clearance soon as it has been recommended for clearance by Madhya Pradesh Government. A proposal was sent to the Centre in March 2015 but was sent back to the project's nodal agency, the National Water Development Agency on account of shortcomings regarding information on village area, cost benefit analysis and the settlement of forest rights. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 & 1).

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Linking of Ken-Betwa may take off only by year end', *DNA*, 03/02/16.

Six tiger deaths in Madhya Pradesh in eight months

Six tiger deaths have been reported from Madhya Pradesh in the last eight months, the most recent being in the Gumtara range of the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Seoni district. The cause of the death of this last one could not be ascertained but it has been suggested that the tiger had been poisoned. This is the second such case reported from the Pench TR. Earlier a male tiger cub was found dead at Kurai range on August 9, 2015. Pointing out injury marks on its body, forest officials had said that it was killed in a fight over territorial supremacy. However, findings of the investigation report were never revealed.

On January 9, earlier this year, an adult tiger was killed when it came in contact with an electrified fence set up by farmers in Chhindwara district. This incident was reported from Saakh village, which is located in a territorial forest area close to PTR. A 23-year-old youth identified as Jitendra alias Jaggu was arrested by the forest officials after the matter surfaced. Four other farmers have been made the accused in the case. After initial investigations forest officials have ruled out any poaching attempt in this case.

As per the last census there are around 50 tigers in the Kanha-Pench reserves.

Source: P Naveen. 'Madhya Pradesh loses six tigers in eight months; three in Pench reserve', *The Times of India*, 31/01/16.

MADHYA PRADESH/ MAHARASHTRA

Nature camp for students from villages on Pench TR fringe

The NGO, Satpuda Foundation, recently organized a nature camp for 35 students from 10 villages on the fringes of the Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

The students were taken to the nature interpretation complex at Sillari in East Pench during the two-day residential excursion. They were educated about the life cycle of the tiger, shown wildlife documentaries and engaged in various nature-oriented activities. They were also taken on a nature trail along Pipariya lake and Shivkund area of Wagholi for bird watching and identification of plants.

Copies of a conservation manual prepared by the NGO to guide these students in various conservation actions were distributed at the end of the camp.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Pench buffer students get closer to nature', *The Times of India*, 15/02/16.

MAHARASHTRA

Four arrested in Dombivli, Mumbai, with leopard skin; previous killings in SGNP undetected

The recent arrest of four poachers with a leopard skin in Dombivli has raised concerns in the Forest Department (FD) that illegal wildlife trade could be growing in Mumbai. Investigators learnt that the same poachers had killed another leopard in the same area in Raigad last year and then sold the skin in Mumbai. The fact that this went undetected has the officials worried that poaching and wildlife trade could be thriving on a larger scale in the area.

The Kalyan Crime Branch Unit III along with FD officials arrested four tribal people carrying a leopard skin near Dombivli Railway Station. The four accused hail from villages near Pali, in Raigad district. They were booked under Sections 9, 39, 48 (a), 48 (A), 49(B), 50 and 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Police said that during interrogation, one of the accused confessed that they had killed the leopard near Sudhagad fort in Raigad. One of the accused also confessed that they had killed another leopard last year and sold the skin to a Mumbai-based customer. Police tried getting the details but they failed to get information about the buyer.

The case has been handed over to the Vishnu Nagar police station in Dombivli, and the cops and FD officials are now on the look out for the buyer of the first skin. A team of police officials also went to various locations in Raigad to investigate whether more people were involved in the crime.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav, 'Illegal wildlife trade growing in Mumbai, say authorities', *Mid-Day*, 01/02/16.

Rawandi village agrees to relocate from Sahyadri TR

Residents of Rawandi, a small hamlet of 23 people located in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, have agreed to move out of the forest and relocate to Eksal village in Bhiwandi tehsil of Thane district located around 260 km away. Forest officials say this will have a positive impact on the forests and wildlife and also offer better opportunities to these people who were located deep inside the forest and had to experience many restrictions and difficulties.

A relocated family of five persons has each been allocated one acre of land for agriculture and 370 sq m area for construction of a house. The land that has been allocated to the relocated villagers has been purchased by the Forest Department (FD) from the villages of Eksal and Sagan in Bhiwandi.

Efforts by the FD are also going on to shift the remaining four villages of Adoshi, Modishi, Khirkindi and Khusapur that are all located in Jawali tehsil of Satara district, which is known for dense forest and rich wildlife. Officials say they have received confirmation letters from the residents of these four villages as well saying that they want to shift to another location.

Source: Nikhil Deshmukh. 'Finally, Rawandi villagers make way for wildlife', *The Times of India*, 25/02/16.

Pench TR launches a public-participation project

The Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) has launched a project to involve people in saving tigers and forests under its jurisdiction. Large-scale public participation is being sought from villagers around five protected areas — the Umred-Karhandla, Mansinghdeo, Tipeswar, Painganga Wildlife Sanctuaries and the Bor TR.

The project, an initiative of the Pench Tiger Conservation Foundation, includes sensitization of women's self-help groups in 40 vulnerable villages around these PAs. Of the 40 villages, 20 are from the Pench fringes and 10 each from Bor and Umred-Karhandla. The Rs. 6 lakh project will involve workshops to inform women about ongoing government schemes for villages around the parks. They are being informed about the state government's Van-Dhan Jan-Dhan Yojana and about various self-employment options before them such as developing kitchen gardens and raising poultry. The project was launched on January 21.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Pench tiger reserve project to bridge gap with locals', *The Times of India*, 02/02/16.

