

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIII, No. 2

April 2017 (No. 126)

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Protected Area Update

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Produced by

The Documentation and Outreach Centre

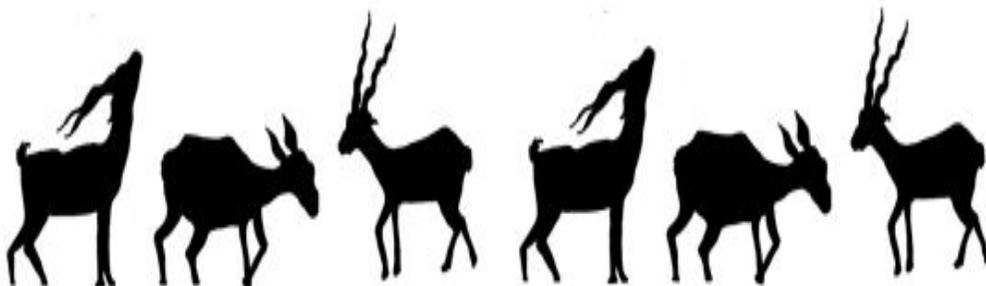
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Publication of the PA Update has been supported by

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

Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, C/o FES

World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature - India

Donations from a number of individual supporters

Forests and forest fires

Significant movement of wild-animals in search of water, thousands of acres of forests burnt down fires, particularly in southern India (see stories below from Karnataka), even the death of a forest guard in fighting the blaze in Karnataka's Bandipur Tiger Reserve... news reports in January and February from across southern India indicate clearly that summer has come early to the forests here this year, it is going to be a harsh summer and it is going to be a long one.

The themes and structure of the reports are interesting even as they are similar: forest officials and wildlife experts suggesting that the fires are not natural and must have been ignited by miscreants, by local communities unhappy with forest department policies or even by disgruntled forest staff. The reports also uniformly highlight the sorry state of affairs – sanctioned posts have not been filled in in many places resulting in a serious shortage of manpower to deal with such situations; staff, where available, is not adequately trained and there is a serious shortage of necessary infrastructure and equipment – one of the big challenges in fighting the blaze in Bandipur, for instance, was getting food and water to the fire-fighters in good time and in adequate quantities. And then there is the mandatory assertion by the authorities that a criminal investigation has been (or will be) constituted and that the miscreants will be brought to book.

The obvious way to understand and explain the situation is of a failure of management and planning. If it is a well-known fact that forest fires are a regular occurrence in the dry season, why is it that issues such as the shortage of staff, lack of training, insufficient and inadequate equipment, and the neglect of the frontline staff only come up when the crisis is in our faces or the damage has already been done? What happens to all the funding

reportedly made available for better equipment for forest and PA staff? What about the regular reports of the cutting edge sensing, imaging and communication technologies that are supposed to mitigate if not prevent precisely these situations? The questions may be rhetorical, but if there is something that needs to be investigated, it is this sorry state of affairs.

But there is another failure that needs also to be discussed – this is a failure of imagination that leads to us having only one narrative on fires in the forest. When the language of miscreants, sabotage and criminal investigations is at the heart of the narrative, the issue, clearly, is seen as a law and order issue. While there is no denying that this might be an important dimension that needs attention, there is another reality that gets little attention if any at all.

What if fires were not all destructive as the current dominant narrative would have us believe? What if investigations of history would tell us that a no-fire policy was more a compulsion of colonial forestry practice where the focus was primarily commercial exploitation of the forests for its timber? What if we were to accept that fires and forests have a positive relationship and might have co-evolved? What if we were to find a deeper understanding of this dynamic relationship in traditional knowledge and practices of forest dwelling communities? These 'what-ifs' are not mere speculation because studies in fire-ecology in recent years, including in India, are showing just that.

The forest-fire relationship is a much more complex one than is generally believed. This reality needs to be factored in if we have to deepen and widen our understanding of what fires do to the forests. The solutions we think of will then be altered because the way we formulate the problem will have changed.



ASSAM

Second phase of eastern swamp deer translocation to Manas NP completed

The second phase of translocation of the eastern swamp deer to Manas National Park (MNP) from Kaziranga National Park (KNP) was completed with the move of 17 eastern swamp deer – two male and the remaining female – from the Kohora range of KNP.

The translocation is a joint initiative of the Oil and National Gas Company, Wildlife Trust of India, and Assam Forest Department. Earlier, on December 26, 2015, 19 eastern swamp deer were translocated to MNP and the population had increased to twenty-five, which according to experts is considered a satisfactory breeding rate.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 1)

Source: 'Eastern swamp deer translocated to Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/02/17.

Committee suggests measures to curb human-elephant conflict in Udalgiri

There has been an escalation in human-elephant conflict since 2012 in the northern areas of Udalgiri district of Assam, bordering Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. 85 human beings and 35 wild elephants have died in the conflict in addition to damage caused to several hundred houses and to crops in the period 2012-16.

The district has, at the same time, witnessed massive encroachment on forest lands; as per official records, out of 24,995 ha of land belonging to protected areas, reserve forests (RF), and proposed reserve forests (PRF) here, 8,762 ha have already been encroached upon and no efforts have been made to even evict the encroachments. Rather, another 1000 ha of land belonging to the newly proposed RF

are to be handed over to the Patanjali group for establishment of a mega herbal park.

Keeping all this in mind, the Assam government recently directed the Dhansiri Forest Division, Udalgiri, to suggest measures for mitigation of the situation in the district. A 35-member district level committee has also been formed with deputy commissioner, Udalgiri as chairman.

The first meeting of the committee was held recently and a number of suggestions were made to deal with the situation. These include the following:

- Government to direct tea garden managements to sponsor the deployment of at least one *kunki* elephant each for the forest department (FD) during peak seasons of the conflict.
- The tea companies to be directed to maintain a plot of minimum 10 ha of land with drinking water provision for migratory herds of wild elephants.
- Government to recognise members of EOL (Elephants on the Line) who had been given training on wild elephant behaviour, GIS, GPS, wildlife photography and safety measures to be taken during chasing of wild elephants of six sectors of the district as volunteers to support FD keeping in view the shortage of manpower in the FD.
- Government to immediately identify vacant plots of land adjoining RFs, PRFs, wildlife sanctuaries, and revenue land for creation of new grasslands with bamboo and banana plantations and of more joint forest management committees' forests in order to provide shelter to wild elephants and to check further encroachment.
- Anti-depredation squads to be formed in vulnerable villages.
- Honorarium to members of the squads to be sanctioned at least for six months in a year.
- The persons engaged in anti-depredation squads must be covered by insurance to meet any eventualities in such as injury or death.

- A corpus fund to be created to provide immediate relief in cases of death caused by wild elephants.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 5; Vol. XIX, No. 4 and Vol. XVII, No. 6))

Source: 'Meet suggests steps to mitigate man-elephant conflict', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/02/17.

GUJARAT

Gujarat FD proposes reduction in ESZs for PAs in state

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has proposed a substantial reduction in the eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) around a number of protected areas in the state. These include among others the Nal Sarovar and Porbandar bird sanctuaries, and the Gaga Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary. The old ESZs extended between two km and 16 km from sanctuary limits. The new ESZs range from 500 m to two km from the sanctuary boundaries.

