

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIII, No. 4

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Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

New species in the Western Ghats

In a phenomenon that has taken many by surprise, a significantly large number of new species have been discovered and described from the Western Ghats in the last few years. This issue of the *PA Update* itself has a report on four new burrowing frogs and another about six new species of freshwater crabs from this ancient mountain range. The most striking, of course, has been the fact that 160+ new species of amphibians, mainly frogs; have been described from here in less than a decade and importantly, the pipeline isn't drying up just yet.

This, more than anything else in recent times, has once again highlighted the extreme richness and importance of the Western Ghats at the same time as the threats and challenges they face. We have a range of reports in this issue of the *PA Update* that attest to that – a CAG study suggesting that nearly 4000 sq km of forests (including in the Western Ghats) have been lost in Karnataka alone in the last four decades; there are more proposals for railway lines and other infrastructure projects that will slice the fragmented forests even more and there is also the complete rejection of the idea by Karnataka and Kerala that the Ghats are an eco-sensitive zone. There are the other well-known concerns, of course, over the introduction of exotics, extensive mining, rapid urbanization and the damming of rivers here.

It is not insignificant that the 1970s Silent Valley movement, which for many symbolizes the birth of the contemporary conservation movement in the country, was born in the Western Ghats. 2017 also marks the 30th anniversary of The Save Western Ghats March that saw the coming together of a diverse set of people (scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, activists, journalists, local communities) in a co-ordinated effort to respond to the socio-ecological challenges being faced here and more recently we saw the large

conservation research and action initiative in the ghats under the aegis of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Many of the new discoveries have come as part of this initiative and a new frog described from the Amboli forests of Maharashtra has, in acknowledgement, been called the CEPF Burrowing Frog *Fejervarya cepfi*.

These big initiatives and efforts combined with smaller localized initiatives across the landscape also attest to the fact that the importance of the Ghats is still alive, that people and institutions are concerned and all may not be lost just yet.

The frogs, in particular, have a particularly special place and important role to play. They are one of the most sensitive creatures and among the first affected by changes such as those of forest loss, reduction in rainfall or warming of the climate. They are critical ecological indicators and their discovery in larger numbers only suggests we have a larger responsibility. To them and to ourselves!



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

GUJARAT

Ambardi lion safari in Gir NP gets final approval

The Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has given its final approval to the Ambardi lion safari at the

Gir National Park (GNP). This is to come up in Dhari taluka of Amreli district and is aimed at reducing the tourist rush in the western part of the park. The safari here will be on lines similar to the Devaliya Safari Park in Junagadh district.

The infrastructure for the Ambardi safari is already in place and there will be three lions for public viewing along with herbivorous animals in 387 ha of fenced area.

Some representations by people opposed to the project and objections raised by the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) had delayed the new safari's final approval. However, a committee headed by additional director general of wildlife of the MoEFCC gave its final approval recently following the clearance given by the CZA.

Source: 'Gujarat's Ambardi lion safari gets Centre's nod', *The Indian Express*, 06/06/17.

FD keeps outsourcing decision on hold after lion trackers' protest

Over 200 lion trackers from five districts converged at the Junagadh chief conservator of forest's (CCF) office on June 5 to lodge their protest against the May 31 decision of the Gujarat State Lion Conservation Society (GSLCS) to hire a private agency for various duties, including the critical on-field job of lion tracking from July 1. After hectic rounds of parleys with the CCF, it was finally decided that the outsourcing order would be kept in abeyance.

Trackers say that opening up a sensitive eco-system like Gir could yield disastrous results. Moreover, the decision to outsource work to a private agency was taken even as there was no proper quorum in the GSLCS meeting that took the said decision.

Before the formation of the GSLCS, trackers were employed on a daily wage basis in various departments. Following the formation of the society they were taken hired on contract based on individual experience and considering the large requirement of field staff.

