

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIII, No. 3

June 2017 (No. 127)

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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXIII, No. 3, June 2017 (No. 127)

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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**

EDITORIAL

Is technology changing the meaning of the ‘wild’?

One of the most significant trends visible in wildlife conservation and management today is the use of ‘technology’. This particular issue of the *PA Update* is striking for the number of stories that have such a technology focus – camera traps providing new evidence of tiger presence in Mhadei WLS in Goa or the Asiatic wildcat in Bandhavgarh; radio collars helping solve the mystery of tiger deaths in Bandipur in Karnataka and Chandrapur in Maharashtra; satellite telemetry promising new insights into behavior and movement patterns of the Great Indian Bustard in Gujarat; use of software and sophisticated surveillance technologies to keep an eye on developments across large landscapes and the suggested use of contraceptives to contain runaway populations of monkeys.

All of this seems normal, even obvious, in a contemporary scenario, but look at it from a relatively more historical context and one wonders if the change is not a very fundamentally different one from what has been the case in the past.

What these new technological innovations appear to do without exception is increase our proximity to the subject of the investigation. Landscapes might be distant and the topography complex, but the surveillance technologies make it all so easy as we can now see, observe and monitor from the comforts and the confines of far away office rooms. More individual wild animals are perhaps being caught and handled today than ever before. And then there are various levels of physical intrusion that they are subjected to – be it a microchip in the tail, a radio-collar around its neck or a contraceptive injected into its body, not to mention the sedation that most of these individuals are forced into.

Technology has always allowed us deeper access into and control over our

environment, but some things - a ferocious large cat or a free flying bird or a deep-sea mammal - still seemed out of reach. They were wild and therefore inaccessible or inaccessible, therefore wild. The question that comes up, then, is a very fundamental, even philosophical one.

Is a monkey who can pro-create not a drastically different biological creature from one that cannot any more because it has been sterilized by human intervention? Is a tiger that has been sedated multiple times and now carries a radio-collar, as ‘wild’ a tiger as one that has never been photographed, sedated or collared? How wild is a wilderness where everything has been mapped, where everything is known and where all movement is tracked in real time? The issue is one that goes to the very heart of the idea of the ‘wild’ and of ‘wilderness’, marking as it does a paradigm shift in our relationship to and understanding of wildlife.

This is very relevant to the issue of conservation because it is the conservation of this ‘wild’ life and of ‘wild’erness that we are talking about. When the idea of the wild and of wilderness itself is not the same anymore, will that of wildlife conservation also need to change? We don’t need answers to this question immediately, but it is important that we reflect on it deeply. And collectively!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Lhagyala monastery sets aside forest for wildlife conservation

The Lhagyala monastery located in the West Kameng district has declared its forest as a community conservation area. The 7th century monastery, among the oldest in Arunachal Pradesh, owns large swathes of a forest bordering Bhutan and has decided to set aside 85 sq.km of this forest as the Mon-Lhagyala Community Conservation Area (MLCCA). The forest is home to a number of rare and

endangered species that includes among others the Red panda, Musk deer and high-altitude pheasants.

The local Mon-Lhagyala Buddhist Cultural Society and the Kalaktang Tsokpa, a confederation of more than 20 Monpa villages, recently authorised the monastery to create the MLCCA for biodiversity conservation. The society is entrusted with managing the community conservation area where hunting and commercial extraction of forest resources are banned. Those found violating the ban 'order' will be punished under the provisions of customary laws of the Tsokpa besides the Wildlife (Protection) Act – 1972.



Source: Rahul Karmarkar. 'Arunachal monastery declares forest near Bhutan as protected zone for red pandas', *Hindustan Times*, 28/04/17.

ASSAM

More than 370 encroacher families evicted from Orang NP, other forests

Forest officials recently evicted 343 families and cleared about 2.35 sq km area of the Orang National Park (ONP) that was encroached. In Goalpara district too the authorities evicted 32 families from a reserve forest two days after encroachers had attacked forest officials who were trying to stop illegal felling of trees.

While the Gauhati High Court had directed the forest department (FD) to evict the encroachers from ONP way back in 2014, it was only in May 2016 that eviction drives were intensified.

The FD also carried out an eviction drive in Goalpara district in western Assam, with officials saying 94 houses were demolished and 32 families evicted from inside the 308 sq km Kheropara reserved forest. At least ten forest officials including a range officer and a lady forester were injured, a couple of them seriously, when a group of over 50 people armed with machetes and other sharp weapons attacked the forest team that had gone there to stop illegal felling of trees. This prompted Assam Forest Minister Pramila Rani Brahma to rush to the spot and order immediate eviction of the encroachers.

In September last year, the government had also evicted over 330 families and cleared 24,00 bighas of land adjoining the Kaziranga National Park (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3).

Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap. 'Anti-Encroachment Drive: 343 families evicted from Assam's Orang National Park', *The Indian Express*, 13/04/17.

CHATTISGARH

Two wild buffaloes radio-collared in Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary

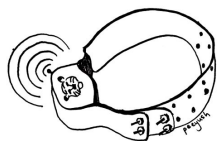
The Chhattisgarh Forest Department (FD) has, with the help of wildlife biologists, radio-collared two wild buffaloes in the Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary. Tracking the animals, it is hoped, will help provide information on the movement of the buffaloes and also in taking up conservation steps.

Dr. R P Mishra, head of the Central India Wild Buffalo Conservation Project and coordinator, Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), has been managing the conservation project with the FD. The WTI had consulted and brought in Dr. Markus Hofmeyr from South Africa National Parks, who is an expert on the tranquilization of large mammals. The collaring process was carried out in the month of March.

Source: Virat A Singh. 'Chhattisgarh Forest Department monitors wild buffaloes via radio collars', *DNA*, 23/03/17.

GOA

Five tigers in Mhadei WLS



Camera traps deployed by the forest department has confirmed the presence of five tigers – one male, two females and two cubs

- in the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). Tiger presence had been first reported here in April 2013, and this has now been confirmed via the camera trap images.

Source: Rajendra P Kerkar. 'Forest dept confirms five tigers at Mhadei', *The Times of India*, 10/04/17.

GUJARAT

Gujarat to propose reduction in PA ESZs as 'local objections'

The state government plans to forward proposed changes to eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) around protected areas as objections received from locals in the area. While forests and environment minister Ganpat Vasava is said to have received several complaints from locals that their fields and land are affected because of the ESZ a forest department official has pointed out that in many cases, the government was taking refuge in the fact that ESZs for PAs were larger than the PAs themselves. For example, the area of Gir Sanctuary and National Park is 1,469.99 sq km, while the ESZ is a little over 3,328.8139 sq km.

Source: 'Gujarat to forward cuts in size of ESZs as 'local objections'', *The Times of India*, 06/04/17.

Parliamentary panel pitches for 'Project Lion'

A 31-member parliamentary committee that visited Gir in January earlier this year, has proposed a Project Lion to strengthen lion conservation efforts in the state. Headed by

Congress MP, Renuka Chowdhury, the committee has strongly pitched for 'statutory support' and for the creation of 'Project Lion' on lines of 'Project Elephant' and 'Project Tiger' to protect lions and their habitat.