The expert committee for ESZs around wildlife sanctuaries and national parks had, in October, cleared five of the seven proposals to revise ESZs. The two that were deferred were for the Barda and Velavadar sanctuaries. The minutes of those meetings stated that the government of Gujarat requested the deferment of proposals declaring revised ESZs around Velavadar Blackbuck National Park and Barda Wildlife Sanctuary due to huge number of objections received from local stakeholders.

Officials involved in the process say that politicians are putting forth excuses about having received lots of representations against the draft notification. However, minutes of the meeting indicate that no such objections were received.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, 'Government ready with revised sanctuary eco-sensitive zones plan', *The Times of India*, 17/02/17.

HARYANA

FD to dig water holes in Aravallis for wildlife



The Haryana Forest Department (FD) has dug five new water holes in Rojka Gujjar near Bandhwari and in Mandawar forest areas to ensure that wild animals do not wander out in search of water. The larger plan is to dig five to six such pits in every district of the state, including in places such as Mahendergarh, Bhindawas, Nahar and Mewla Maharajpur, where a number of animals have been spotted recently.

Last summer, too, the FD had dug over 20 such pits, about two to three-feet deep. These were dug at important locations around the Dumduma Lake along the Bandhwari stretch. The FD is said to have been taking all precautions after incidents of human-animal conflict were reported in Mandawar and Malaka villages. In Mandawar, a three-and-a-half-year-old male leopard was beaten to death by villagers after it strayed into the village, while in Malaka, a male leopard was captured by the FD and released into the wild.

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Forest dept digs five water pits in Aravallis for wildlife', *Hindustan Times*, 06/02/17.

KARNATAKA

FD proposes allocation of Rs. 406 crore in state budget

The Karnataka Forest, Ecology and Environment Department has placed a proposal for the allocation of Rs 406.75 crore before the state government in a pre-budget meeting. This

is less than last year's figure of Rs 498 crore. According to a forest official, the demands were cut owing to the financial burden on the state. Additionally, there are no proposals this year for new reserve forests or protected areas.

The proposals made by the department include the creation of 50 tree parks in different parts of the state, creating sandalwood estates and encouraging farmers to grow the state tree, and building 100 ponds and solar-powered borewells in wildlife areas, work on which has already begun in Bandipur and Nagarahole Tiger Reserves.

The department has also planned to create a nursery society to raise funds to grow and distribute saplings across the state. While the department wants to set it up along with various government departments, the government has proposed that this be done by the Karnataka State Forest Development Corporation or the Karnataka State Forest Industries Corporation. The state government has also agreed to the proposal of the department to keep aside one percent of the road development fund for planting roadside saplings on the lines of the National Highways Authority of India.

The department is also promoting the Krishi Arogya Protsahana Yojana, where compensation to farmers will be increased for sapling plantation from Rs 40 to Rs 100 and increasing the overall budget for this from Rs 27 crore to Rs 60 crore. The department has also proposed to set up a Poornachandra Prathishtana at a cost of Rs 5 crore, for research and development along with an information centre at a cost of Rs. 12 crore.

Source: 'Forest dept seeks Rs 406-cr allocation in state budget', *Deccan Herald*, 21/02/17.

Over 200 acres of forest adjoining Shettyhalli WLS destroyed in fire

More than 200 acres of forest in Ambligolla and Choradi, on the periphery of Shettyhalli Wildlife Sanctuary in Sagar taluka were burnt down in the month of February. The forests here have dense bamboo vegetation. Two years ago,

the bamboo flowered and dried up making the region vulnerable for forest fire. Over 40,000 saplings planted in 2015 as part of an afforestation initiative in the second block of Kudigere range were also reduced to ashes in the blaze.

Fire tenders could not douse the flames as their water stock got exhausted soon. Non-availability of power in the villages here meant that the fire tenders had to return to Sagar city to refill, which delayed the fire-fighting operations.

Source: Veerendra PM. '200 acres destroyed in forest fire in Sagar taluk', *The Hindu*, 20/02/17.

200 acres forest burnt in BRT TR

Nearly 200 acres of forests were reportedly burnt in the Punajanur range of the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve (BRTTR) in the month of February. The forest department said they suspected that the fire, which started at Chikkaianagiri forest area, might have been the handiwork of miscreants.

The region has extensive grasslands and is surrounded by hills. Dried lantana and grass here helped in spreading the fire.

Source: 'Wildfire destroys 200 acres of vegetation in BRT range', *Deccan Herald*, 24/02/17.

Fire destroys more than 1,000 ha, kills forest guard in Bandipur TR



The high-intensity fire that destroyed more than 1,000 ha of forest in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) in the month of February was sparked by humans, a forest official of the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has said. Karnataka forest

minister, B Ramanatha Rai, also announced a high-level investigation into the incident.

The fire that ravaged Moleyuru, Kalkere and Hedyala forest ranges had threatened to spread to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) in Kerala. But timely intervention by the officials from both the states averted that possibility. The WWS had put all its 168 forest guards on high alert immediately after news broke about the BTR fire. The WWS had taken ample precautions against forest fires starting from December. Frontline staff of the FD had started constructing fire belts on the border of the WWS and the BTR.

Hundreds of hectares of forest were decimated in the BTR in a fire at the Kalkere forest range of Bandipur. Though the fire was brought under control, another major outbreak was reported at Kamalanagar and Enbegur in the Gundara forest range of the BTR adjacent to the Kurichiyad forest range of the WWS. The Wayanad district administration also sent two fire tenders from the Kalpetta and Sulthan Bathery fire stations as well as a team of forest officials to Kamalanagar to assist the Karnataka forest personnel on a request from the Karnataka FD.

A forest guard, 32-year-old Murugappa Gouda Thammannanavar of Sindagi taluk in Vijayapura district, died while fighting the fire in Bandipur. Three of his colleagues also suffered serious burn injuries. The forest minister announced a compensation of Rs. 25 lakh to the kin of the deceased forest guard.

Forest officials have also warned that fire may force wild animals to leave Bandipur and cross human settlements en-route to new habitats. With the animal movements set to increase in the coming days, the FD has decided to close the Muthanga and Tholpetti eco-tourism zones for visitors.

A report titled “Forest Fire Disaster Management”, prepared by the National Institute of Disaster Management in 2012, noted two major reasons for forest fires in Karnataka: conflicts over the collection of forest products, and the rivalry between local communities and the forest department. Low-intensity fires had been reported from the BTR in 2009, 2012 and

2014 as well. (Also see PA Updates Vol. XXII, No. 2; Vol. XXI, No. 2)

Source: TA Ameerudheen, ‘Forest fire that ravaged Bandipur Tiger Reserve was sparked by humans, says top official’, *www.scroll.in*, 24/02/17.

‘Senior officials will probe Bandipur wildfire’, *The New Indian Express*, 22/02/17.

‘In a first, forest guard dies while dousing wildfire’, *The Times of India*, 19/02/17.

E M Manoj, ‘Focus on fire control as forests turn tinder’, *The Hindu*, 21/02/17.

Over 60% frontline forest posts vacant in Karnataka

Karnataka’s principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) (wildlife) said that over 60% of frontline posts in the forest department (FD) are lying vacant and that it was difficult, on that account, for the FD to tackle forest fires efficiently. The PCCF pointed out that though new recruits must mandatorily spend at least five years in tiger reserves, the staffers start seeking transfers out of forests soon after the term is completed. He noted further, that at least Rs 500 crore is required to set up group housing and other facilities around reserves so that the staff and their families stay and continue to work there.