20 villages near Tadoba seek community forest rights under FRA

20 villages in the buffer zone of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve recently sought community forest rights (CFRs) under the

Forest Rights Act, 2006. These include 13 proposals from villages in Chimur tehsil, five from Bhadrawati and two from Sindewahi tehsil. The district-level appraisal committee headed by the Collector, Deepak Mhaisekar has, however, decided to keep these proposals on hold pending an opinion in the matter from the Forest Department (FD), which has been asked to verify whether these areas falls under critical wildlife habitat (CWH) category under the FRA. All these proposals will come up for consideration in the committee's next meeting.

34 other proposals of CFRs were approved by the committee in the said meeting. This included 25 proposals from Bramhapuri tehsil, three from Rajura, four from Korpana and two proposals from Jiwti tehsil. This has taken the tally of villages with recognized CFRs in the district to 122.

Source: Mazhar Ali. '20 villages near Tadoba seek rights over forest produce', *The Times of India*, 21/02/16.

Tiger found dead after being hit by vehicle in Tadoba Andhari TR buffer

Veterinary doctors have inferred that the sub-adult tiger found dead near the forest nursery in the Chandrapur buffer range of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TR) in January was hit by a vehicle. A team of doctors that conducted the post-mortem found that the tiger's jaw was fractured in the left side, which could have happened only due to the impact of a speeding vehicle. The carcass was at least 12 days old and was totally putrified. All body organs were so decomposed that the doctors even failed to identify the sex of the tiger.

Forest officers claimed that some vehicle had hit the tiger head-on while crossing the busy Chandrapur-Mul highway at Kesla Ghat. The big cat managed to walk 170 meters, up to boundary of Kesla Ghat forest nursery, before succumbing to the injuries.

Last year alone 16 tigers were lost in Chandrapur. Now, this fresh incident has raised questions over the protection offered to the tigers in the Tadoba landscape. Questions are

being asked about how the forest nursery staff had failed to detect a tiger carcass lying right at the boundary for almost two weeks and why the staff of the buffer zone did not notice the missing tiger cub when there is now a full record of all tigers and their monitoring is a high priority activity.

NGO activists have pointed out to the rising wildlife road accidents on the Chandrapur-Mul road, particularly the Kesla Ghat stretch, and that it was a matter of concern that the government is considering national highway status for this road.

Source: Mazhar Ali. 'Tiger found dead near forest nursery was hit by vehicle', *The Times of India*, 06/02/16.

Post of Field Director, Navegaon-Nagzira TR vacant for five months

The post of Field Director (FD), Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR), has been vacant since September 1, 2015, when Sanjay Thaware retired. The additional charge was given to Gondia Deputy Conservator of Forests (DyCF), Jitendra Ramgaonkar, for two months and is currently being held by the Bhandara DyCF, NR Praveen. It has been pointed out, however, that with a lot of problems being faced by the Bhandara and Gondia divisions themselves, the officers holding additional charge of NNTR cannot be justified.

The government, recently, filled three vacant posts of Assistant Conservator of Forests in NNTR, which had been lying vacant for the past eight months. Four posts of Foresters, a post of Conservator of Forests and another for a Divisional Forest Officer, however, remain to be filled.

The absence of a regular FD is said to have impacted management, protection and conservation activities in the reserve. A senior officer said that there was no coordination between the territorial and wildlife wing, dispersing animals were being poached in the adjoining territorial areas and patrolling too has been limited as the RFOs are busy with *khasra* (tree felling on private land). In the last five

years, at least 25 sloth bears have been poached outside NNTR and there is no count of animals like deer, nilgai and wild boars killed similarly. Most of the animal deaths are due to electrocution; however, the forest officials have not yet sought data on power tripping from MSEB officials and neither has the MSEB provided the same on its own.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Navegaon-Nagzira tiger reserve headless for 5 months', *The Times of India*, 05/02/16.

MAHARASHTRA/TELANGANA

Two tigers travel from Maharashtra to Kawal TR



Two tigers — a male from the Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Pandharkawda, Yavatmal and a female from Kanhalgaon, Chandrapur — are reported to have travelled 150 km and 100 km respectively to the Kawal Tiger Reserve in neighbouring Telangana. Forests from Tipeshwar connect to Kawal via Korpana, Manikgarh and to Kanhalgaon through Wamanpalli. Spread over 2,014 sq km Kawal was declared a tiger reserve in April 2012. However, it was believed to be devoid of tigers until recently when forest staff has been recording some evidence of the presence of the big cat here.

The NGO, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), in association with the Forest Department had conducted Phase IV intensive monitoring of tiger populations outside protected areas in 2014-15. This had led to the creation of a database of all tigers in most of tiger bearing areas of Maharashtra. Several important forest blocks acting as corridors

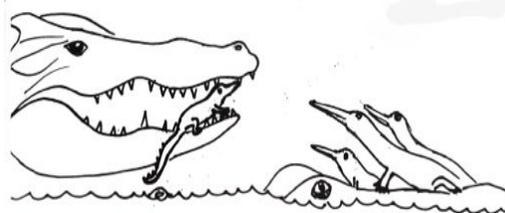
between key protected areas were also sampled during the exercise. One such area included the forest blocks of Pandharkawda outside Tipeshwar WLS. Here camera trapping was carried out in April-May 2015 and with the help of those records it was confirmed that the tiger T-8 has moved from Pandharkawda to Kawal; similarly the photo of the tigress T-3 matched with that of the new tigress in Kawal.