The trackers now also demanded an annual pay hike commensurate with current inflation and a proper system for compensating those who die or get injured during risky work of animal rescue. The CCF said that only the methodology of hiring manpower was being changed and there was no threat to the existing trackers. The new manpower including trackers and other staff will be hired through an agency.

In the meanwhile, a member of the state wildlife board said that lion tracking itself could not be outsourced since it is a critical activity pertaining to conservation management and private agencies would not have the expertise to fulfil the requirement.

Source: 'Lion trackers to protest outsourcing of work', *The Times of India*, 05/06/17.
'Outsourcing order kept in abeyance, trackers relent', *The Times of India*, 06/06/17.

A retiring room and a hotel to come up on Gir land at Sasan

The standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared proposals for a retiring room and a hotel at Sasan Railway Station. As a consequence, around 7,600 sq m of Gir Sanctuary land will be diverted for the projects. The retiring room project was mooted by the Indian Railways at Sasan, while the hotel project is by a well-known private entity.

The railways have proposed the retiring room at the station even though only two meter gauge trains operate in daytime — the need for a night halt for passengers does not arise. Besides, there have been sightings of wild fauna including leopards at the Sasan station and it is feared that the movement of vehicles and construction activity will affect the wildlife here.

A State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) member has pointed out that the standing committee of the NBWL has restricted the use of the retiring room to officials and staff; if it was not to be used for guests or even family members of railway officials, then there was no need for the retiring room, as officers on duty

are given rooms at government-approved rates. Another senior officer opined that the SBWL head, which is the state chief minister, should have rejected the proposal. The decision, instead, was left to the NBWL, which under the influence of the railway minister cleared the proposal. The NBWL has only imposed the condition that 5% of the cost of the project be spent for habitat improvement and for wildlife.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, 'Railway retiring room grabs lion land', *The Times of India*, 08/06/17.

HARYANA

Animal population rises in Aravallis: WII

A survey by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has reported a significant increase in the population of wild animals in the Aravallis; leopard numbers, in particular, have risen four-fold. The survey of 51 sites in the Aravallis showed an increase in the numbers of 10 mammalian species including leopard, Striped hyena, Golden jackal, Grey wolf, Indian fox, Jungle cat, Grey mongoose, Small Indian civet, Indian crested porcupine, Indian hare, Wild pig, Rhesus macaque, Nilgai and the Chinkara.

The report has also pointed out that scores of animals are mowed down by speeding vehicles in the forest areas every year. The Gurgaon-Faridabad Expressway is one such road where road kills have increased noticeably. An increase in the leopard population has also led to a rise in incidents of human-animal conflict in the Gurgaon stretch of the Aravalli region, especially Sohna.

Urgent efforts have been called for in the report to conserve the shrinking forests straddling the five Aravalli districts in Haryana — Gurgaon, Faridabad, Mahendragarh, Mewat and Rewari.

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Gurgaon: Leopard numbers in the Aravallis rose four-fold in last four years', *Hindustan Times*, 04/06/17.

'Aravallis could lose vegetation, become barren, says survey', *Hindustan Times*, 04/06/17

'Haryana to unveil plan to prevent the Aravallis from turning into a desert', *Hindustan Times*, 04/06/17.

JHARKHAND

North Koel irrigation project awaits wildlife clearance; will impact Palamau TR

The standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) recently discussed the North Koel irrigation project and has sought a report on it from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) as clearing it would involve diversion of 1,007.29 ha of forest land from the Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR). If approved, nearly 3.5 lakh trees would be felled for the project. The committee decided that a committee comprising of member secretary, NTCA and a member from the Wildlife Institute of India would visit the project site and submit a report for further consideration.

First sanctioned in 1970, the North Koel project envisages a dam (Mandal Dam) near Kutku village of Latehar district in Jharkhand, a barrage on the same river around 96 km downstream of the Mandal Dam site and a system of distributaries originating from the two main canals. Together, these will provide to 124,270 ha in Bihar and Jharkhand. Once completed, the project will also generate 24 MW of electricity besides providing drinking water as well as water for industrial and agricultural purposes in Jharkhand and Bihar.