Forest watchers recently gave a memorandum to the state forest minister, B Ramanath Rai, demanding that their remuneration be at par with that of police personnel. They also demanded that their beats have sufficient staff. The minister said there was a need for serious thought about the conditions under which the forest staff live and work. He reportedly agreed to all the demands made by the forest watchers, and also said that over 2,000 personnel were being hired across all levels. (Also see accompanying story on fires in Bandipur TR)

Source: ‘60% of frontline forest dept posts are vacant, says PCCF’, *Deccan Herald*, 23/02/17.

Urea being used to kill wildlife in Male Mahadeshwara and Cauvery WLSs

The forest department (FD) has detected incidents of poisoning of wild animals in Male Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The issue came to light following an incident when poachers left behind the head of a sambar and dogs accidentally dragged the carcass off to the village of Nakkundi in the Hoogyam range of MM Hills. Postmortem reports and preliminary investigations by the FD revealed that the death of the animal was because of urea poisoning

According to conservationists and locals, farmers in areas surrounding MM Hills and the Cauvery WLS are using urea as fertiliser because it is easily available at subsidised rates. Due to this, the water bodies in these areas are contaminated. With summer fast approaching and only a few pockets of standing water available, poisoning of such waterholes, it is feared, can prove to be a disaster not only to wildlife but also to livestock, several of which have been reportedly killed by drinking poisoned water in this region.

Source: 'Poachers using urea to kill wildlife around MM Hills', *Deccan Herald*, 08/02/17.

Two leopards electrocuted near Cauvery WLS

Two young leopards were electrocuted on January 25 in Uyyamballi Hobli of Kanakapura taluk, bordering the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. The Range forest officer said that the leopards were found electrocuted near one Chikka Thamayya's farm. He had illegally powered the fence around his four-acre ragi farm to protect it from wild boar.

A police case was filed against the farmer and another case is to be booked against him for illegally drawing power as well.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj, 'Two leopards electrocuted near Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka', *The New Indian Express*, 01/02/17.

FD asks coffee planters to remove snares from forests in Kodagu district following death of tigress

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has directed all coffee planters in a 20-km area bordering Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (NTR) and the Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary to clear snares to prevent loss of wildlife. The directions were issued following the death of a six-year-old tigress after she was caught in a snare at Srimangala in Kodagu district, near NTR. The snares had been put up by coffee estate owners to capture straying wild boars, which they said were destroying crops.

On the first day of the drive to remove the snares, the FD seized 121 snares from Anechowkur-Thithimathi (31), Kallahalla-Ponnampet (23) and Nanachhi Gate-Kallahalla border (67).

The FD has issued a warning to estate owners to remove the snares within two months and ensure that none come up in future. Estate owners have been warned of stringent action against those placing the snares.

A similar drive had been initiated by the FD in 2010 around Bandipur Tiger Reserve. Officials say the problem is more severe in Nagarahole than in Bandipur, especially towards Kodagu, where there are many estates and private properties.

Source: 'Clear snares near forests, department tells coffee planters', *Deccan Herald*, 02/02/17.

Forest officials seek permission to relocate elephants from Hassan district

With the increase in elephant attack cases in Alur and Sakleshpur taluks in Hassan district, the district forest officials have sent a proposal seeking approval to capture 26 elephants roaming there. The Deputy Conservator of Forests of Hassan has sent a request to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) to take up the operation. The proposal has to be approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change

(MoEFCC). In 2013, the ministry had given approval to capture 25 elephants. The forest department has relocated 24 animals so far, including one in February this year.

In the past 10 years, more than 40 people have died in human-elephant conflict in the district. There have been two deaths already in Sakleshpur this year. Following a recent incident in Kuruvangi, residents of the village staged a dharna on the Bengaluru-Mangaluru highway demanding a permanent solution to the elephant menace. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, Nos. 6 & 5; Vol. XVIII, Nos. 2 & 1 and Vol. XVII, No. 6)

Source: 'Forest officials seek permission to relocate elephants in two taluks', *The Hindu*, 14/03/17.

KERALA

Sky bridges for langurs in Chinnar WLS

Five sky bridges for langurs are to come up in the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary connecting Karimuty to the border of the sanctuary with Tamil Nadu. The wooden bridges would connect trees across the Kochi-Dhanushkodi National Highway and have been proposed in light of the increased incidence of road kills of the animals, particularly in summer, when they have to cross the road to reach the Pampa river. Another bridge built for use by giant squirrels was successful and this has further encouraged the authorities.

Source: Giji Raman. 'Sky bridges for monkeys', *The Hindu*, 20/03/17.

75 hectares of forest burnt in Parambikulam TR; 3500 hectares across the state

A fire in the first week of March is reported to have burnt down nearly 75 hectares of forest in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. The state had even sought helicopters from the defence ministry to help deal with the situation but they only came after the fires had gone on for a day. The fire was eventually doused thanks to a spell

of rain that the region experienced. Such a major fire has not been reported in Parambikulam for over a decade and officials were assessing the damage that had been caused.

In another incident in the last week of February nearly 100 hectares of Chembra's forests were burnt down in the Wayanad district. According to the forest department more than 2,500 hectares of forest area in the state had been completely destroyed and another 1200 hectares partially burnt in fires in late February-early March.

Forest officials say that drought, exacerbated by the delayed summer rains, have created a very precarious situation in the state with areas in Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Ernakulam and Pathanamthitta districts being particularly vulnerable.

Source: Jeemon Jacob. 'A hot mess', *India Today*, 09/03/17.

'Summer rain helped douse fire in Parambikulam', *The Hindu*, 06/-3/17.

MADHYA PRADESH

Investment clearance committee recommends Rs 18,000 crore for Ken-Betwa river linking project

The investment clearance committee, comprising officials from the NITI Aayog and the Union Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), has recommended clearance for the Rs 18,000-crore for the Ken-Betwa river linking project. The clearance would be given after detailed deliberations and discussions, said the ministry secretary who heads the committee.

Phase I of the project has already received clearances from the National Board for Wildlife, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)'s Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1). However, the MoEFCC's final approval is still awaited as it decides taking into account the recommendations of its EAC. The project is also being examined by the Supreme Court

appointed Central Empowered Committee for adequacy of mitigative measures against its adverse impact on the Panna Tiger Reserve.

The first phase of the project will cost about Rs 9,393 crore and is likely to be completed in nine years. The project comes under Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme in which the Centre contributes 60 per cent funds and the rest is by the state. But the MoWR has asked NITI Aayog to change the funding pattern to 90:10 ratio given it is a national project. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 1; Vol. XXII, Nos. 4, 3 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 and 1).

Source: 'Rs. 18,000 Crore Ken-Betwa River Linking Project Cleared', www.ndtv.com, 10/02/17.

ODISHA

Odisha prepares to tackle forest fires

The Odisha Forest Department has said it is taking all measures to ensure fires do not affect forests in the state the coming summer. Modern technology including satellite-based information is being used to identify fire-prone areas. The state has also constituted 216 fire-fighting squads to deal with the fires.

There were more than 3000 fire incidents reported from Odisha in 2016; the number being the highest as compared to the preceding five years. The highest number of fire-related incidents was reported from Kandhamal at 1,170. This was followed by 630 in Koraput and 323 in Ganjam.

Source: 'Tech to tackle forest fire', *The Telegraph*, 20/02/17.

Dolphin census along Odisha coast

While the total dolphin count across the seven coastal divisions of Odisha has shown a decline, the number of Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika and in the Rajnagar mangrove divisions has remained more or less steady. These are the findings of a recent census that counted 134

dolphins in Chilika of which 121 were the Irrawaddy dolphins while the remaining 13 were Bottlenose dolphins.