The committee held discussions with NGOs, civil society organizations, the state forest department and the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change on the issues relating to Gir and to lion conservation. It is also reported to have expressed apprehension about shifting of lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Parliamentary panel pitches for 'Project Lion'', *The Times of India*, 03/05/17.

FD calls for stringent action against illegal electric fences around farms adjoining Gir



Alarmed by deaths of lions due to electric fencing surrounding farms, the Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has issued guidelines for the prevention of such incidents. At least four

lions, including a lioness pregnant with two cubs and 45 humans were electrocuted in one year and the FD has now sought stricter legal action against those who install electric fencing illegally.

The FD has, in a recently issued circular, said that the culprits should be booked under the Electricity Act, 2003, which entails imprisonment of up to three years for power theft. This is besides the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Currently, farm owners where lions die due to their electric fencing are arrested but then let out on bail.

A public interest litigation filed by an environmental activist following the death of the pregnant lioness in Sangodra village of Junagadh in February last year is pending with the Gujarat high court. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1)

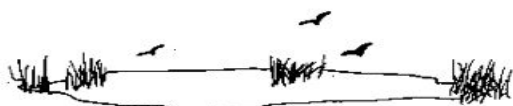
Source: Vijaysinh Parmar. 'Forest department tightens noose around farmers using electric fencing', *The Times of India*, 29/03/17.

HARYANA

Community reserve proposal for Brahmasar wetland near Kurukshetra

The Haryana Wildlife Department has proposed to declare the Brahmasar wetland in Kurukshetra as a community reserve to conserve the wetland and the endangered species of wildlife found here. Located about 50 km from Kurukshetra on the Ambala-Kaithal road, the wetland is home to flapshell and softshell turtles (called bhatal locally), a large fish population and also plays host to over 100 species of migratory birds. No commercial activities are allowed here on account of the religious sentiments associated with it.

According to the proposal, while the land will remain the property of the panchayat, teams of villagers and the wildlife department will jointly provide protection to it. The local panchayat has even passed a resolution to hand over the 104-acre wetland to the department but the proposal is said to be stuck in the Chief Minister's office.



Source: Vishal Joshi. 'Turtle conservation project in K'shetra awaits CM's nod', *The Tribune*, 04/05/17

JHARKHAND

Two arrested for killing a deer in the Hazaribag WLS

A Jharkhand government employee and his businessman-friend were arrested recently on the charge of killing a deer in a forest near Hazaribag Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). A police patrol discovered the dead deer in the boot of

the car during a routine check near Tatijharia Police Station close to the sanctuary. The police found a rifle and 40 bullets in the car along with the carcass, which bore bloodied marks akin to bullet wounds.

An FIR was lodged against Amit Kumar Singh, an employee with the civil court in Hazaribag, and businessman Radhe Shyam Singh, allegedly a repeat offender who hunted regularly.

Source: Sanjoy Dey. 'Deer hunt haunts Jharkhand's Hazaribag wildlife sanctuary, two held', *Hindustan Times*, 10/04/17.

KARNATAKA

ESZs approved for 12 PAs in the state

A national expert committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has approved the state's proposal to set up eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) around 12 PAs in the state including Bannerghatta National Park (BNP) and Ramadevara Betta Vulture Sanctuary (RBVS).

For BNP, which spans over 260.51 sq km, the original proposal envisaged an ESZ spread across 268.96 sq km. However, the state government revised the proposal to reduce the size to 181.57 sq km. The area includes 16 revenue enclosures. The expert committee has recommended the finalization of the draft notification, subject to the views of National Tiger Conservation Authority on the inclusion of revenue enclosures in the ESZ.

For RBVS, which is spread over 3.46 sq km, the government's proposal of a 7.56 sq km ESZ was approved. The state, however, suggested a few changes with regard to construction activities and setting up of industries, establishment of hotels and resorts, and installation of electrical lines. The committee then asked the state for a list of endangered species of animals, especially vultures.

The panel deferred 15 and recommended 32 proposals across the country including those for the Bannerghatta NP,

Gudekote Sloth Bear Sanctuary, RBVS, Nugu WLS, Biligiri Ranganathaswamy TR, Bhadra TR, Chincholi WLS, Mookambika WLS, Malai Mahadeshwara WLS, Melkote WLS, Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary and the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary

Source: Rohith B R. 'Bannerghatta, 11 other protected areas to get eco-sensitive zones', *The Times of India*, 11/04/17.

Three held for stealing teeth from tiger carcass at Bandipur TR



Three cattle grazers were arrested for sawing off the teeth of Prince, the most photographed tiger of Karnataka's Bandipur Tiger Reserve, whose carcass was

found on April 2. The three are residents of villages located on the periphery of the reserve and three teeth believed to have been removed from the tiger's carcass were recovered from them. Officials have said, however, that the accused had only removed the teeth from the tiger and were not poachers.

Prince was found dead in the Kundkere range of Bandipur with his snout missing and initial reports from the forest department (FD) had suggested that the tiger had died of starvation. The tiger's death was seen as a mystery and the FD was forced to reopen the investigation after activists alleged that it was a case of poaching.

The department's explanation for the missing snout had shifted from a crude bomb explosion to it being an act of scavengers to finally that of the snout being hacked by the villagers to get the teeth of the large cat.

Source: 'Karnataka: 3 held for stealing Prince's teeth from his carcass at Bandipur Tiger Reserve', *Hindustan Times*, 28/04/17.

Karnataka rejects proposals to declare Western Ghats eco-sensitive zone

The Karnataka government has rejected recommendations of the Kasturirangan committee on declaring the Western Ghats region an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). Citing that any additions to the already existing forest reserves and national parks in the region would hit development activities and livelihood of the local people, the state cabinet has resolved to urge the Centre to consider dropping the recommendations.

The state law minister said that the government had received resolutions from the 1,776 villages and gram panchayats that fall under the ESZ category of the Kasturirangan report stating they don't want the recommendations to be implemented, and the cabinet has therefore decided against the same. The cabinet has hence decided to reject the recommendations to add further areas into the ESZ category.

The Centre had on February 27 issued a fresh notification seeking response from the state on the recommendations made by the Kasturirangan-headed High Level Working Group on the Western Ghats. It sought that 20,666 sq km land in the state be declared as an ESZ to protect the region's flora and fauna.

Source: 'Karnataka rejects proposals to declare Western Ghats eco-sensitive zone', *The Times of India*, 20/04/17.

KERALA

Camera trap images of tigers, tiger habitat leaked online

Some images taken by the nearly 2,000 camera traps deployed inside Kerala's tiger reserves have found their way into popular social media sites, raising concerns of their misuse by poachers and smugglers. The state chief wildlife warden issued an urgent inter-departmental missive directing officers dealing with camera traps to keep information under safe custody and share it "only on a need to know basis", and with due authorisation by divisional forest officers or wildlife wardens.

Camera traps have been set up in Parambikulam and Periyar tiger reserves with the help of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India, and in Wayanad with assistance of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Source: ‘Kerala: Forest cam trap clips leak online’, *Deccan Chronicle*, 08/04/17.