The cost of the project that in 1970 was Rs. 30 crores is now estimated to be nearly Rs.1,300 crores. Of that, around Rs. 750 crores has already been spent. Though stuck for decades, the project has been given a renewed push from the state governments of Bihar and Jharkhand in the last one year. In August 2016, a meeting led by the principal secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also held to fast track the project.

The project was discussed in the April 25, 2017 meeting of the environment ministry's

expert forest panel too. The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) had rejected the demand for waiving off the requirement of compensatory afforestation in lieu of diverting over 1,000 ha of forest area from the PTR. The FAC had noted that compensatory afforestation may be done over an area that is twice the forest land diverted, provided the degraded forest land identified for this purpose was in the corridors of the PTR.

The FAC has also asked the state governments to identify maximum possible encumbrance free, large patches of non-forest land either adjoining or in the immediate vicinity of the PTR to offset habitat loss due to submergence.

Source: Mayank Aggarwal, 'North Koel irrigation project awaits wildlife clearance', *Mint*, 13/06/17.

KARNATAKA

SOP not followed while tranquilising tiger at Nagarahole TR: NTCA report

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), in its report to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on the death of a tigress in Antharasanthe Range of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve in January, earlier this year, has pointed out that the standard operating procedures (SOP) were not followed by the field staff of the forest department. Though the report does not blame any official directly, it demands strict action against those guilty of violating NTCA rules and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

According to an NTCA official, the SOP states that an animal running into a forest patch should not be darted, and be allowed an opportunity to escape. This was not followed. In this case, the animal died because it was darted multiple times in the presence of a huge crowd. The shock, anxiety and probably even the dosage was too high for the animal. Normally, while tranquilising, there should be no crowd or disturbance, but that did not seem the case here either. The advisory on precautions was also not

followed and no written orders were issued before tranquilising the animal.

The report has been filed based on the detailed investigation of the ground staff and the higher-ups. The post-mortem report was also included in the report.

Source: 'NTCA says procedure not followed in Nagarahole tranquilising case', *Deccan Herald*, 15/06/17.

WTI to purchase 38 acres land for elephant corridor

As part of its long-term goal to secure elephant corridors across India, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), along with the Karnataka Forest Department (FD), has planned to purchase 38 acres of land on the fringes of Chamarajanagar-Talamalai forest at Mudahalli. The proposed land acquisition will help widen the existing corridor by 200-300 m along a length of 1.5 km and help facilitate free movement of elephants. The plan has a potential to provide unhindered habitat connectivity for more than 2,000 elephants directly.

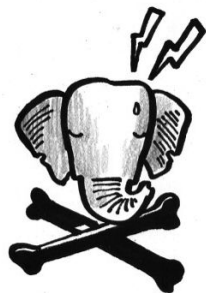
The WTI had, in 2005, identified 88 elephant corridors across India's elephant range and has been working towards securing them. Five corridors - Edayarhalli-Doddasampige (Karnataka), Siju-Rewak (Meghalaya), Rewak-Emangre (Meghalaya), Thirunelli-Kudrakote (Kerala) and Chilla-Motichur (Uttarakhand) have already been secured with the support of stakeholders.

Source: 'Wildlife Trust to purchase 38 acres for jumbo corridor', *The New Indian Express*, 15/06/17.

Two elephants electrocuted in Virajpet

Two female elephants, aged 40 and 26 years, were electrocuted at Kannangala near Siddapura in Virajpet taluk. The jumbos had ventured out of the woods in search of food and water. They came in contact with the low-lying live cable while trying to pull the branches of a tree.

The incident came to light when forest officials were chasing some elephants from the village towards the forest. Villagers had called the team after they spotted a herd of elephants. During this drive, the forest officials entered the deserted estate and found the electrocuted elephants.



A complaint has been registered against the electricity board for negligence.