The latest census has reported 55 Irrawaddy dolphins in the water-bodies of Bhitarkanika and Gahirmatha. A total of 257 dolphins including 181 Irrawaddy, 31 Bottlenose and 40 Humpbacks (of two subspecies) were recorded in the census that was conducted across six coastal divisions on January 20.

The count also reported a marginal change in the dolphins sighted in Berhampur, Bhadrak and Balasore. 29 dolphins including 11 Bottlenose and 18 Humpbacks were recorded in Berhampur, whereas five Irrawaddy dolphins were seen in Bhadrak. Balasore reported zero sightings as against five in 2015.

In 2015, Chilika had reported 144 Irrawaddy dolphins while Bhitarkanika had 58.

Source: 'Irrawaddy Dolphins continue to be Endangered in Bhitarkanika, Gahirmatha', *The Indian Express*, 07/02/17.

'Now, Bhitarkanika a safe second address for Irrawaddy dolphins', *The New Indian Express*, 07/02/17.

Forest staff exempted from election duty

The Odisha Forest Department (FD) has urged the state election commission (SEC) to exempt forest guards and other officials of the FD from election duty in the forthcoming rural polls in the state. The FD has said that it is facing a severe shortage of staff in protected areas in the state and any diversion of staff or patrolling vehicles would compromise on wildlife and forest conservation.

The SEC secretary informed that the Election Commission of India had, in 1998 and 2009, issued orders directing chief secretaries and chief election officers of all the states to exempt vehicles and staff of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries across the country from election duties. The order will be implemented accordingly in the upcoming rural polls in Odisha.

The Sub-collector of Kendrapara also confirmed that no forest officials and guards of Bhitarkanika National Park and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary would be engaged in election duty.

Source: 'No poll duty for forest staff', *The New Indian Express*, 11/02/17.

RAJASTHAN

Four villagers die as FD releases and then looks for leopard in Sariska TR

Two leopards held in Jaipur zoo for over three months were released back into the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) by the Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) in the months of January and February. Four villagers were found killed in leopard attacks in the following days, barely 25 km from the area where the big cats were released. Captured and declared 'man-eaters' in STR last year, the leopards were then released back by the FD after they were surgically castrated to "check aggressiveness".

Forest minister Gajendra Khimsar is reported to have sought their rehabilitation in the wild. He said, however, that though he was against keeping wild animals locked up, it was not he who decided on the release of the leopards in question. Rajasthan chief wildlife warden agreed that the decision was taken at his office but the FD maintains that the animals were "forced on Sariska under pressure" after authorities at Jhalana National Park refused to accept them.

The two male leopards in question were captured on October 14 and November 4 last year after two people died in leopard attacks around 20 km from the STR's eastern boundary. Post-capture, no attacks were reported till the FD released the leopards, one by one, in the STR's Kalighati area on January 28 and February 1. Within a week, the killings started afresh. All four deaths between February 5 and 12 have been reported at places halfway between where the animals were captured and subsequently released.

The two leopards in question were neither radio-collared before release nor did the zoo maintain their DNA samples that could be matched with the DNA obtained from leopard saliva found on the recent victims.

The FD eventually set up trap cages on February 7 and trapped two leopards — both females - on February 8 and 17. A third leopard, a male, was also trapped near Govindpura village. One more leopard was subsequently caught near Jaitpur village, and while the identification was still to be carried out, FD officials said they were certain this was the killer leopard. The 10-year-old animal had his lower canine teeth missing and the rest of the teeth were also worn out.

The Jaipur Zoo veterinarian Dr. Arvind Mathur, however, said that this is not the leopard caught last year. He informed that the microchips were inserted in those leopards that had been castrated before releasing them back. The present leopard doesn't have a microchip and neither was it castrated.

STR is not the first or only area of capture-and-release experiments in Rajasthan. In Udaipur, the frequency of capturing leopards from the Rajsamand area and releasing them in and around the Kumbhalgarh forests has increased sharply in the last couple of years. This has, however, not helped the worsening human-leopard conflict in the region.

Source: Jay Mazoomdaar, 'Leopards freed from zoo, Sariska counts its dead', *The Indian Express*, 20/02/17.

'Third leopard trapped in Sariska, this time a male', *The Indian Express*, 21/02/17.

Hamza Khan, 'Killer leopard caught in Alwar: forest officials', *The Indian Express*, 22/02/17.

Sariska TR to get another tiger

The National Tiger Conservation Authority has given permission for the shifting of a male tiger to the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR). The state wildlife and forest department is now awaiting

the central government's nod to initiate the translocation.

The state wants to bring in a tiger from outside the state to diversify the gene pool in Sariska but no decision has been taken yet on where this tiger will come from. Last year, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had shot down the proposal of state wildlife department for shifting a sub-adult from Ranthambhore TR on the grounds that the genetic configuration of tigers and not conflict mitigation should be given priority for future translocation.

Presently, there are 14 tigers in STR all of whom come from the gene pool of the Ranthambhore tigers. These include four males, nine females and one tiger cub whose sex has not been determined yet. According to the WII, the population viability analysis carried out based on the present population of tigers in Sariska, it is necessary to add one adult male and adult female tiger every three to five years for the next 15 to 20 years.

The final decision on the translocation would depend on other states agreeing to part with a tiger. If they are not agreeable the state wildlife department will have no option but to shift one from Ranthambhore.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 4 & 3; Vol. XVIII, No. 5 and Vol. XVII, No. 5)

Source: Joychen Joseph. 'Sariska likely to get another tiger', *The Times of India*, 11/02/17.

SIKKIM

Major fire in Fambanglho WLS

A major fire was reported at the Tinjurey Ridge of the Fambanglho Wildlife Sanctuary in the month of February. The fire broke out on February 4 but a team consisting of forest, police, civil and fire service officials together with the local panchayat, joint forest management committee members and villagers were able to reach the spot only a day later on account of the inaccessible terrain.

Indian Air Force helicopters were pressed into service on the request of the Sikkim

government to deal with the fire. Drought-like conditions in the state have rendered forest areas vulnerable to forest fires and villagers residing close to forest areas all over the state have been advised against going into forest areas for picnic, camping or for any other purpose with inflammable materials.

Source: 'Major fire breaks out in Sikkim's Fambanglho Wildlife Sanctuary', *Hindustan Times*, 06/02/17.

TELANGANA

No funds for tiger reserves in Telangana state budget



No provision has been made in the recently presented Telangana budget for 2017-18 for tiger reserves in the state. As per the changed Project Tiger guidelines the State Government should show 40% allocations for the project in its budget, based on which the Centre would match it with the remaining 60%. Earlier, the total funding came from the Centre.

This year, the heads listed under the provisions for centrally sponsored schemes in the Environment, Forests, Science & Technology department do not include any specific allocations for Project Tiger or wildlife. All the provisions amounting to a total of Rs 7.89 crore are for the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) under the National Mission for a Green India. The official position on this is that funding for tiger reserves is usually diverted from the NAP funds and no separate allocation is, therefore, shown for the same.

Last year's budget estimates did not show allocations for any centrally sponsored programme. Only Rs 47.32 crore was the plan allocation for the department, which was revised to Rs 154 crore by January 2017. Year-end accounts however showed that additional

amounts of Rs two crore for the NAP, Rs 20 crore for the Forest College and Research Institute, Mulugu, and Rs 3.15 crore for Project Tiger were released, which were inclusive of central and state shares.