It has been noted that the migration of the tigress from Kanhalgaon to Kawal underlines the need for declaring it a sanctuary to ensure long-term survival of tigers. The proposal for sanctuary status for Kanhalgaon, however, is under state government's consideration for a long time now (*PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 5). Additionally a number of linear intrusions like roads and canals have been or will soon start impacting tiger movement in the region.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. '2 Maha tigers found in Telangana forest 100-150km away', *The Times of India*, 03/02/16.

ODISHA

Rise in crocodile, gharial population in Satkosia WLS



The Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary has witnessed an increase in crocodile population with about 123 gharials and muggers found inhabiting the Mahanadi river gorge and adjoining pools within the sanctuary during a recent census. During 2015 census, the crocodile population was estimated at 107 – 90 muggers and 17 gharials.

According to the latest census that was carried out on January 8, 2016, 107 muggers and 16 gharials were spotted in the sanctuary

area. Of these, three gharials and 66 muggers were found in the Mahanadi river gorge. 12 muggers were found in the river while 18 were found in various pools inside the sanctuary at night. There were 13 gharials and four muggers in the Tikarpada Gharial Conservation and Research Centre. Seven muggers were seen in various pools of the Athamallik forest division.

The census was carried out under the direct supervision of the Angul circle Regional Chief Conservator of Forests.

Source: 'Satkosia sees rise in crocodile population', www.orissapost.com, 29/01/16.

RAJASTHAN

Sariska TR put in the 'good' category of MEE



In the management effective evaluation (MEE) report for the country's 47 tiger reserves (TRs),

Sariska has improved its status in the past four years. It had a status of being a 'fair' tiger reserve (TR) in the last MEE conducted in 2010-11. In the MEE report for 2014-15 (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 1), it has been put in the category of 'good' TRs. Ranthambhore falls in the same category.

MEE conducted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India is the assessment of how well protected areas are being managed and their effectiveness in conserving target flora and fauna. In the report released in January, the reserves were put into four categories – 'very good', 'good', 'fair', and 'poor'. Among those put in the 'very good' category are Anaimalai, Bandipur, Corbett, Kalakad-Mundanthurai, Kanha, Melghat, Mudumalai, Nagarhole, Panna, Parambikulam, Pench (Maharashtra), Pench (Madhya Pradesh), Periyar, Satpuda, Sundarbans, Tadoba-Andhari and Valmiki.

In the report, Sariska is among the two TRs that have got special mention for their

performance due to the fact that tigers were wiped out from both of them in the past. Sariska has 13 tigers, according to the latest census. Proper compliance with various tiger conservation policies has contributed to Sariska's status upgrade, said Sariska Field Director in response to the MEE ranking.

Source: 'Sariska tiger reserve leaps from 'fair' to 'good' grade', *The Times of India*, 03/02/16.

TAMIL NADU

Tribal communities in Erode look forward to FRA title deeds

Tribal communities in the Erode district have heaved a sigh of relief following the Supreme Court's recent reversal of the Interim order of Madras High Court staying the issue of title deeds under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). The order came on an application filed by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), which argued that there was no need to restrict the operation of the FRA in one state when it was being implemented in the rest of the country. According to official statistics, 21,781 claims have been filed in Tamil Nadu and 3,723 titles deeds are ready for distribution.

Where Erode district is concerned, the Forest Department (FD) had itself scrutinised 411 applications and completed measurements for 337.8 hectares last year. Geddaisal near Hassanur accounts for the highest number of 90 applicants (56.02 hectares), followed by Nagalur forest settlement with 86 applicants (121.62 hectares). Tribal communities in Mavanatham, Uginiyam, Ramaranai, Uppupallam, Nandhipuram, Vilankombai and Kembanur settlements are also entitled to title deeds.

Last year, the MLA from the area had made a representation to the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu who is the chairperson of the state level monitoring committee under the FRA to ensure establishment of gram sabhas, constitution of forest rights committees (FRCs), and determine community forest resources

rights by the gram sabhas. The Tribal Welfare Department is expected to organise training about the FRA for all the members of the FRCs along with the members of the sub-divisional level committees and district level committees.

Source: 'Tribal communities in STR looking forward to early grant of title deeds', *The Hindu*, 08/02/16.

Dumped plastic waste affecting wildlife in Mudumalai, Sirumalai forests

Huge amounts of plastic waste, mainly dumped by tourists, is affecting wildlife, even causing deaths in different parts of the state. Two recent incidents of plastic material being found in animal dung - elephant dung in Mudumalai forests in the Nilgiris and gaur dung in Sirumalai forests of Dindigul division - have alarmed wildlife officials.