MADHYA PRADESH

Photographic evidence of Asiatic wildcat in Bandhavgarh TR



Presence of the Asiatic wildcat has been confirmed in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) with

photographic evidence. Camera traps set up by the forest department for tiger surveys here captured images of this nocturnal cat in the last week of March.

The cameras photographed individual cats and a female with kittens, indicating that they were also breeding successfully in the landscape.

Source: Virat A Singh. ‘Asiatic wildcat confirmed in Bandhavgarh for the first time’, *DNA*, 05/04/17.

FAC refrains from giving a clear go-ahead to Ken-Betwa river-linking project

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has refrained from explicitly giving its opinion either way in the case of the Ken-Betwa river linking project. The FAC has only seconded an earlier sub-committee’s report that had cleared the project subject to strict caveats. The FAC’s recommendations are passed on to the environment minister, who can abide by them or reject them.

The Rs.18,000 crore river interlinking project requires 4,141 ha of forest from the

Panna Tiger Reserve, and additional land from elsewhere. As compensation for the tiger habitat that would be inundated by the project, the water ministry had agreed to acquire about 8,000 ha of forestland from the Madhya Pradesh government and revive them as forest. The FAC has, however, said that this land was not good enough as it was fragmented, and, to meaningfully revive a forest that is part of tiger habitat, the land acquired ought to be contiguous.

This would require, according to the FAC, revenue lands/non-forest lands by way of purchase or otherwise by the project proponents and the government. While a State can allocate forestland for central projects, transferring private or revenue land is harder, time-consuming and costly. The FAC has also asked for the project’s main canal to be re-aligned and has said that the project should consider reducing the height of the proposed Dhaudan dam by at least five meters to reduce the impact on the tiger reserve.

Senior water ministry officials are reported to have been preparing a rebuttal to contest the FAC’s recommendations and said that reducing the dam height was non-negotiable. They have noted that the “FAC has ventured into areas far beyond its mandate” and that the measures suggested by it were “impossible to comply with”.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, Nos. 2 & 1; Vol. XXII, Nos. 4, 3 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 and 1).

Source: Jacob Koshy. ‘Ken-Betwa: Forest body for lowering dam height’, *The Hindu*, 01/04/17.

Jacob Koshy. ‘Ken-Betwa link hits green hurdle’, *The Hindu*, 08/04/17.

NBWL permits diversion of 40 ha of forest from Nauradehi WLS for road widening

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has permitted the diversion of 40 ha of forest from the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (NWS) for the widening of national highway 12 that runs through the sanctuary. Nauradehi was recently

added to the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) to compensate for the submergence on account of the Ken-Betwa river linking project.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had suggested that four wildlife sanctuaries, two each from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, should be added to PTR to compensate for forest submergence. The NBWL accepted this proposal while granting wildlife clearance to the river-linking project and added Nauradehi, Rani Durgavati and Ranipur and Mahavir Swami Wildlife Sanctuaries to the PTR.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'NH-12 widening near Panna Reserve cleared', *DNA*, 31/03/17.

MAHARASHTRA

ESZ notified for the Gautala Autramghat Wildlife Sanctuary

An eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) that includes an area of one km from its boundary has been notified for the Gautala Autramghat Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). As many as 70 villages in the districts Aurangabad and Jalgaon will also come under its ambit. The draft notification declaring the ESZ had been published on June 12, 2015 and forest officials say there were no objections received from stakeholders in response.

A Zonal Master Plan has to be prepared now and there is a time of limit for this of two years from the date of publication of the final notification.

Source: Prasad Joshi. 'Gautala sanctuary area declared eco-sensitive zone', *The Times of India*, 30/04/17.

Umred Karhandla WLS tiger, Srinivas, electrocuted; found buried in farm

Srinivas (T10), the offspring of the iconic tiger Jai from Umred Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), was found buried in a farm in Vilam village in Nagbhid range (Chandrapur district), around 100 km from Nagpur. Jai is himself missing for a year and is feared dead.

Mahadeo Irpate (60), a farmer of Kothulna village, confessed to the crime and said that Srinivas died after coming in contact with the barbed electric wire fence laid to protect paddy crop from marauding herbivores, especially wild boars and nilgais. The current was drawn illegally from a 11KV overhead line. Irpate has been arrested and the case is being considered as one of poaching.

When Irpate noticed the dead tiger, he removed the radio collar with the help of a screwdriver and threw it 200 metres away near a nullah and then buried the carcass in his farm. When a team of investigators led by Nagbhid RFO, RM Talande, reached the spot eight days after the tiger was reported missing, only the collar was found. An intense search of the spot with the help of the forest dog squad failed to reveal anything. It was only the next day that the spot was located by the dogs. The carcass had been buried so meticulously that the foresters got no clues.

Jai, who too moved in the same landscape, is feared to have met the same fate in April last year near Paoni. Despite massive search operations, Jai, who had also been radio collared, could not be located. The spot where Srinivas was buried is located in the corridor connecting the Umred Karhandla WLS with the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.



Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Tiger Srinivas, aged 3, found buried in farm', *The Times of India*, 29/04/17.

Grasslands to be developed to augment leopard prey base in SGNP

The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) authorities have begun work on re-creating the grassland ecosystem in the park to help support herbivore populations and in turn augment the prey base for leopards here. Named 'Operation

Grasses for Leopards’, the project, it is hoped, with help in reducing human-leopard conflict. As an initial step, a study is being conducted to identify species of grass palatable to the park’s herbivores.

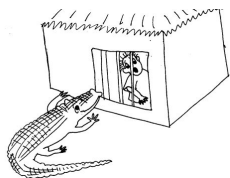
One of the main efforts in the project will be to remove the exotic, invasive shrub *Chromolaena odorata*, which currently covers nearly 30% of the park area. The weed forms dense thickets about two meters high and is difficult to eradicate. Over the next five years, park authorities plan to replace this weed with patches of grasslands for spotted deer and other herbivores.

The pilot project has already begun around Tulsi lake. The weed around the lake was removed twice and grasses have started to come up naturally. Seeds of palatable grasses that were collected in November and December last year will be planted in identified patches in the Tulsi, Yeoor and Krishnagiri ranges before the monsoons. The areas under the transmission lines that crisscross the park are bereft of tree cover and are being looked at as potential grasslands.

Source: Rizwan Mithawala. ‘Why forest dept is growing tasty grass in National Park’, *The Times of India*, 09/04/17

ODISHA

Bhitarkanika NP closed for tourists as crocodile breeding season begins



With the onset of the breeding season of estuarine crocodiles, the Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) has been closed for tourists from the 1st of May. It will now open for visitors three months later, on August 1.

The park has been closed to ensure there is no disturbance to the breeding animals and also to ensure visitor safety as the reptiles turn aggressive during the breeding period. The forest department is also prioritising safety of

local people as incidents of conflict are often reported in this period.

As per the latest census the crocodile population in Bhitarkanika is 1671 animals.

Source: ‘Bhitarkanika National Park closed for crocodile breeding’, *Indian Express*, 01/05/17.