Source: 'Two elephants electrocuted in Virajpet', *The Times of India*, 15/06/17.

Centre seeks clarification from Karnataka over rejection of Kasturirangan report on WG

The Central government has sent a letter to the Karnataka government seeking clarifications on its decision to reject the Dr. K Kasturirangan report on the protection of Western Ghats in the state. In a written reply in the state assembly, forest and environment minister, B Ramanath Rai, said that the letter and the clarifications sought by the Centre are under state government consideration and a reply is yet to be sent. The state government has, owing to the popular demand, decided to completely reject the Kasturirangan report and had communicated this to the Centre via a letter dated April 22.

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. The committee had suggested that 20,666 sq km land in the state be declared as an Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) to protect the region's flora and fauna. The state had reasoned, however, that the implementation of the report would adversely impact the livelihood of lakhs of people in 33 taluks and 1,576 villages that will be earmarked as ESZ.

Kerala too is reported to have rejected the report in totality. (Also see *PA Update* XXIII, No. 3)

Source: Sandeep Moudgal. 'Centre seeks clarifications on state govt decision to reject western ghats report', *The Times of India*, 07/06/17.

3,660 sq km of forests lost in Karnataka over four decades: CAG-commissioned study

A study commissioned by the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has reported that 3,660 sq.km. of evergreen and deciduous forests have disappeared in Karnataka over the past four decades. It also found that 267 sq km of built-up area and buildings have come up in and around protected areas in the state.

With no official data available, the CAG entrusted the study to the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, to tabulate the changes in land use and land cover in forests using satellite imagery. The study focused on areas in and around 13 protected areas (PAs) and used images from 1973, 1991-92 and 2016 to compare the changes in the forests and in the buffer zones upto nearly 10-km around these PAs.

The report points to the degradation of evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous forests – which once made up nearly two-thirds of the forest type – as seen in their reducing areas. While evergreen forests declined by 1,893 sq km, deciduous forests declined by 1,766.26 sq km. One of the worst affected areas is the Kali Tiger Reserve where nearly 1,000 sq km of evergreen forests has been lost. In various forms, agriculture and horticultural activities increased in over 235.5 sq km. The principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), Karnataka, said that the department had little control over the lands around forests as these are private lands or belonged to the revenue department.

The report also notes that nearly 50% of protected areas had seen intensive lantana invasion and there has been little effort to

contain the spread. Further, it notes that while resorts and homestays were mushrooming and tourist inflow into forests increasing, there was little understanding of the carrying capacity. The report documents 51 commercial resorts operating within 10 km from forest areas in six of the 13 sampled PAs; of these only seven resorts were found to have been approved by the forest department.

The report also found that encroachment of forest areas increased from 42,518 acres in 1995 to 2.04 lakh acres in 2014. In the PAs, in particular, as many as 4,393 families had encroached 9,524 acres as of March 2016, but only 1,384 forest offence cases were booked. The increase in encroachments in 19 years was seen to be about 465%.

Source: Mohit Rao. 'Degradation seeing forest landscape disappear: CAG-commissioned study', *The Hindu*, 24/06/17.

'In 19 years, encroachment of forest areas rose by 465% in Karnataka', *The Hindu*, 22/06/17.

KERALA

FD strongly objects to Thalassery-Mysuru railway project

The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department has strongly objected to the proposed Thalassery-Mysuru railway project citing serious ecological factors such as threats to endangered flora and fauna as well as social issues. The department has submitted a report to the government stating that the railway line passing through the forest belts of Kannavam and Periya will destroy the forests and the rich biodiversity there.