The problem in the Sirumalai range is reported to have intensified in the last couple of years, with tourists coming in droves. According to the Palani Hill Conservation Council, dumping plastic waste in the forests has become routine, with a large quantity generated in Dindigul town dumped on the 17th and 18th bends up the hill. Many tourists dump food waste in plastic bags along with disposable plastic tumblers. Wild animals are attracted to the leftover food and eat it with the plastic bags, affecting their digestive system and sometimes choking them to death.

A Dindigul based wildlife enthusiast has submitted a petition to the district collector about the illegal dumping of plastic. The forest officials said that they have been doing everything in their power to control the dumping in the forest areas but the sheer magnitude of the problem has been defeating them.

Source: P Oppili, 'Plastic waste dumped inside forests by tourists kills animals, officials alarmed', *The Times of India*, 07/02/16.

TELANGANA

Tiger holds up traffic in Kawal TR

As many as 15 vehicles including a group of pilgrims returning home in a bus from the Sammakka-Saralamma tribal fair at Medaram in Warangal district were stranded in the midst of the Jannaram forest of the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) as a tiger staged a 'midnight sit-in'. The tiger sat quietly in the middle of the road for about 40 minutes with an occasional roar. This is the first time that such an incident has been reported from Kawal. Though frightened, the pilgrims said it was nevertheless a rare opportunity to spot a tiger.

Kawal is not known to have a tiger population of its own, though tigers from neighbouring Maharashtra have been reported here in recent times (see story above, Pg. 12)

Source: 'Tiger holds up pilgrims' progress in Hyderabad', *The Times of India*, 22/02/16.

UTTARAKHAND

WII recommends 'silent zone' above Kedarnath WLS

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has recommended notification of the areas 'above' wildlife sanctuaries as a 'silent zone' by keeping the noise level of helicopters within the limit of 50 db. This is the recommendation in WII's interim report with regard to height and noise level for flights over the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (KWLS) made to the state Chief Wildlife Warden (CWW). The report says that these measures will reduce impact on wildlife. The WII will submit its final report in summer this year. The interim report also highlights the fact that on an average the flights are generating noise level of 70 dB and fly below 600 meter.

In 2013 the Divisional Forest Official of KWLS had submitted a report to the CWW, saying that animals and birds of many endangered and rare species such as the Snow leopard, Musk deer and the Monal had

abandoned certain areas of the sanctuary once the frequent flights for Kedarnath temple began for the pilgrims.

The NGT, while hearing a case in the matter, had asked the state to take immediate steps to submit its proposal for notification of an eco-sensitive zone covering KWLS. It also directed the state government to issue specific directions in consonance with the aviation policy with specific reference to the eco-sensitive zones of KWLS in relation to height and level of noise that the helicopter being used by the company should be permitted to generate. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 5)

Source: Seema Sharma, 'Wildlife Institute of India recommends noise, height limits for helicopters to fly over Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 31/01/16.

NTCA recommends Nandhaur WLS as TR

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has recommended Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to be the third tiger reserve in the Uttarakhand after Rajaji and Corbett. The sanctuary is situated between the Gola and Sarda rivers and is home to more than 100 species of trees, 25 mammal species, 250 birds, 15 reptiles and 20 fish species. This area of 270 sq km has reported 21 different tigers after it was declared a sanctuary in 2012. It is part of the Terai Arc landscape and the Shivalik Elephant Reserve and also has a healthy elephant population.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'NTCA recommends Nandhaur WLS to be third tiger reserve of the state', *The Times of India*, 23/02/16.

NTCA cuts Corbett TR funds

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has cut the funds to the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) to Rs 6.5 crore. This is Rs one crore less than last year's allocation of Rs 7.5 crore. According to the Deputy Director of the reserve, they were expecting an increase of 10%

as has been the trend over the years. Though they have managed to get Rs 1.2 crore under CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund, Management and Planning Authority), the decrease would affect such works as construction or repair of roads, police posts, water bodies, salary of employees, and removal of lantana.

The cut has the authorities worried as the reserve needs Rs. 20 crore every year to manage all the expenditure. This year, they got Rs. 12 crore from the state government to manage their expenditure.

The Union Finance Ministry has also slashed the Centre's share of non-recurring expenditure from 100% to 60%, for Project Tiger, leaving the remaining amount for the respective states to manage. However, in the case of special status states, which includes the three Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir and Uttarakhand and the Northeastern states, the ratio is 90:10.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'National Tiger Conservation Authority slashes Corbett funds by Rs. 1 crore', *The Times of India*, 03/02/16.

UTTAR PRADESH

605 soft shell turtles seized in Mainpuri

Mainpuri district forest officials recently seized 605 Indian soft shell turtles, which were, allegedly, being smuggled to other South Asian countries. Acting on a tip-off, officials raided a colony of members of the Kanjar tribe and recovered the turtles; the suspects, however, managed to flee. An FIR has been lodged against seven people under Section 9, 39, 50 and 51 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

There has been a spurt in turtle smuggling from Mainpuri and nearby regions in the recent months. 20 turtles were recovered here in November 2015, 124 in December 2015 and 50 in January, earlier this year. 3000 turtles were also seized in the first week of February in a truck from Mainpuri by the Dumka forest division staff in Jharkhand.

The Indian soft shell turtle is used for food and drugs and is in great demand in South Asian countries. Officials say a single turtle can fetch anything between Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 in the international markets.

Source: Anuja Jaiswal. '605 turtles recovered from Mainpuri', *The Times of India*, 20/02/16.