NGT asks Odisha to evict two unauthorised educational institutes from forest areas

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Odisha government to evict two educational institutions for encroaching 18 acres of forestland in Patharagadia and Patia mouza, Bhubaneswar, in violation of the Forest Conservation Act.

The NGT has ruled that the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) and Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) had built a playground, houses and gardens without taking approval from the forest and environment department.

Achyuta Samanta, who is the managing trustee of Bhubaneswar-based Kalinga Relief and Charitable Trust, which runs the KIIT and KISS, was once also a member of the forest rights committee that allows diversion of forestland for non-forestry purposes.

Source: Debabrata Mohanty, ‘NGT asks Odisha govt to evict 2 educational institutions’, *The Indian Express*, 23/03/17.

Odisha FD stalls construction of eco-tourism complex

The Odisha Forest Department (FD) has stalled the construction of an eco-tourism complex near Bhitarkanika National Park after an RTI query revealed that the project of the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation fell in the eco-sensitive zone of the park.

The response to an RTI application filed by a social activist had revealed that permission for the complex had not been sought from the FD.

Source: 'Odisha: Forest department stalls construction of eco-tourism complex', *The Indian Express*, 26/03/17.

PUNJAB

River dolphins go missing following a water cut at Harike

Only four Indus River dolphins could be located in the Beas following a drastic water-flow cut in March end to enable de-siltation and repair of canal gates at the Harike barrage. Two dolphins were spotted near village Munda on April 4, while two others were spotted at village Dhundha near Goindwal Sahib. These numbers are much smaller than the estimated 18-35 dolphins that were reported by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)– India after a recent census. The reduced water flow for dredging means the dolphins either dispersed in the different channels of the Beas or got swept downstream into the deeper pools. Since the flushing took place in the dry season, some dolphins may have been sucked into the canals or the Sutlej. There are fears that they could have been killed.

As water levels plunged after supply was cut off on March 27, senior wildlife officials rushed to Harike. This was followed by a field visit by the chief engineer and superintending engineer for canals who then decided to increase water flows on the plea of wildlife officials that the dolphin was in danger. Wildlife officials expressed concern over the impact this would have on dolphins, smooth-coated otters and their prey base in the form of fish, which reported considerable mortality.

Source: 'Massive hunt on for missing Indus dolphins', *The Times of India*, 07/04/17.

RAJASTHAN

E-Patrol for monitoring Ranthambhore, Sariska TRs and GIB areas of Jaisalmer

Forests of the Ranthambhore and Sariska Tiger Reserves (TR) and Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

areas of Jaisalmer will soon use 'E-Patrol', a satellite based technology platform to automate the process of monitoring. The android-based software developed by a Bengaluru based firm has successfully been tried in 20 other tiger reserves and was launched in Ranthambhore TR on February 9, 2017.

The system that costed Rs. 30 lakh for the Ranthambhore TR will ensure accountability of forest guards in patrolling TRs and would enable field managers to assist intensity and spatial coverage of patrols in a geographic information system domain which would also be monitored from Jaipur.

While the program is fully operational in the Ranthambhore TR, it covers only a part of Sariska and Jaisalmer at the moment.

Source: 'E-patrol for tiger reserves, GIB habitats', *The Times of India*, 12/04/17.

TAMIL NADU

Water from River Bhavani no longer safe for consumption: WWF report



A three-year-long study undertaken by World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) -- India has shown that the water from rivers Bhavani and Kallar is no longer safe for consumption. Conducted by the WWF as part of its work in the Western Ghats-Nilgiris Landscape, the study found that the upper reaches of the Bhavani and Moyar have been polluted by the Udthagamandalam and Coonoor municipalities and industries, including a government-owned factory.

Coonoor, with a population of 50,000, generates about 5 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage, which is discharged untreated into the Kallar. The coliform bacteria levels in the waters in Coonoor were found to be 10 times higher than the permissible level stipulated by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). A cordite factory in Aruvankadu, which manufactures nitro-cellulose and nitro-

glycerine for ammunition, discharges its effluents into a small stream that eventually joins the Kallar. The discharge is loaded with nitrates and aluminium, far exceeding CPCB standards

The Bhavani too does not fare well in Mettupalayam. The town generates six to eight MLD of domestic sewage, which is currently being discharged untreated into the river. Pollution is further exacerbated by two micro-hydel dams (10 MW each), recently built both upstream and downstream, converting the entire river stretch into a stagnant cesspool. The report documents significant decline in river water quality post commissioning of the dams in late 2015.

Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board officials said that they have already sent notices to the industries on setting up zero liquid discharge units within a month. The Collector said the administration will take up lake restoration projects and design treatment plants for both Ooty and Coonoor municipalities.

Source: S Senthil Kumar. 'Water from River Bhavani no longer safe for consumption: WWF report', *The New Indian Express*, 04/05/17.

TAMIL NADU/ KERALA

Neutrino project needs clearance from Kerala also

The Tamil Nadu based Indian Neutrino Observatory (INO) will now need wildlife clearance from the neighbouring state of Kerala as well. This follows the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) reasoning that clearance will be needed as the project was just 4.5 km away from Mathikettan Shola National Park in Idukki district in Kerala and the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border was just a km away.

An environmental organization Poovulagin Nanbargal has pointed out that an environmental impact assessment study should be done before applying for fresh clearance, that it should be translated into Tamil, put out in public domain and that a public hearing should

also be carried out. It has warned that if the project promoters skip this process they will again file a petition at the NGT.

Source: S V Krishna Chaitanya. 'Neutrino project now faces Kerala challenge', *The New Indian Express*, 07/04/17.

TELANGANA

State Board for Wildlife approves projects in and around Kawal TR, Kinnersani WLS

The Telangana State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) in its 3rd meeting held recently, approved the Tummidi-Hetti barrage, which is part of the B.R. Ambedkar Pranahitha irrigation project. The proposal for diversion of 622 hectares of forestland falling in the tiger corridor linking the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) in Telangana with the Tadoba Andhari TR in Maharashtra and Indravathi TR in Chhattisgarh, was cleared by the board and forwarded for the approval of the National Board for Wildlife. The proposed area constitutes approximately a fifth of the total area of the tiger corridor, which is over 3,000 hectares.

Other proposals which were cleared in the meeting include diversion of over 63 hectares of forestland in Kinnersani Wildlife Sanctuary for widening of the road, erection of 400KV transmission lines by the TSTransco, and laying of pipelines and structures for Mission Bhagiratha project.

Source: Swathi Vadlamudi. 'Nod for diversion of forestlands', *The Hindu*, 03/05/17.

NBWL approves survey and exploration for uranium inside Amrabad TR; road projects in other PAs

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has given its consent to a proposal for the survey and exploration of uranium in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (ATR). The proposal by the Regional Director, South Central Region, Department of Atomic Energy, envisages survey and exploration for uranium over 83 sq kms of

the reserve which is spread over Amrabad and Udimilla in Nagarkurnool district and Narayanpur in Nalgonda district.