Of the releases for tiger reserves, only about Rs 52 lakh was actually spent up to January 2017.

Source: Swathi Vadlamudi. ‘Project Tiger’ disappears from budget papers in Telangana’, *The Hindu* 15/03/17.

Draft ESZ notifications issued for eight PAs in state

Draft eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) notifications for eight PAs in Telangana were issued recently. These include the Mahavir Vanasthali National Park (NP), Mrugavani NP and the Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

The draft notification of the Mrugavani NP says that the ESZ will have an extent of five km along the boundary of the park in the areas falling under Government Order (GO) No 111 and three km towards Manchirevula. In case of the Mahavir Harina Vanasthali NP, an ESZ with an extent of up to one km around the boundary that includes 13 villages (now mostly urbanised) in Ranga Reddy district will be declared. This would not affect the existing Autonagar industrial area adjacent to the park.

In Nizamabad and Medak districts, a five km area will be notified as ESZ for wildlife sanctuaries. This would cover 380.51 sq km in these districts. For the Manjeera WLS, it was proposed to have an ESZ of one km from the boundary of the park, which would cover 65.28 sq km.

For the Kasu Brahmanand Reddy NP located in the city of Hyderabad, the draft notification has been issued for 25 to 30 m from the boundary that includes the walkway. The state has asked for it to be decreased to three to seven metres in view of a plan for road development.

Source: U Sudhakar Reddy. ‘Hyderabad: Wildlife parks get green zone, 10-km exclusion area’, *Deccan Chronicle*, 01/02/17.

UTTARAKHAND

Influx of Kanwariyas causes garbage and food waste problem in Haridwar forest division

The influx of Kanwariyas, ahead of Mahashivratri, resulted in a huge garbage and food waste problem in the Rasiyabad and Shyampur ranges of Haridwar forest division. A number of camps – including in forest ranges – were set up for them where they can rest and get food. A bazar had mushroomed with a large number of stalls selling food and other items and open mass kitchens were set up to cater to hundreds of Kanwariyas.

Environmentalists have questioned the permissions given for the camps, particularly in forest areas. They noted that there is frequent movement of wild animals in the area, especially of elephants, and the presence of litter and food waste might attract them, leading to situations of conflict. There were many occasions when police had to stop the traffic of Kanwariyas on foot and of vehicles as elephants were regularly visiting Tedi Puliya for the food and the sugarcane piled up for juice for the pilgrims.

A wildlife activist pointed out that the mela authority in Haridwar should provide land to set up the stalls and the mass -kitchens for the Kanwariyas in Haridwar as using the reserve forest was illegal. He also alleged that operators who bring pilgrims from outside charging a hefty fee from each of them strike a deal with the forest officials and hire the forest area relatively cheap. They then share the profits with the forest officials.

Source: Seema Sharma, ‘Kanwariyas litter Haridwar jungle, wildlife activists fume over threat to wild animals’, *The Times of India*, 19/02/17.

Corbett TR director removed following his shoot-at-sight order

The director of Corbett Tiger Reserve has been removed from his post following a controversy over a shoot-at-sight order issued by him to check the activities of poachers.

He had issued the orders and pressed two drones into service following reports of the movement of alleged poachers along the southern fringes of the park. 150 forest officials were deployed and a total of 388 camera traps installed at sensitive points within the territory of the park. Villagers in the area were also informed of the same and were advised to avoid taking animals for grazing to the core areas.

However, according to the chief wildlife warden, the director was not authorised to issue such an order.

Source: 'Corbett Director removed after his shoot-at-sight order', *Deccan Chronicle*, 26/02/17.

Himalayan black bear killed in a road accident near Haridwar

A young male Himalayan black bear was killed in an accident on national highway 74 near Haridwar forest division in the month of February. This is the same stretch where a tiger had been killed a few months earlier (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 5). Shaken by the incident, the wildlife department convened a meeting with officials from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to find a solution to the problem.

The NHAI is reported to have agreed to provide short term and long-term solutions to minimize the mortality of the animals on the highway. In the short term, the NHAI would install barriers and signages to slow the speed of the vehicles. For the long term, it would build a five km long flyover for vehicles from Ravasan to Pili so that the animals can move without any disturbance.

The proposal for the flyover is to be prepared soon in consultation with the officials from the WWF, WII, forest department and NHAI. It would be sent to the chairman of the NHAI for final approval.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'Himalayan black bear killed in road accident on NH near Haridwar', *The Times of India*, 11/02/17.

UTTAR PRADESH

110 Gangetic dolphins spotted in Kaushambi-Handia stretch of the Ganga



As many as 110 Gangetic dolphins were spotted in a 90 km stretch from Kaushambi to Handia in a recent dolphin population mapping project undertaken jointly by the Allahabad district administration, the forest department and the World Wide Fund for Nature - India.

This, according to officials such as the Sub-divisional magistrate, Fatehpur, who was also involved in the project, was indicative of the improved water quality in the river. The water quality is said to have improved on account of the fact that officials have closed down 24 drains discharging sewer water into Ganga. Six sewage treatment plants have also been made functional in the region.

Source: Smriti Malaviya, 'Back from the brink of extinction: How the Gangetic dolphins made a comeback', *Hindustan Times*, 10/02/17.

Radio-collaring studies reveal interesting facts of the Sunderbans tigers



The Sunderbans tiger, unlike its cousins elsewhere, hunts mostly in the morning, between 5 am and 10 am. It is its prey-base here - mainly the diurnal spotted deer -

that explains the Sunderbans tiger's hunting hours. This is corroborated by the fact that most tiger attacks on humans here have also been reported between 7 am and noon. New and interesting information such as this has been gathered as part of a study of seven tigers here that were fitted with radio collars. The study was published recently in PLOS One.

Apart from insights into the behaviour of the tigers, the radio telemetry study also sheds light on the Sunderbans terrain. Spanning eight years between 2008 and 2016, the study shows that female tigers have a home range of 57 sq. km. each and males, 110 sq. km. The study also shows that the Sunderbans tiger prefers *Avicennia* and *Sonneratia* plants over *Phoenix* and *Ceriops* as habitat. This is believed to be the case because of higher prey availability and ease of hunting in these habitats. *Phoenix* and *Ceriops* are found on relatively higher grounds, however, and are used by the cats for shelter during high tides and often act as cub-rearing refuges.

Bolstered by the findings the state has now released a collared tigress in the forests outside the Sunderbans core area. A tigress captured earlier from Tridibnagar village was released in the forests of Ajmalmari in South 24 Parganas forest division in the month of January. It is hoped that this will allow the forest department and researchers a better idea about the habitat outside the tiger reserve area.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee, 'Decoded: Sunderbans tigers' tale', *The Times of India*, 12/02/17.

Parliamentary committee on coal wants norms for drilling in forest areas to be relaxed

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Coal has recommended, in its 27th report, relaxing guidelines to enable drilling in forest areas by government companies. The committee noted that non-availability of forest clearance and adverse law and order condition prevailing in some areas is cited as a 'generic reason' by the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute for the non-achievement of drilling targets. It is in this context that the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is reported to be considering simplification of procedures for according forest clearance.