35 captive-bred gharials released in Hastinapur WLS

Forest Department (FD) officials, working in collaboration with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) India and farmer volunteers known as 'Ganga mitras' recently released 35 gharials into the Ganga at Hastinapur. The gharials - 12 males and 23 females, all a little less than three years old - were reared in captivity at Kukrail in Lucknow and were transferred to Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in special wooden containers. Biometrics of each of the gharials were recorded at the facility and their scutes (scales) were marked with cuts for identification. The gharials weighed between 4.5 and 6.5 kg and measured between 129 and 145 cm in total body length.

With this release, the number of gharials released into the river in the region in the last seven years has gone up to 606. Ganga mitras trained by WWF to actively participate in gharial and turtle conservation — from Makhdoompur and Bijnor, Moradabad, Bareilly and Shahjahanpur districts - are part of a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together people to participate in conservation initiatives.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 4 & 2)

Source: Sandeep Rai. 'Local farmers, forest dept, WWF join hands to save gharial', *The Times of India*, 22/02/16.



NTCA awaits MoD nod for drone monitoring project in TRs

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is awaiting a final nod from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to start its drone-monitoring project for combating wildlife poaching and human-animal conflict. The NTCA has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to start monitoring by drones in five tiger reserves (TRs) – Panna, Corbett, Kaziranga, Sundarbans and Sathyamangalam, and the permission being sought is to fly the drones only within the boundary of the core area of these reserves. A budget of Rs 3.5 crore has been earmarked for the project.

The WII has got required clearances from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Home Ministry and now a final approval is awaited from the MoD. The WII will have to train the Forest Department staff to handle the equipment and utilise the technology. The drones will be imported, but will be assembled here in order to customise them to suit the geographic and the specific requirements of the TRs. Before deployment, a team will map out the risk zones for poaching and conflict. Each drone will need a team of three biologists and as many engineers.

Two years ago, a successful trial run using drones had been conducted in the forests of the Panna TR (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 4). Following that, WII is improvising on its UAVs to include additional features like night vision capability, landing capacity, and



increased duration and speed of flights.

The project, if successful in the first pilot phase in the five TRs, will be scaled up later on. (Also see Perspective, *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 4)

Source: 'NTCA awaiting Defence nod for drone monitoring of tiger reserves', *The Indian Express*, 02/02/16.

Madras HC asks Centre to consider revoking ban on sea cucumber trade

The Madras High Court (HC) has asked the Centre to consider a request by fisherfolk to revoke the 15 year-old ban on fishing and trading of sea cucumber, and pass suitable orders in three months. Justice R Subbaih, who heard a writ petition filed by the Nagai Sea Foods Catching Association (NSFCA) asked the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, and the State Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, to give a personal hearing to fishermen representatives before passing orders.

After a notification was issued in July 2001 imposing a ban on fishing and trade in sea cucumber, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) was commissioned to undertake studies to assess the status of the sea cucumber in Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar. The ZSI recommended alternative methods of conservation and a ban only on trawl fishing, the writ petition said. The ZSI's report – Studies on Assessment of Sea Cucumber in Palk Bay and Gulf of Manner – did not recommend continuation of the ban, the NSFCA has said.

According to the petitioner, families involved in fishing and trading in sea cucumber in the Gulf of Mannar, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tuticorin, and Nagapattinam had been badly hit by the ban, as trade was prevalent in a number of other countries including Japan, Australia, China, the USA, Egypt, Fiji, Philippines and Galapagos island.

Source: A Subramani. 'Revoke ban on trading sea cucumber, say fishermen', *The Times of India*, 13/02/16.

Centre extends relaxation of green norms in LWE affected districts

The Centre has extended the relaxation of green norms in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas in the country till December 2018. The central government had in May 2011 granted relaxations under section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, to help expedite the creation of public utility infrastructure in 60 LWE affected districts identified by the planning commission for implementation of the Integrated Action Plan. This was for creation of critical public utility infrastructure by government departments, not involving more than five hectares of forestland. The general approval was granted, keeping in view the importance of creation of public utility infrastructure including schools, dispensaries, hospitals, electric and telecommunication lines, drinking water projects, rainwater harvesting structures, and minor irrigation canals.

The approval was valid up to December 31, 2015. A recent statement released by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change says that this provision has been further extended to a total of 117 LWE affected districts and will be now valid up to December 2018.

Source: 'Green norms relaxation in Naxal areas to continue till 2018', *The Hindu*, 22/02/16.

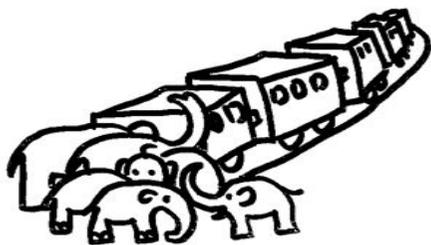
Mitigation cost must be built into costs for linear projects in forest areas: WII

Setting up green infrastructure and including mitigation costs in cost of projects intruding into forested areas are some of the key recommendations made by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC). The ministry had asked the WII to prepare a technical document suggesting measures to mitigate impact of linear projects like canals, roads, railways and power

transmission lines passing through forested areas.