The approval was granted, according to the minutes of the meeting, because of the strategic importance of uranium for a developing country. The proposal was cleared under the category of “proposals within 10 km from the boundaries of protected areas”, even though the exploration is to be done within the boundaries of the tiger reserve. Further, the caveat of non-invasive exploration, insisted upon by activists in the State Board of Wildlife meeting, does not find any mention in the minutes of the NBWL (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1).

There is also a contradiction between what the state government is saying and what has been approved by the NBWL. While the NBWL minutes mention ‘survey and exploration’, the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), Telangana, said that only survey would be carried out in the designated area of ATR. He said further that no harm will be caused to the environment on account of the survey.

The first ever meeting of the state board post-bifurcation held last December had cleared the proposal unanimously, after which a team from the National Tiger Conservation Authority visited the area and submitted its report. The proposal will now go to the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee for permission.

Other major proposals cleared by the NBWL for the state of Telangana include widening of a 13.8 km road between Nakerrekal and Mallampally on national highway 365 passing through the Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuary. It requires diversion of around 51 acres of forest and will entail the chopping down of 5,000 trees. Another project approved was for the widening of a road through the Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park in the city of Hyderabad. This will require a diversion of seven acres of forest.

Source: V Nilesh. ‘Uranium survey proposal in Amrabad tiger reserve gets nod’, *The New Indian Express*, 02/04/17.

Swathi Vadlamudi. ‘NBWL ignores caveat of non-invasive exploration’, *The Hindu*, 06/04/17.

Panel to study impact on relaxing ban on vehicles through Kawal TR



The Telangana Forest Department has constituted a four-member committee to study the impact of relaxing the ban on movement of heavy vehicular traffic passing through the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 1; Vol. XXII, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, Nos. 5 & 3). While the District Forest Officer (Mancherial) is the member-convenor of the committee, other members are the executive engineer, Roads & Buildings, Deputy Commissioner of Transport, Adilabad and an NGO representative.

They will be looking into the number of wild animal deaths on the highway and impact of sound, dust and air pollution on the flora and fauna due to passage of heavy vehicles round the clock through the TR. They will also look at issues of the classification of heavy vehicles based on weight and number of axels, suitability of present width of road passing through the TR for safe two-way passage of heavy vehicles, strength of road surface, toll gates on the national highway between Hyderabad and Gudihatnoor via Kamareddy, Armoor, Nirmal and the total toll fee applicable for each category of heavy vehicles.

The panel will also study the number of toll gates between Hyderabad and Gudihatnoor on Rajiv Rahadari passing through Siddipet, Karimnagar, Luxettipet, Jannaram, Birsaiet, Utnoor, Gudihatnoor and tolls applicable for different categories of heavy vehicles.

Source: ‘Panel to study impact of relaxing ban on vehicles’, *The Hindu*, 02/05/17.

UTTARAKHAND

State government enforces WII norms for helicopter flights over Kedarnath WLS

The 14 heli-charter companies that operate flights to Kedarnath during the Char Dham yatra this year will have to follow norms recommended by the Wildlife Institute of India to ensure minimum disturbance to wildlife in the region, including in the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The National Green Tribunal (NGT), which had served notices to the state government over noise from choppers disturbing the wild animals in the sanctuary has asked for the WII norms to be implemented.

All choppers will have to maintain a height of 600 meters from the ground, and ensure noise levels of 50 db. Six choppers will be allowed to ply at one time every day and their operations will last from six in the morning to six in the evening. Experts have said that choppers equipped with advance technology will have no problem in flying at the height of 600 meter but those with old machinery will face problem and will have to make changes.

The WII report has also recommended shifting the helipad currently located near Kedarnath WLS to ensure reduction in noise and disturbance during landing and take-off. The state government is yet to make up its mind on this particular recommendation. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 2 and Vol. XXI, No. 5)

Source: Seema Sharma. 'Uttarakhand government enforces norms recommended by WII for Kedarnath flights', *The Times of India*, 29/04/17.

WEST BENGAL

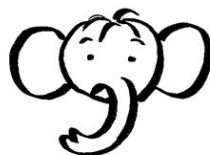
Human deaths in human-elephant conflict reduced in south Bengal

A reduction has been seen in human deaths in incidents of human-elephant conflict in South Bengal. 32 deaths were reported for the period April 1, 2016 to March 31, a number much

smaller than the 71 deaths reported in the previous corresponding period.

The reduction is considered to be an outcome of various measures taken to deal with the conflict situation here. An SMS based service launched last February in Bankura north division, from where most of the conflict cases are reported, informs villagers about presence of elephants in the area. Elephant movement coordination committees formed with foresters to ensure smooth coordination while driving away the elephants from villages is also said to have helped.

Recently, a conservation campaign of the wildlife wing of the state was also implemented by the Society for Heritage and Ecological Researches (SHER) in seven forest divisions of south Bengal. Local communities were alerted through a number of simplified guidelines of dos and don'ts, like not to go for collecting mushrooms in the dark or defecation in the forest. The campaign helped in facilitation of the rapid response activity for locals to mitigate conflict.



Source: Sujoy Khanra. 'Jumbo efforts keep conflict at bay', *The Times of India*, 10/04/17.

No tree felling for rail over-bridge near Gorumara NP: NGT

The eastern zone bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has continued the stay order issued earlier by the Calcutta High Court restraining the state forest department from felling trees in forest land near the Gorumara National Park (GNP)

At the NGT hearing held recently, the counsel for the state government furnished a permission to fell 3,000-odd trees issued by the divisional forest officer to the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation. The NGT, however, refused to take cognisance of this order as the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, requires the Centre to grant permission after a rigorous examination of such applications.

Building a rail over-bridge (ROB), it was pointed out, is a non-forest activity. The NGT has directed the petitions to be served on the central government and the concerned ministries, which include the railways, environment and surface transport.

The proposed ROB on national highway 31 near Lataguri that triggered the tree felling drew widespread protests as the area falls in the buffer zone of the GNP and is also part of an elephant corridor. Further, only one train passes through the area twice a day, holding up the sparse traffic for only a few minutes.

Source: 'Gorumara tree felling: NGT stays HC order', *The Times of India*, 14/04/17.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Contraceptive trials for curbing monkey populations

Scientists with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) are trying a procedure to control monkey populations by using a family planning vaccine called porcine zona pellucida that has been used successfully in the United States of America (USA). A trial project using the oral contraceptive conducted in the institute is reported to have shown satisfactory results and the scientists are confident that the contraceptive will help control the runaway monkey population.

The challenge, however, would be to get the Central Drug Standard Control Organisation on board. The vaccine is not available in India and must be imported from the USA. Each dose would cost at least Rs. 6,000. The Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has cleared the project but there are a number of other approvals needed to procure the drugs including that from the central drug control department.

The chemical that comes from pigs produces antibodies that prevent the sperm from attaching to the egg. The vaccine could be given

to monkeys mixed with their food, or can be injected. The scientists believe the contraceptive can be manufactured in the country.

Source: Nihi Sharma, 'Scientists pitch for a family planning 'pill' to control monkey menace in India', *Hindustan Times*, 13/04/17.