This forest is the connecting link of the largest elephant reserve in South India from the Mudumalai-Bandipur-Nilambur tract to the Brahmagiri Hills of Karnataka. Disturbing the forest, it is feared, will lead to elephants coming down to the human settlements of Nidumpoil and Edayar resulting in increased human-elephant conflict here. Five people have already been killed in wild elephant attacks in this region in the past two or three years. It has also

been pointed out that these forests are source of water for the rivers of north Kerala from Valapattanam to Mahe. More than three lakh people of Thalassery taluk who are dependent on the Anjarakandi Puzha would be affected. Further, 1,000-odd tribal families belonging to the Kurichiyar community live in the Kannavam forests in 33 settlements and they too are likely to be affected.

Another prominent project of the government on rail connectivity from north Kerala to Mysuru-Bengaluru is the Nilambur-Nanjangund line. Though Rs. 8 crore have been set apart for the detailed project report, the project in abeyance following strong objection from the Karnataka Forest Department. Instead, the government has opted to go ahead with the Thalassery-Mysuru line, the feasibility survey of which was also done by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, which, incidentally, has opined that this line is not viable.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, Nos. 5 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 5 & 3))

Source: Biju Govind. 'Forest dept red flags rail project', *The Hindu*, 07/06/17.

One new genus and six new species of crabs described from Western Ghats



A collaborative effort by the Zoological Survey of India and the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, Kerala University, has discovered one new genus and six new species of freshwater crabs in the Western Ghats in Kerala.

The new genus, named *Karkata*, meaning crab in Sanskrit and Malayalam - is endemic to the Western Ghats. One species under this new genus, *Karkata ghanarakta*, was collected from the Thattakkad Bird Sanctuary of Ernakulam district, while the second species *Karkata kusumbha* was reported from Mankulam of Idukki. The study also recorded two new species of the genus *Pilarta* - *Pilarta*

aroma and *Pilarta punctatissima*. The former was reported from Pongalappara, Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve while the latter was discovered in Ovumkal, also in the Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary.

Another species *Cylindrotelphusa longiphallus* was collected from Kuzhikattusseri, Thrissur, while *Cylindrotelphusa breviphallus* was recorded from Ponmudi.

Details of the study have been published in the current issue of *Journal of Natural History*.

Source: 'A new genus, six new species of freshwater crabs discovered from Western Ghats in Kerala', *The New Indian Express*, 09/06/17.

KERALA/MAHARASHTRA

Four new burrowing frogs described from Western Ghats

Sonali Garg, a research student at the Delhi University has reported the discovery of four new species of burrowing frogs from the Western Ghats. The finding, published in the journal *Zootaxa*, is the result of five years of extensive explorations in the forests here. The species belong to the genus *Fejervarya*, but unlike other members of the family, they possess the ability to burrow.

The first of the new species, Manoharan's Burrowing Frog *Fejervarya manoharani*, was discovered from the Agasthyamala hills in South Kerala and is named after TM Manoharan, former principal chief conservator of forests. The Kadar Burrowing Frog *Fejervarya kadar* was collected from the Vazhachal forests and named after the Kadar tribe that was in the forefront of the agitation against the Athirapally hydel project. The CEPF Burrowing Frog *Fejervarya cepfi* was found in Amboli in Maharashtra and is named after the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), which recently supported extensive research in the Western Ghats. Discovered in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve,

the Neil Cox's Burrowing Frog *Fejervarya neilcoxi* has been named after Dr. Neil Cox of the International Union for Conservation of Nature who was instrumental in preparing the Red List of global amphibian species.

Source: T. Nandakumar. 'Burrowing frogs add to diversity of Western Ghats', *The Hindu*, 20/06/17.

MADHYA PRADESH

Tiger walks 125 km from Panna to Bandhavgarh TR

A three-year-old tiger, named Bahubali 2, is reported to have walked 125 km from the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR). The animal caught the attention of park officials when he was first sighted in the buffer zone of BTR a few months ago. He was named T-71 and pictures uploaded on social networking sites helped identify him as a migrant tiger from PTR, where his name was P213(21). It was concluded accordingly that the tiger had walked 125 km from Panna to Bandhavgarh. While the exact details about the path taken by the tiger are not known, it is said that the tiger might have taken 3-5 months to reach Bandhavgarh. He was then re-named Bahubali 2.