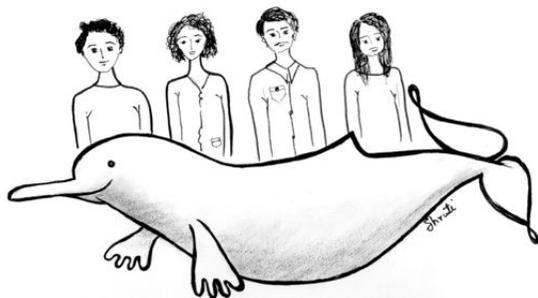
The MoEFCC will soon be according forest clearance for exploration blocks of up to 10% forest density at the District Forest Officer level and 10-40% at the Central Government level. The committee has urged that the Ministry of Coal should impress upon the Environment Ministry to urgently notify the proposed guidelines for enabling drilling in forest areas by government companies.

The Standing Committee has also recommended encouraging Coal Pit Head projects while taking note of the mismatch in the capacity of coal transported by rail and the Environment Ministry's guidelines that restrict movement of coal with an ash content of more than 34%. The committee noted that the development of power projects at Coal Pit Heads should be encouraged to comply with the Environment and Forest Ministry's diktats on transport of coal with high ash content to destinations beyond 500 km. The committee also recommended that the government should ensure that power plants with power purchase agreements but without a coal supply assurance through the Letter of Allocation — Fuel Supply Agreement (coal linkage) route get coal linkages

to lower input costs and keep power tariffs in check.

Source: 'Standing committee on coal wants norms for drilling in forest areas to be relaxed', *Business Line*, 12/03/17.

Students to be involved in project to protect Gangetic river dolphin



School and college students in West Bengal are to be involved in a national project to develop a conservation action plan to save the Gangetic river dolphin from extinction. The project would develop monitoring protocols for river fauna including dolphins, quality assessment of river habitat and assessment of invasive species. It encompasses the states where the dolphins are found - Assam, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh.

The West Bengal chief wildlife warden said that he had recently discussed with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) the issue of the inclusion of fishing communities and schools along the Ganga in Bengal in awareness campaigns for the conservation of the dolphin.

The initiative is part of the overall species recovery program initiated by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change that includes the Great Indian Bustard, Dugong, Manipur deer and the Gangetic Dolphin. The program is being implemented by the WII.

Source: 'Student community to help conserve Gangetic river dolphin', *The Hindu*, 24/02/17.

Android-based monitoring software M-STrIPES to be used in tiger reserves

A national level, five-day training workshop on Monitoring System for Tiger-Intensive Protection and Ecological Status (M-STrIPES) was conducted recently in Baripada by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Field officials and technical staff of 11 tiger reserves (TRs) of the country participated in the workshop.

It has been decided to use the android-based monitoring software across all the TRs of the country. A pilot for the same has already been completed and the use of the software is expected to start in the Similipal Tiger Reserve from April 2017.

Source: 'M-STrIPES to monitor STR from April', *The New Indian Express*, 08/02/17.

Sanctuary Nature Foundation project to support grassroots conservationists

In a bid to support grassroots conservationists, the Sanctuary Nature Foundation has selected 12 conservation leaders for its 'Mud on Boots' project. The initiative aims at supporting grassroots conservationists regardless of their academic qualifications or organisational affiliations. Each green crusader will receive rupees three lakh to implement their project over a period of two years (2017-18).

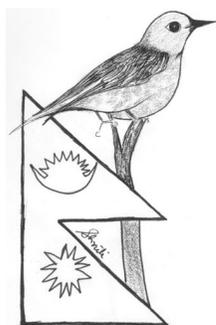
These individuals were selected by inviting nominations from some of India's leading wildlife conservationists. Those selected for the award include Urs Khan, a goatherd from Rajasthan working to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard; Sajal Madhu, who works for conservation of elephants in coal mining-afflicted areas of Chhattisgarh; Sunil Harsana, who is a guardian of the sacred forest of Mangar Bani in Haryana; Anoko Mega, a member of the Mishmi community in Arunachal Pradesh, who is striving to transform community attitudes towards hunting; and Joydeb Pradhan, a senior citizen in West Bengal who is working to protect the habitat of the vulnerable state animal - the fishing cat.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Mud on Boots' project launched to support conservationists', *The Times of India*, 13/02/17.

SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

New bird species spotted in Nepal



The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) has been spotted for the first time in Nepal, bringing the total number of avian species in the Himalayan country to 866. The bird, which is considered an autumn passage migrant bird

species in Pakistan and India, was first seen and photographed by an expedition last year near the Shey monastery within the Shey-Phoksundo National Park. Researchers from an NGO – Friends of Nature, Nepal then spotted the bird while conducting another study. The identification was confirmed by the bird experts Carol Inskipp and Hem Sagar Baral. Following this, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Bird Conservation Nepal has formally confirmed the presence of a new bird species in the country.

Source: 'New birds species discovered in Nepal', *India Today*, 11/02/17.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Survey records many endangered species in Karen State in Myanmar

A recent camera-trap based survey has recorded 31 species of mammals in Karen state in southeast Myanmar, a region that has been

excluded from previous scientific assessments due to military conflict. 17 of the 31 species are threatened and include among others, the tiger, the Asian elephant, Phayre's langur, and the dhole. The camera traps also detected images of the Indochinese leopard across all survey sites, suggesting that Karen State could be supporting one of the most significant leopard populations remaining in South-east Asia. The survey was carried out by Wildlife Asia, an Australian conservation NGO that coordinates the Karen Wildlife Conservation Initiative (KWCI) and involved setting up of camera traps in four areas of the state between December 2014 and July 2015.

Karen state (also known as Kayin state), is located in southeast Myanmar and borders Thailand. The state has had a turbulent past, suffering from decades-long conflict that has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and allowed little room for development. The region has also been excluded from most previous scientific assessments.

It also faces several threats, including poaching of high value species like tiger and elephant for the international illegal wildlife trade. In fact, with the ceasefire between the Myanmar Army and the Karen military units, incidences of poachers using snares along tiger trails has become more frequent. The researchers' camera traps even photographed multiple groups of poachers.

The wildlife of the region state is also threatened by increased hunting to support the large influx of people working in infrastructure projects, like construction of dams and roads. The state is also rich in minerals, and it is feared that mining would not only destroy forests, but also poison the river systems here.

KWCI has recently received a funding of \$500,000 from the KfW IUCN Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Program to support their work on protecting tigers in this landscape.

Source: Shreya Dasgupta. 'Survey of previously inaccessible region of Myanmar reveals many endangered species', news.mongabay.com, 28/03/17.

The State of Wildlife in North-East India – 1996-2011

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

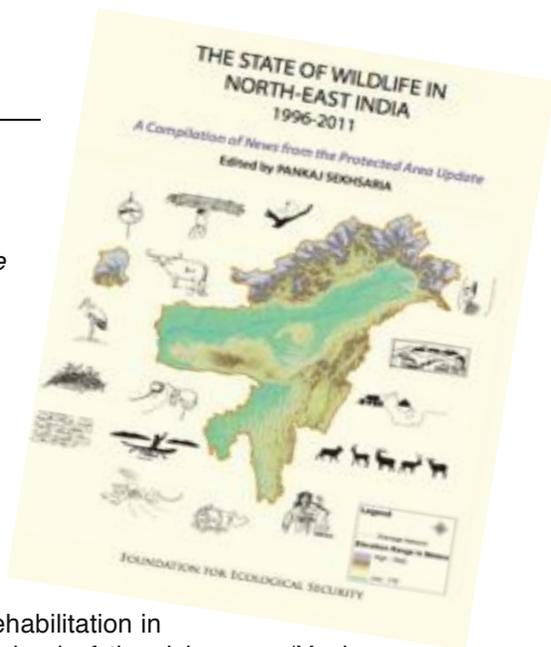
List of Contents: North East India Regional News; News from the States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.