BBC banned from PAs for five years



The Indian government has prohibited the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from filming in India's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries for "irreparable damage done to India's reputation". Imposed with 'immediate effect' on April 10, the five-year ban applies to filming for BBC documentaries and news reports.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had in a show cause notice criticised the BBC for "grossly erroneous" reporting, and recommended the blacklisting of the BBC's South Asia correspondent Justin Rowlatt for a documentary that highlighted the government's "ruthless anti-poaching strategy" for the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve. On February 27, the NTCA issued a memorandum, asking the chief wildlife wardens of all tiger-range states and field directors of tiger reserves not to grant filming permission to the BBC for five years. The government's April 10 order upholds and extends the ban from tiger reserves to all national parks and sanctuaries.

Aired in February, the documentary by Rowlatt claimed that forest guards were given powers "to shoot and kill", the result of which the film claimed was that more people were killed by forest guards than rhinos by poachers:

23 people lost their lives compared to just 17 rhinos last year. In a BBC article introducing the film, Rowlatt also claimed that only two intruders were prosecuted while 50 were shot dead since 2014. The film questioned the Kaziranga authority's justification that the forest guards had engaged with heavily armed poachers.

A BBC spokesperson said that the authorities' reaction to this report is extremely disappointing. The programme was balanced, impartial and accurately reported.

In July 2010, the Assam government offered immunity to Kaziranga forest staff under section 197(2) of the CrPC, 1973. In the 11 years before this notification, between 2000 and 2010, 17 poachers were shot dead inside Kaziranga while 68 rhinos were killed. Since the notification, between 2011 and 2016, the number of poachers killed jumped to 59 and the number of rhinos poached to 103.

Source: Jay Mazoomdaar, 'Kaziranga film: BBC banned for 5 years from all national parks, sanctuaries', *Indian Express*, 15/04/17.

Elephant poaching on the rise: TRAFFIC India

Ivory seizures and poaching of elephants have witnessed a rise in the last two years in Karnataka and neighbouring states, according to TRAFFIC India. Contrary to the belief that poaching has peaked only in the last two years, TRAFFIC has said, it has continued unabated in the three southern states as also in Odisha, West Bengal, and Assam. Five to six years ago, it was cyclic and incidents of poaching used to rise and fall, but this has changed. Most of the elephants poached are wild, and not captive, while the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve seems to have become the poaching hotspot.

Karnataka Forest Department officials have said, however, that more seizures do not mean poaching has increased. Instead, they insist, detection has been better due to effective policing. The chief conservator of forests (CCF), Kodagu division, said that most of the

seized tusks were those removed from elephants that had died natural deaths and in all cases the offenders were caught and cases booked against them. According to the authorities, these poachers have no link to the international smuggling market, though inter-state movement of tusks is common.

There is still a huge demand for ivory both in the domestic and international markets. In India there is a big demand for carved bangles and other ivory artifacts in states like Gujarat, Bengal and Karnataka. In the international market, it is feared that till China clears its ivory stocks, there will be a lot of trading and demand for tusks.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Jumbo poaching rampant, says watchdog; officials refute claim', *The New Indian Express*, 15/04/17.

No need for a national rhino conservation authority: Centre



The central government has said there is no need for a national rhino conservation authority as Project Tiger, under the National Tiger Conservation Authority, was carrying out identical initiatives. This was in response to Assam MP, Gaurav Gogoi's suggestion for the constitution of a national rhino conservation authority under the ministry as a centrally sponsored scheme. Gogoi had proposed an authority that would have exclusive powers for the protection, conservation, and management of rhinos in the country and safeguard the boundaries of national parks and sanctuaries.

The centre noted that with the exception of Jaldapara National Park in Bengal

and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, all rhino habitats in the country were tiger reserves and identical threats of poaching and trafficking were faced by tigers as well. Project Tiger, being a centrally-sponsored scheme, it was argued, used the tiger as an umbrella species in an ecosystem approach, thereby benefiting rhino conservation as well.

It was also noted that the tiger conservation authority had constituted a rhino task force at Kaziranga, which suggested measures to strengthen rhino conservation. It had also set up e-eye surveillance at a cost of Rs 2.65 crore at Kaziranga. An unmanned aerial vehicle will also be tested at Kaziranga soon, the minister added.

Source: 'Delhi bins rhino cell plea', *The Telegraph*, 03/05/17.

More wildlife sniffer dogs for eight States



Thirteen dogs between the age group of 6-9 months will be trained at the National Training Centre for Dogs, BSF Academy, Tekanpur, Gwalior, to become wildlife sniffer and tracker dogs. This is the sixth phase of the programme and once trained the dog squads (one dog and two handlers) will be deployed by the forest departments of eight States – West Bengal (3), Sikkim (2), Uttarakhand (2), Uttar Pradesh (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Assam (1), Odisha (1), Kerala (1).

TRAFFIC India had initiated the wildlife sniffer dog training programme in 2008. Since then, 43 dog squads have been trained with support from World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India. According to TRAFFIC India, sniffer dogs deployed in the field have received an overwhelming response from various stakeholders. They have been successful in at

least 150 cases of wildlife seizures, arrests of about 100 persons and recovery of body parts including skins and bones of tigers and leopards, bear bile, ivory, star tortoise, deer antlers, skins and meat, live birds, porcupine, pangolin scales, snares, traps and weapons.

Source: 'Adding teeth to wildlife law enforcement, 13 dogs begin training to become wildlife sniffer dogs', wwfindia.org, 03/04/17.

New methodology for counting big cats

A new methodology developed by the Indian Statistical Institute, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) may revolutionize the counting of tigers and other big cats over large landscapes. Called "Bayesian Smoothing Model" (BSM) the methodology addresses a problem of extrapolating accurate population counts in smaller areas to wider regions where only weaker methods can be employed.

Currently, scientists rely on information collected using rigorous but resource-intensive survey methods-such as camera trapping to provide reliable results at smaller scales. However, they are compelled to use weak surrogate indices, such as track counts, while surveying large landscapes of 10,000 sq km or more. BSM claims to address this challenge by developing a far more complex but realistic model for combining information obtained at different geographical scales.

Source: 'Tigers, Ready to Be Counted', <http://www.sciencenewsline.com>, 31/07/17.



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

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

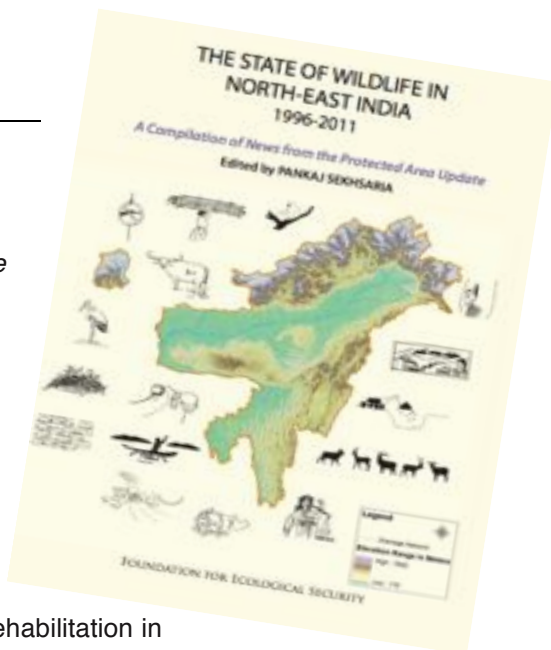
List of Contents: North East India Regional News; News from the States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.