However, even as January 31 was the last date for stakeholders to submit comments on the draft guidelines prepared by the WII, not many did, as these were not publicized by the MoEFCC. Earlier, in October 2011, similar guidelines for linear infrastructure intrusions in natural areas were recommended to the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife.

The WII has recommended as part of its report that mitigation should first consider avoidance of development – the ‘no go’ option. If avoidance is not possible, stringent measures need to be stipulated in areas representing specialized habitats, the habitat ranges of protected species, migratory routes and bottlenecks in ecological corridors that are crucial to effective conservation in the long-term. The cost of mitigation should be built into the project cost, it says.



Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. ‘Mitigation cost must be part of infra plans’, *The Times of India*, 02/02/16.

Tigers in Northeast India genetically different

The tiger population of Northeast India is genetically different from the rest of the country. The revelation was made in the detailed report ‘Status of the Tigers, Co-predators and Prey in India’ brought out recently by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The report says that an interesting step would be to investigate the admixture of genetic material between these and the Indo-Chinese tigers (*Panthera tigris corbetti*) found in the border areas of the northeastern states. It is also

mentioned in the report that the Northeast, Dibang and Namdapha formed one population cluster, while Manas, Kaziranga, Nameri and Buxa formed a second cluster.

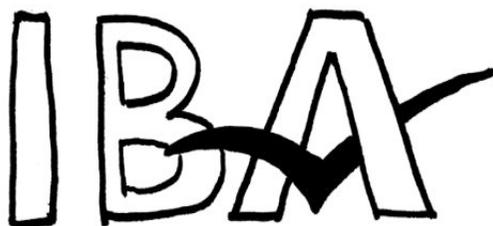
Senior professor at the WII and one of the authors of the report, Yadendra Jhala, said that tigers from Northeast India are distinctly different in their genetic composition. This is likely as the Northeast tiger population probably forms a zone where there has been historic gene flow from Myanmar. This is the route tigers took to enter India and this process has been continuous, resulting in mixing of genes of tigers from Southeast Asia and India. It creates a different and distinct composition of gene frequencies in the region.

The report suggests that the northeastern hills and Brahmaputra landscape, Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong-Pakke-Nameri-Orang has the largest population of 163 tigers and should be managed as a single meta-population. Enhanced protection in the region will help build prey and subsequently tiger population in the long-term. Manas-Buxa along with areas of the Bhutan landscape had the potential to sustain higher number of tigers and were currently below their carrying capacity. Dibang and Namdapha show good promise for tiger and biodiversity conservation but needed more conservation investment, the report has suggested.

Source: Roopak Goswami. ‘Northeast tiger genes unique, says study’, *The Telegraph*, 08/02/16.



Important Bird Areas Update



Peeyush

NATIONAL NEWS

Vulture's services worth over Rs. 5 lakh, says IUCN study

A recent study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has estimated that 600 vultures consume the same amount of animal waste as a medium utility plant required to dispose it. The study conducted by the IUCN office in India says, "A medium utility plant processes 164,400 kg of meat in a year, whereas the amount consumed by 600 vultures in a year is between 115,200 kg and 172,800 kg". A medium plant is valued at Rs 6.7 crore in rural areas and Rs 7.9 crore in urban. This gives a vulture a value of Rs. 5.85 lakh in villages and Rs. 6.96 lakh in cities.

In the past two decades, the vulture population in the country has declined drastically on account of the use of anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac to treat livestock. Though the drug is banned in the country, there have been reports of its illegal use. The absence of the birds has forced the government to put in place carcass rendering plants at several places. IUCN India scientists studied the cost of carcass disposal through these plants to estimate the economic value of the service provided by the birds.

The decline in vulture population has had other indirect costs, too. Anecdotal evidence shows that the population of secondary scavengers such as dogs, jackals and rodents has been increasing. This might be leading to

increased expenditure on diseases such as rabies, leptospirosis in humans and canine distemper in tigers. Besides, the increase in feral dogs' population and the change in their feeding habits might also have an impact on the prey base for large wild cats like the tiger in future.

The researchers have also pointed out that a vulture safety zone for breeding 600 birds and releasing them in the wild would cost 75% of the cost of a medium carcass rendering plant.

Source: Kumar Sambhav Shrivastava, 'Scientists say a vulture's services worth over Rs. 5 lakh', *Hindustan Times*, 15/02/16.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Atapaka Bird Sanctuary is world's largest home for spot-billed pelicans

The Atapaka Bird Sanctuary, part of the Kolleru Lake, has been identified as the world's largest home for the spot-billed pelican. As per the recently conducted Asian Water Bird Census, the global population of this bird is about 22,000 and between 35–40% of this population was reported to be roosting at Atapaka. According to the Forest Department (FD), about 5,200 spot-billed pelicans were counted at Atapaka and about 1,000 birds were spotted at Madhavapuram, located in West Godavari district. Around 1,000 nests were also seen in the villages in Kolleru and surrounding habitations.

The average annual population of the pelican here for the last few years has been

between 2,000 and 3,000; it is for the first time that this number has gone beyond 5000 birds. The FD has created artificial mounds and about 150 iron stands have been erected in the 320-acre sanctuary in Kolleru for the nesting birds.

Source: Rajulapudi Srinivas. 'Atapaka, largest home of spot-billed pelican', *The Hindu*, 19/02/16.