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

Annexures

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INVITING COLLABORATIONS

The *Protected Area Update*, which is now in its 22nd year of publication, has consistently provided news, information and analysis on matters related to wildlife, conservation and protected areas. It has created a credible forum that allows for discussion on a wide-range of often un-addressed issues in the wildlife, conservation and livelihood landscape. It reaches out widely and also represents a wide-range of perspectives and concerns.

We would like to invite researchers, NGOs, journalists and individuals to collaborate and use the *Protected Area Update* as a platform to further common interests in these related subjects. The newsletter can be used as a platform to put out short analyses and synthesis of ongoing work or work that has already been completed. The *PA Update* can also be used, simultaneously and complementarily, as a platform for seeking and gathering information where it is needed.

Please write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com with ideas, queries and suggestions on how these collaborations could be made to work and for specific proposals that are of interest to you.

Important Bird Areas Update

UTTAR PRADESH

FD shelves eco-park project inside Surajpur wetland



The forest department (FD) has shelved its eco-park project inside the Surajpur wetland and forest reserve. The decision comes after an environmentalist filed a plea in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) objecting to development projects inside the sanctuary (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 4). The NGT had, on June 3, 2016, stayed construction inside the wetland and sought reports from the state government and the centre on the issue. The case is still on trial in the NGT.

The eco-park was proposed as a concept to attract visitors to the area where the wetland is spread across 325 ha and consists of a natural lake of 80 ha. The project was allotted a Rs. 130-crore budget and included the construction of a cycle track and a four km pathway, besides other facilities. It was inaugurated in April 2014 by the chief minister.

Environmentalists have contended that construction work and human intervention would affect the ecology of the lake. Divisional forest officer, Gautam Budh Nagar, said that the FD will follow the NGT order and that it will not carry out any work on the pathway. The petitioner in the matter has welcomed the step and demanded further that the FD should transport all tiles and construction material that

still lie inside the sanctuary, and, also stop cutting trees for the project.

Source: Vinod Rajput, 'Forest dept shelves Eco Park plan inside Surajpur wetland', *Hindustan Times*, 20/02/17.

WEST BENGAL

Initiative to clean up the Santragachhi Jheel

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) has initiated a campaign to clean and save the Santragachhi Jheel, a wetland and bird habitat ringed by residential buildings, shops and shanties adjoining a busy railway station. The volunteer-driven project that would be implemented over three months will focus on cleaning the lake in a scientific manner and building permanent vats along the periphery so that residents don't dump their daily waste into the water. The WWF-India will request the Howrah Municipal Corporation to maintain the vats.

Waste dumped into the water has already been categorised into biodegradable and non-biodegradable categories based on a survey by 30-odd volunteers for three consecutive weeks. The locations around the water body where waste is mostly thrown have also been identified. A crucial part of the project is to convince the residents and shop owners. Sewage and garbage dumping are constant threats to the jheel's existence.

Prakriti Sansad, an NGO that conducts a waterfowl count at Santragachhi Jheel every winter found 3,123 birds in the lake in January, earlier this year. This is almost half the number of birds that were counted last winter.

Source: Subhajoy Roy, 'Scramble to save lake of birds', *The Telegraph*, 08/02/17.

The *Protected Area Update* needs your support

The *Protected Area Update* is now in its 23rd year of uninterrupted publication. It is published six times a year and mailed to nearly 1800 people. Additionally, it goes out in an electronic form to about 2000 individuals via paupdate@yahoogroups.com and is also hosted by a number of websites that deal with issues related to natural history of South Asia. There is also now an active facebook page for the newsletter <https://www.facebook.com/groups/protectedareaupdate/> which helps continue the outreach and the discussions.

The *PA Update* has been a key source of news, information and also opinion on protected areas from across South Asia, and particularly India and we keep getting this affirmation via communication we receive regularly from its readers. Continued publication has been possible on account of the generous interest and support of a number of organisations and individuals and we are extremely for all this support over the years.

That being said, raising funds for the publication year on year has and continues to be a challenge. Kalpavriksh and the *PA Update* team is committed to bring out the newsletter

regularly as we have done in the past and we seek your help in this endeavor.

Please do considering supporting the *PA Update* via individual and/or organizational contributions and also by subscribing to it for yourself, for friends and others who you think might be interested

We do believe that the long-term sustainability and publication of the *PA Update* can be and, in fact, should be based on the participation of and support from the key stakeholder, the reader of the *PA Update*.

For details of how to send a contribution and for other suggestions and ideas please write to the Editor, *PA Update* at psekhsaria@gmail.com or mail us at the editorial address below

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News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia	
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Obituary

Duleep Matthai, environmentalist

(Born in Chennai on October 18th, 1924 and died in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand District, Gujarat on March 5th 2017 aged 92)

Duleep Matthai was a highly influential figure in India's nascent environmental movement in the 1970s that first flagged the long term environmental risks arising from loss of forest cover that comes with unfettered industrial and agricultural development. The current water scarcity in many parts of the country can be attributed to both loss of forest cover and excessive water extraction with ever deeper borewells. Securing the country's water-catchment areas – the forests - was a key campaign for Matthai. His warnings and those of other environmentalists continue to fall on deaf ears because of widespread ignorance and indifference to the importance of ecological security.

Through his love of nature and wildlife developed from his early childhood growing up on a forested family estate in Kerala, Matthai understood long before it became widely accepted knowledge the ecological role of forests. He understood that the loss of large expanses of forests through human activity especially in the tropical regions and uplands of India poses a serious threat to human welfare and even survival.

Today, there is undisputed scientific evidence that forests help to maintain air, water and soil quality, influence climatic conditions, regulate run off and ground water and reduce downstream sedimentation and flooding. They sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to reduce the greenhouse effect and importantly protect the watersheds and river systems. Chronically drought affected areas are invariably those that have undergone severe deforestation.

Matthai was a founding trustee of the World Wildlife Fund in India and always played an active role in promoting the organization within the country. He was largely instrumental

in getting land allotted for setting up the WWF head office in New Delhi. His concerns about environmental degradation found resonance with the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who discussed environment issues with him from time to time and also invited him to join as a member of important advisory bodies set up by the Government, such as the National Committee of Environment Planning and Coordination and the Indian Board of Wildlife chaired by the Prime Minister. Matthai was consulted also when the Department of Environment was established in 1980, especially in the matter of naming it properly.

In 1980s, Matthai was appointed to the governing bodies of the newly established Indian Institute of Forest Management at Bhopal and the Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun. He was also a member of the Steering Committee of the prestigious Project Tiger, which was also chaired by the Prime Minister whose purpose was to monitor the progress of what has to date been India's largest and most successful Wildlife Conservation Project. Later, as Vice Chairman of the National Wastelands Development Board set up by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Matthai toured the country extensively often on foot to understand the challenges of restoring bio diversity including the native species of flora on degraded barren tracts laid waste by exploitative human activities. He then suggested possible solutions, which included aerial seeding wherever feasible, given the political will to make available necessary resources and overcome vested interests.

Professor M. S. Swaminathan, the eminent scientist and father of India's "Green Revolution" regards Duleep Matthai as the father of the ecological security movement in India and his commitment to the conservation of

nature and the development of WWF India as “truly monumental”.