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)

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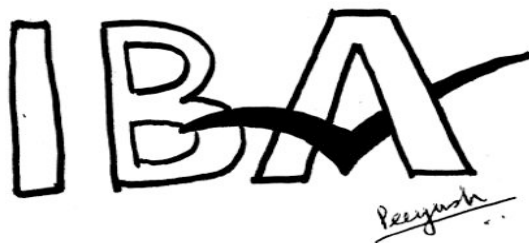
INVITING COLLABORATIONS

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.

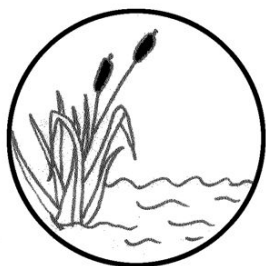
Please write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com with ideas, queries and suggestions on how these collaborations could be made to work and for specific proposals that are of interest to you.

Important Bird Areas Update



CHANDIGARH

Court rejects realty project in catchment of Sukhna lake



The Delhi high court (HC) has scrapped a proposed Rs. 1,275 crore residential project in Chandigarh on the grounds that it fell within the catchment area of the Sukhna lake.

The project is promoted by the Tata Housing Development Company.

The HC said that the permission granted to the project by the panchayat of Sukhna village, and endorsed by the Punjab government, had to be set aside. It also set aside environmental clearances for the project, holding that they were not in “conformity with the mandatory requirements of the ministry of environment and forests”. The ruling came in a PIL alleging that the project was against the law and would disturb the ecological balance as well as the migration of birds to the lake.

The HC directed the Punjab government to reconsider the matter in view of its judgment, adding that if the review favoured the project, the company may seek environmental clearance from the Centre under ‘category A’.

Source: ‘Green threat: Delhi HC scraps realty project by Sukhna lake’, *The Times of India*, 13/04/17.

GUJARAT

GIB sanctuary to be extended by 3,700 ha

The Gujarat government has decided to expand the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) Sanctuary by 3,700 ha. The land allocated for the same is in Naliya and is adjacent to the existing sanctuary. It was earlier in the possession of the Gujarat Energy Development Agency (GEDA) and was being used for raising plantations. GEDA’s lease for the land has now expired.

Officials said that since it was near the sanctuary, a proposal had been sent to the government to turn it into a grassland and give it to the forest department for GIB conservation. This had been pending with the government for the last ten years.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, ‘Great Indian bustards get 3,700 hectares more’, *The Times of India*, 23/03/17.

Two GIBs satellite-tagged in Gujarat to study movement, conservation needs

Two Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) were recently satellite-tagged in Gujarat to enable a study of their movement patterns and also to understand their conservation needs. This is the first time GIBs in Gujarat have been attached

with such transmitters, though this has been done earlier in Maharashtra.

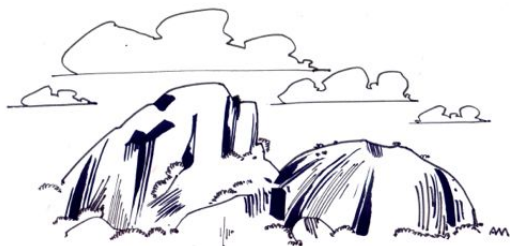
While the birds breed in Naliya in Kutch they move out subsequently and are also known to move across the border into Pakistan. Little is however known of the bird's presence and needs during this non-breeding season. According to Dr Yadvendra Jhala of the Wildlife Institute of India that is carrying out the tagging project, a total of 46 sightings have been reported in Pakistan, 43 of which were of dead birds. Satellite tracking, it is hoped, will help document and establish whether the birds found in Pakistan belong to the same group that is in India. It will also help researchers to pinpoint the period when the birds cross over to Pakistan, and how long they stay there.

Little is known of the pattern of movement of the birds within the state and the study is expected to help in this matter as well.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Satellite to help thwart extinction', *The Times of India*, 04/05/17

KARNATAKA

Forest department says no to recreation of *Sholay* sets in Ramanagaram



The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has expressed its opposition to an ambitious project of the state tourism department (TD) to recreate the scenes of the iconic Hindi film *Sholay* in Ramanagaram on grounds that the area has been declared a vulture sanctuary. The project that is estimated to cost of Rs. 7.5 crore includes the creation of a 3D village with the latest audio-visual equipment and multiple screens, under a public-private partnership. The proposal drafted

by the Ramanagaram deputy commissioner is said to be only in its initial stages and the TD has said that there is no concrete plan yet.

The deputy conservator of forests (DCF), Ramanagaram, has said that development, commercialisation and tourism cannot be allowed around the hillocks of Ramanagaram as the 10-km area around the hillocks is a no-development and no-commercialisation eco-sensitive zone. Though no official census has been conducted, it is estimated that there are not more than 30 vultures remaining on the hillocks, which are spread over 346.61 hectares.

Source: 'Forest department says 'no' to recreating *Sholay* in Ramanagaram', *Deccan Herald*, 07/04/17.

RAJASTHAN

GIB breeding centres in Kota & Jaisalmer

Rajasthan has agreed to establish captive breeding centres for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) at Sorsan in Kota and Mokhala in Jaisalmer



districts. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has sanctioned Rs 33.85 crore for the two centres. This was finalized at a meeting of experts from the forest department, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the WWF-India, among others, that was held recently in Jaipur.

WII will soon sign a memorandum of understanding with state forest officials to take this programme forward. It will be tasked with sourcing eggs, transportation, rearing chicks and reintroducing birds in the wild once they are ready.

Source: Rosamma Thomas. 'Great Indian Bustard breeding centres in Kota & Jaisalmer soon', *The Times of India*, 29/04/17.

31 vultures mowed down by train at Jorbeer, in Bikaner

31 vultures were mowed down recently by a train on the Bikaner-Delhi rail route. The accident occurred at the Jorbeer Important Bird Area IBA. An estimated 200 heads of cattle are regularly killed on this rail track here and the vultures were feeding on the carcass of a cow killed in such an accident. A wildlife researcher pointed out that on the one hand the Government of India spends crores on captive breeding of vultures, while on the other hand, an entire nesting colony of birds was finished in Jorbeer and nobody had taken stock of the situation.

Jorbeer falls on the migratory route of raptors from Eurasia and Mongolia and seven species of vultures have been observed there.

Source: Rachna Singh. '31 vultures feeding on dead cow mowed by train in Bikaner', *The Times of India*, 03/04/17.

NEPAL

Vulture release plans move ahead in Chitwan National Park



Six captive-reared White-rumped Vultures from the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre, Kasara, Chitwan National Park (NP) were released to a pre-release aviary built at the Vulture Safe

Feeding Site, Pithauli, Nawalparasi on 15 April 2017. The six vultures were surplus females (ones known not to be paired-up and breeding) determined by a molecular sexing technique of the all vultures at the Centre.