ASSAM

Women self-help groups of Dadara for protection of the Greater adjutant stork



Under the leadership of NGO, Aaranyak's Greater adjutant stork project team, 14 women self-help groups of Dadara village in Kamrup district have formed a 'Hargila (Greater adjutant stork) army', for the conservation and protection of these birds.

The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) has sponsored a four-month training programme for the women of Dadara at the Fashion Institute of Sualkuchi. The SIRD has distributed handloom machines and yarn to the hargila army at Dadara in what will be the first step towards creating a hargila centre at Dadara. It is hoped that with the sale of textiles, the families of Dadara will be able to support the conservation program and also become economically self-reliant at the same time.

The current population of the Greater adjutant stork is only 1,200, of which, 80 per cent are found in Assam. The bird's habitat has been greatly impacted by human development. A number of historical colonies have decreased or disappeared in recent years. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 6)

Source: Roopak Goswami, 'Village forms 'hargila army'', *The Telegraph*, 18/02/16.

KERALA

Speedboat operators, fisherfolk clash in Vembanad

The ongoing conflict between the fisherfolk community on Valandakkadu island and operators of speedboats on the Vembanad backwaters resulted in a big strike in the month of February, with local people staging a blockade of the water body with country boats. The blockade, staged on the Kaithavana Kadavu-Maradu stretch of the Kochi backwaters, was aimed at preventing tourist boats from darting to and fro in the waters surrounding the island. The protesters have accused the boat operators of being selfish and ruining the livelihood of many for the sake of providing enjoyment to a few. They pointed out that fishing was the sole source of livelihood for the 45 families living on the island, but the criss-crossing powerboats were posing a serious safety risk to the community who use country boats. They were, as a consequence, reluctant to venture into the water body during the day.

The sudden rise in the number of speedboats plying here has been attributed to the presence of luxury hotels and several agencies offering boats on hire within the municipality. The fishing community has also alleged that the disposal of diesel and sewage from these boats had caused pollution of water, leading to a depletion of fish stock. In order to regulate the speedboats, the local Maradu municipality has directed tourist boat operators to apply for a licence from the local body. No boats will be allowed to ply here if they do not have the licence.

Source: Hiran Unnikrishnan. 'Wave of protest in Vembanad waters', *The Hindu*, 22/02/16.

MAHARASHTRA

JICA refuses to change the alignment of Mumbai Trans Harbour Link

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has clearly told the Mumbai

Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), that it won't allow a change in the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL) project's alignment. The planning authority had informally suggested that the alignment at the Sewri end be shifted a few metres south so that there is no opposition to the project on account of the danger to flamingoes and the mudflats. The estimated cost of the MTHL project is Rs. 17,000-crore, of which the JICA will be funding around Rs. 15,000 crore.

The MMRDA had said that it would follow a majority of the mitigation measures suggested by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and if there are any more suggestions, then NGOs and environmentalists can come forward. MMRDA officials have also pointed out that there are chances that independent experts and environmentalists might oppose the project during its implementation. This will not only delay the project, but also accelerate its cost further. Also, the BNHS report has stated that the construction of the bridge at the Nhava Sheva and Sewri end mudflats should be done in 15 to 18 months. This deadline cannot be met if there is opposition during implementation, the MMRDA has said.

More than 40,000 flamingoes visit Sewri during winter, and environmentalists have expressed concern that the current MTHL alignment might have a negative impact on them and the other 150 odd species of birds that use the mudflats. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, Nos. 5, 4, 3 & 1; Vol. XX, No. 2; Vol. XIX, No. 1 and Vol. XVIII, No. 4).

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav, 'Japanese agency refuses to change alignment of Trans-Harbour Link', *Mid-Day*, 20/02/16.

ODISHA

Solar energy technology for biodiversity conservation at Chilika

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is all set to usher in the introduction of solar energy

technology to drive biodiversity conservation and livelihood activities at Chilika. From using solar-hybrid engines for tourist boats that ply in the 1,100 sq. km lake to using renewable technology to run solar dryers and chill rooms of primary fishery cooperative societies, a number of plans are reported to be at an advanced stage. For the project, the ISA will soon sign a memorandum of understanding with Ramsar Convention, and the Central Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is working on the details.

As per the plan, the diesel engine-operated boats plying in the lagoon would be converted into solar hybrid engines over the next few years. Thrusters using solar panels would be used by boats and the technology for it will be provided by the Indian Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar. The Odisha Renewable Energy Development Agency will be a partnering agency for the tech know-how, which is required for the solar energy engines.

For the fisherfolk communities, solar dryers and blowers have been installed in and around Chilika under the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project. Similarly, chill rooms with a capacity of two tonnes would be created for cooperative bodies. Installation of one MW solar power plant for shoreline villages is also part of the plan.

Source: Siba Mohanty, 'Chilika, Paris Talks' 1st Impact', *The New Indian Express*, 12/02/16.

RAJASTHAN

Decisions at SWLB meeting: Captive breeding centre for GIB, catfish eradication in Keoladeo NP, road widening through Ranthambhore

The Rajasthan government is said to be considering setting up of a captive breeding centre for the Great Indian Bustard following a proposal made recently by the Wildlife Institute of India. The idea was proposed at a meeting with the Chief Minister (CM) of the state where officials from various departments and members

of the state wildlife board were also present. The CM is reported to have asked officials to study the Maharashtra model for arranging additional financial resources in the matter.