Born into an eminent Kerala family, Duleep was the second of the three children of Dr John Matthai, who served successively as Railways and Finance ministers in Independent India’s first cabinet and Mrs Achamma Matthai who as Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board of the Govt of India played an important role in helping to resettle refugees from West Punjab in India after Independence and Partition.

Matthai’s first job was in 1944 as a 20 year old management trainee in the tea industry in Assam with Jardine Henderson. In 1960 he moved to Bombay initially as JRD Tata’s Executive Assistant before taking on senior roles in other Tata companies.

Despite his busy corporate life Matthai found time with Dr Salim Ali the renowned ornithologist to extend the conservation work of the Bombay Natural History Society. The two nature lovers became lifelong friends with their shared passionate interest and deep knowledge of India’s large variety of birds.

In his mid-50s Duleep Matthai resigned from all his corporate activities to focus his energies on nature conservation and environmental protection and in doing so developed friendships with many similar minded people across India’s social strata who mourn his loss.

Matthai helped set up in 2001 and became a founding trustee of the Foundation for Ecological Security an NGO that is actively involved in the massive and critical task of ecological restoration in the country, the “wastelands” in particular and in 2007 he set up on his own initiative and became a founding trustee of the Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust to which he donated the major part of his personal assets.

He passed away at the age of 92 in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand District, Gujarat. Personable, driven and determined he helped in more ways than one to bring wildlife

conservation to centre-stage at a time when most Indians were competing with themselves to outdo the British destruction of natural India. His primary focus then was a concept that was understood by the ancients in India, but forgotten in the melee of development post 1947... that destroying forests in the name of development would end up exhausting the water supplies of the subcontinent and visit all manner of miseries on our long-suffering people. He used to say then what many young persons now understand: "Nature does not need us. We need Nature."

He survived by his only son Arjun.

Kalpavriksh and the *Protected Area Update*, in particular, is deeply indebted to Mr Duleep Matthai. The Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust and the Foundation for Ecological Security – the two organizations of which he was an integral part, have been the most consistent supporters and substantive funders for a better part of the *PA Update*’s existence. There is no doubt we would not have come this far if this unstinting support was not there for us all these years.

We extend our deep felt condolences to Mr Matthai’s family and friends.



A Decade Ago **Protected Area Update 66, April 2007**

Dogs sterilized to save Orissa turtles

In a move to protect Olive Ridley turtles from dog attacks, an initiative has been undertaken to sterilize dogs along the Orissa coast.

A small number of dogs were sterilized in January by the Hyderabad based Blue Cross in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Animal Resources Development and other NGOs like the Orissa Turtle Trust.

At least 2,500 dogs are to be sterilized as part of the project in the next six months. Training is also to be provided to 15 veterinary doctors to carry out the task.

Until five years ago, the sea surrounded Nasi-1 and Nasi-2, two tiny islands within the Gahirmatha beach, where turtles come for mass nesting. As a result, no animal could reach the islands to destroy the eggs. Since 2002, however, the islands have become accessible from the neighbouring Wheeler Island, compounding the problem of dog attacks significantly.

Source: 'In Orissa, dogs sterilized to save endangered turtles', *The Sentinel*, 31/01/07.

Contact: **DFO Bhitarkanika**, see above.

Fisherman shot dead; forest guard arrested; colleagues boycott protection duty at Gahirmatha

Turtle protection duty at Gahirmatha faced serious problems over the last few months. The sequence of events began on December 14, 2006, when a fisherman, allegedly fishing in prohibited waters was shot dead by forest staff. This had resulted in a series of retaliatory attacks on forest staff by armed trawler owners. A turtle camp at Bhitarkanika was burnt down (see *PA Update* Vol. XIII, No.1, Feb 2007) and a Coast Guard Vessel too was attacked.

A forest guard was subsequently arrested on murder charges in the connection. In response the All Orissa Forest Guards' Union

issued a cease-work call and all 28 forest guards on the permanent pay-roll of the government went on strike, skipping onshore and offshore protection duties from December 19. The Union termed the arrest as arbitrary and alleged that an innocent guard on duty was being made a sacrificial lamb even though he had indeed fired the shots.

The Kendrapara District administration responded to the situation by dispatching seven platoons of the APR and the OSAP to aid in protection and patrolling. Forest staff finally went back to duty more than a month later.

In a later operation conducted in January, forest officials, led by a magistrate, arrested more than 20 fishermen and seized nine mechanised fishing vessels along with fishing nets and some fish from within the prohibited zone of the Gahirmatha Sanctuary.

Source: 'Forest men skip turtle protection to protest colleague's arrest', *The Statesman*, 19/01/07.

'Forest staff seize 9 boats, arrest 20 fishermen in Gahirmatha sanctuary', *The Pioneer*, 31/01/07.

SRI LANKA

1850 elephants killed in Sri Lanka in 15 years

The Sri Lanka Wild Life Conservation Department has revealed that over the last 15 years, 1,850 elephants, 1,192 of them, male, have been killed.

It has reported that about 150 elephants and between 50-70 human die because of man-elephant conflict every year. Data available points towards an increasing trend of such incidents.

In 2005, 70 humans and around 200 elephants were killed in the conflict.

Source: Email from Nalin M dated 12/03/07

PERSPECTIVE

Let's begin from what's beneath our feet!

There is no better way to understand or appreciate our natural world than to start with what lies beneath our feet: soils and going deeper still, rocks from which soils are made. Eminent British palaeontologist Richard Fortey speaks of the profound effect of geology, thus: "Geology acts as a kind of collective unconscious for the world, a deep control beneath the oceans and continents". Geological forces shape our landscapes and rocks and manipulate the size and expanse of geographic features like mountains, plains and deserts, and chart the course of rivers, and therefore the evolution and distribution of plant and animal life. Sadly, we overlook the "deep control" of geology in our lives.

Conservation efforts currently aim at species and habitats but ignore geological features. This needs to change. Geology and geologists can also contribute significantly to our understanding of climate change and evolution. Consider this: more than 20% of the global carbon burial is orchestrated along the slopes of the Himalayas by the rivers that carry the silica-rich sediments and deposit them deep under the Bay of Bengal. This fact has barely received any attention in global or national debates but if it is incorporated, it will help determine how industrialisation, urbanisation, agriculture and development must take place along the Himalayan rivers.

And how much attention do we pay to our soils? Petrologists (scientists who study soils) have found that fluctuating temperatures are expected to change microbial composition and increase the decomposition rates in soils, thereby releasing carbon stored in soils rapidly and thereby, potentially reducing the ability for soil ecosystems to store carbon. This will also lead to rapid decline in agricultural and forest productivity.

We therefore cannot look at single species or tracts of forests alone to design effective, meaningful or sustainable conservation policies. Conservation and

development efforts now need to look at not only what lies above but also what lies beneath our feet. To do this, we need what Fortey calls "geological enlightenment".

We need new ways of seeing to understand how geological forces shape our immediate environment and how they will determine our future. More importantly, we need to teach our children to see things through the lens of "deep history" and solve complex problems that we will leave behind for them. Geologists (and geology) can contribute tremendously to the climate change, conservation and environment debate. We ignore them at our peril.

- **Pranay Lal** is a biochemist and author of *Indica: A Deep Natural History of the Indian Subcontinent* (Penguin Random House India, 2016).
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For private circulation/ Printed matter

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