Each vulture has been fitted with a satellite transmitter for monitoring movements after their release to the wild later in the year. In the pre-release aviary these vultures will exercise their wings and interact with wild

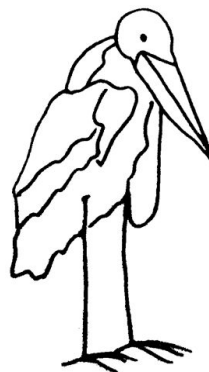
vultures which are also fed beside the aviary, prompting social contact between them. The door of the pre-release aviary will be opened later in the year, and the vultures will be allowed to leave when they are ready.

One week earlier, satellite transmitters were fitted to six wild adult White-rumped vultures in Pithauli which is part of the buffer zone of the Chitwan NP. The behavior of the captive-reared vultures will be compared to that of wild vultures as also if the vulture safe zones are indeed safe for the birds.

It is very likely that the released birds will at times cross into nearby Uttar Pradesh (UP), India, emphasising the trans-boundary nature of efforts needed to conserve vultures. There are already efforts led by the UP Forest Department and Bombay Natural History Society to reduce the threats, particularly of diclofenac, in the wider environment.

The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre was established in Chitwan NP in 2008. The Centre is a collaborative project of the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC)/Chitwan NP, National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), with the main support coming from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Source: 'Nepal Vulture Release plans move ahead!', www.save-vultures.org, 18/04/17.



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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A Decade Ago
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KERALA

Crocodile research centre at Neyyar WLS

The Kerala Forest Minister recently inaugurated the 'Steve Irwin Crocodile Rehabilitation and Research Centre' at the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary. The Centre has been created in the memory of the popular conservationist and TV personality who died recently.

A crocodile farm already exists at the Neyyar WLS. It had been set up in 1977 under the crocodile protection scheme of the Centre and is home to 44 muggers or marsh crocodiles.

Source: 'Minister to inaugurate crocodile research centre', *The Hindu*, 15/05/07

WEST BENGAL

Five elephants found dead in Buxa TR

Five elephants: two adults, a sub-adult and two calves were found dead on the banks of the River Raidak in the Newland Forest Area of the Buxa Tiger Reserve in the first week of May. This is the first time that so many elephants were found dead in the area.

Forest officials said that the animals had been struck by lightning and that an autopsy was to be conducted to ascertain the exact cause. Some local villagers however alleged that they must have died of poisoning as they had entered a nearby habitation the earlier night.

Source: 'Five elephants found dead in West Bengal', *ZEE Television*, 04/05/07.

Rs 10.28 crores for relocation of villages in Buxa TR unused: CAG report

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) for the year ending March 2006 has pointed out that the West Bengal Forest Department (FD) had failed to use the Rs. 10.28 crore allocated to it for the relocation of villages from inside the Buxa TR. It also noted that the matter was not even included in any of the FD's Annual Plans of Operations for 2000-05 and that during the

period 2001-03, the FD only relocated Bhutia Busty which had a population of 415.

According to the CAG report 5300 people live within the core area of Buxa Tiger Reserve and another 10,700 people live in surrounding areas.

The CAG has also observed that 335 hectares of forestland had long been encroached upon by private orange orchards, that no survey was conducted till January 2006 to identify encroachments in the PA and that a huge cattle population in the fringe villages has also led to extensive illegal grazing in the reserve.

Source: Shaheen Parshad. 'Buxa Tiger Reserve failed to relocate human settlement, says CAG report', *The Indian Express*, 16/04/07.

Train kills another elephant in Buxa TR

An adult elephant was killed by a speeding train near the Atiabari Tea Estate level crossing in the Buxa Tiger Reserve in the month of April.

The collision occurred at 4.40 am on April 11. The elephant was stuck to the train's undercarriage and was dragged for about 50 metres before the train came to a halt.

This is the seventh pachyderm that has been killed in similar circumstances ever since the stretch between Siliguri and Alipurdar underwent gauge conversion four years ago (see *PA Updates* Vol XII, No. 3, and Nos. 49, 47, 43, 39, 36, 34, 32 & 29).

All the animals have been killed at the four spots on the railway route identified as being sensitive and where the High Court has ordered that trains move at a reduced speed. Another significant change in this context has been the increase in the number of trains running on this route. There were only five pairs of trains here before the gauge conversion; now it is 30.

Source: 'Train kills another elephant', *The Statesman*, 12/04/07.

PERSPECTIVE

Fisheries and the Humpback dolphin

Think of India's wildernesses, and the sea is one thing that doesn't instantly spring to mind. This remains one of the country's least explored habitats from a wildlife science perspective. And just as there are complicated conflicts between people and wildlife on land, there are equally complex scenes unfolding at sea, much of it below the conservation science radar.

My work revolves around the interactions between fisheries and coastal marine mammals, primarily the Indian humpback dolphin, a strictly near-shore species whose range overlaps largely with fisheries in my region of interest – the northern Karnataka coast. Here, encounters between dolphin and fishing crew are commonplace – as frequent as 40% of all the purse-seine fishing sessions I have surveyed so far. The dolphins use nets deployed from boats as foraging opportunities, taking away some of the catch, and worse, damaging the nets in the process. The fishers respond with a variety of methods to deter these depredating dolphins. None however are completely effective. With fish catches going down, it is possible that these interactions will turn more frequent over the coming seasons. At the moment, fishers aim to deter the dolphins, rather than persecute them. But the full depth of the problem is not yet known, and requires a more complete understanding of dolphin foraging behaviour in the area. In any case, effective measures to mitigate or avoid these interactions are needed quickly.

One remarkable thing that I additionally noticed during my surveys is the rich traditional knowledge of marine mammals that the local fishermen possess. It is a vast repository of anecdotal information that could be tapped to understand the region's marine mammals better. I prepared identification charts in Kannada, and some of the fishermen started using these to identify their past sightings, as well as to report their recent/present ones along with location, water depth and behavioural data. The information that came in through this rather simple system was amazing, and some of it led me to make a few trips into deeper waters

myself, resulting in valuable photographic records of Bryde's whales, along with two species of dolphin – the Arabian common dolphin and the pantropical spotted dolphin – both of which were never recorded from this coast before. The fishermen themselves produced a verifiable record of killer whales in this region. Sighting reports from these teams continue to come in till date.

My work so far has been of a preliminary nature to establish a baseline, but it highlights a few key areas to investigate further. Firstly, the fishery-dolphin interactions in coastal waters need to be investigated in further detail on several levels and mitigation strategies need to be suggested before the scenario turns any more serious. The anecdotally reported cases of cetacean bycatch in these fisheries also deserve greater attention. Secondly, offshore surveys to explore the little-known cetacean diversity in this distant zone very much needed. And lastly, considering the difficulties in surveying some of these remote areas, it is imperative that wide-scale sighting reporting networks be established. Although not very systematic, the data coming in through these channels can undeniably help piece together the little-known picture of these unexplored wildlife habitats.

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For private circulation/ Printed matter

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