Other decisions taken in the meeting related to the eradication of the catfish from the Keoladeo National Park, the setting up of an Executive Council to ensure time bound implementation and monitoring of the decisions taken by the Wildlife Board, approval for a

second rope way at Sunda Mata temple in Jalore district as well as broadening of the Sawai Madhopur-Shivpuri Road passing through the Ranthambhore National Park.

Source: 'Raj govt, WII mull captive breeding centre for Great Indian Bustard', *Business Standard*, 23/02/16.



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 60, April 2006

ANDHRA PRADESH

Telugu Ganga Canal to be re-routed to protect Sri Lankamalleswara WLS

The Andhra Pradesh Irrigation Department has taken a decision to re-route the Telugu Ganga Canal to protect the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary (SLWLS) and important habitat of the critically endangered Jerdon's Courser. A recent study by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) had pointed out that the canal project was posing a huge threat to the habitat of the courser that is found here. The decision of the state government has been welcomed by national and international organizations and bird experts.

Source: 'Decision brings hope for India's rarest bird', *Birdlife*, 01/02/06.

KERALA

Tiger Reserve status sought for Wayanad

The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department is likely to seek Tiger Reserve status for the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary after a recent field survey suggested a good population of the big cats in the area. Following the tiger census conducted here from February 20 to 27, the FD has estimated that the total tiger population in the area is between 20 and 25 animals. The survey teams actually spotted six tigers including cubs in the Tholpetty and Muthanga Ranges of the sanctuary.

Source: 'Tiger reserve status sought', *The Hindu*, 03/03/06.

PUNJAB

Punjab allows hunting of nilgai, wild boar

The Punjab government recently issued a notification allowing for the hunting of nilgai

and wild boar. The permit for hunting would be issued by the respective SDMs after receiving a resolution from the village panchayat, stating that the animals had been damaging their crops. The Forest and Wildlife Departments will not be involved in the process of issuing the hunting permits that would be valid for two months.

A recent census conducted by the Wildlife Department has put the number of nilgai and wild boar in the state at 8000, and 14000 respectively. However, some members of the wildlife advisory board have contested the figures saying that these were exaggerated. (Also see *PA Updates* 50 & 46)

Source: 'Punjab allows hunting of nilgai, boars', *The Statesman*, 09/03/06.

WEST BENGAL

Fire in Singalila NP

Nearly 75 hectares of the Singalila National Park were affected by fire in the first week of March. The fire broke out in the higher reaches of the park. It was reportedly confined to the ground-level and therefore the damage was limited. It took place in different patches and was confined mostly to areas with bamboo. There was no report of any wildlife casualty.

The fire fighting was done jointly by the staff of the Territorial and the Wildlife divisions of the Forest Department. Nearly 90 people, 70 of whom were labourers from the nearby forest villages of Gurdung and Beechgoan were deployed to put out the fire.

The Forest Department was put on high alert for further fires due to the prevailing dry weather conditions in the region. Fire fighting teams have been set up in every forest block. Fire lines were being created and controlled burning was also being undertaken in some places

Source: 'Singalila fire put out', *The Statesman*, 09/03/06.

PERSPECTIVE

Out of syllabus, out of mind!

Ask any student from Andaman and Nicobar Islands the location of Chowra or Teressa Island, and 90% would fail to answer the question. Ask them about Timbuktu or Congo, and it's likely they will have all the details. The A&N islands are home to mountains, the sea, beaches, forests, plains and even tribal communities not found anywhere else, and yet, little of this is part of the school curriculum here.

This is not how it has always been. The British had, in fact, successfully introduced study of local geography in the islands in the early part of the 20th century itself: *Jughrafia – Jazair Andaman o Nicobar*, nicknamed *Andaman ka Jughrafia*, the geography text book written by Master Abdus Subhan in 1935 in Urdu for students of the 3rd standard.

Subhan explains in his preface of the book that the British had made the study of the geography of the islands compulsory in 1920 itself. There were no books available though there was no dearth of reports and data in English and teachers taught whatever they could, according to their own level of understanding. That was when Abdus Subhan embarked upon the onerous task of preparing a proper book for the students.

Though basically a book of geography, it gave quite a lucid idea of the state of affairs in those days. There is a short account of the history of the place - a few words about the aborted first settlement in 1789, the Battle of Aberdeen, assassination of Lord Mayo, and developmental works under various chief commissioners. The geography portion is quite exhaustive and covers both the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands. It covers all the aspects that a book on geography should cover including the land, people, communication, climate, rainfall, agricultural produce, occupation of the people, industrial establishment, trades, towns and villages. The efforts of Master Abdus Subhan, at a time when technological support was non-existent, and the

initiative of the colonial administration were commendable to say the least.

In independent India, the idea kept germinating every now and then, but there has been no serious attempt even after 70 years to teach the Islanders about their own Islands. Though there are a number of books written for the tourists, no concerted effort has been made to prepare a curriculum to familiarize the children about their own surroundings. And whom then can we blame if the islanders are insensitive towards the vulnerable tribes or the fragile ecology?

And even if a few books are being prepared and finalized due to efforts of a few non-governmental organizations, the implementation remains entangled in bureaucratic red-tapism.

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For private circulation/ Printed matter

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