Incidentally, the first Bahubali too was a migrant tiger from Panna (P212) who had wandered out in February 2014. He was found in Rewa and was later released in the Sanjay Tiger Reserve. He was found dead in July 2015, reportedly because of territorial clashes with another tiger.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. '3-year-old tiger walks 125 km from Panna to Bandhavgarh, authorities name him Bahubali 2', *Mid-Day*, 20/06/17.

Protests against displacement from Madhav NP

Villagers who were displaced over the past couple of decades from the Madhav National

Park in Shivpuri have been protesting against lack of cultivable land and poor facilities in areas where they have been relocated. Recently about 300 villagers petitioned the collector to attend a gram sabha to hear their demands.

In the matter of the village of Balarpur that was moved to another area under the Budi Barod Gram Panchayat, students from the National Law University (NLU), Odisha who are documenting the situation, said there are no roads in the relocated village and only one hand pump. In Gatwaya, another village where the relocation process was carried out in 2013, it has been alleged that there has been a violation of the Forest Rights Act. The villagers, reportedly, were not ready to move out but were coerced to move out by the forest department officials.

In other villages - Lakhngawan, Bardkhedi (Mamoni), Harnagar, Kamalpur, Dongar and Arjungawan - located on the periphery of the national park, the survey of affected villages was started in 2004 but the compensation was actually paid only in 2008-09. According to the villagers no gram sabhas were conducted and no prior information was shared with them. There was no informed consent obtained from the villages for relocation and gram sabhas were mostly conducted on paper and in the office of the revenue officials.

Forest officials have, however, denied these allegations. The director of the park has insisted that the people were lying because land given to the tribals was cultivable and that there was no protest. He added they were being moved out because they had already been paid compensation.

About 27 villages have been relocated from in and around the current Madhav NP over the last few years.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Forest dwellers, farmers protest displacement from MP's Madhav National Park', *The Times of India*, 18/06/17.



MAHARASHTRA

Final forest clearance granted to Gorewada International Zoo project



The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has granted final forest clearance to the Rs. 451.35 crore Gorewada International Zoo project on the outskirts of Nagpur city. Though the clearance granted is for the diversion of 564 ha forest land, the state government has been asked to ensure that only 15% of the diverted area (79.07 ha) is utilized for non-forestry activities.

A safari is to come up in 145 ha but the actual construction as per the FAC will be in 6.37 ha. It will house animals like tigers, leopards, sloth bears and herbivores. A water reservoir to provide for the zoo and its animals is also to be built over an area of 28 ha. Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis, has set December 2018 as the deadline for completing the safari project.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Gorewada zoo project gets final forest clearance', *The Times of India*, 22/06/17.

Villagers from Rohinkhidki village inside Melghat TR relocated

594 families living in the Akot Wildlife Division of the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) are being relocated. The forest department (FD) has provided alternative land in nearby Pingli and Kamod villages located in the buffer zone of the

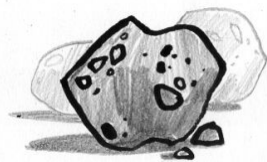
tiger reserve for the purpose of their rehabilitation.

According to deputy conservator of forests, Akot Wildlife Division, the FD has received Rs. 60 crore from the government and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) for the purpose. So far, the FD has deposited Rs. 2.90 lakh in the bank accounts of the beneficiaries (who have opted for cash compensation) as well Rs. four lakh in the form of recurring deposit. The FD will require Rs. 18 crore more to carry out further rehabilitation work.

After Rohinkhidki, the FD plans to relocate Talai village from the forests of the Akot division.

Source: 'Relocation of village in Melghat tiger reserve gains momentum', *Business Standard*, 03/06/17.

FD says no to mining near Sahyadri TR



The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has rejected proposals for mining in the vicinity of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (STR). The proposals rejected were for bauxite mining projects at Kumbhawade in Ratnagiri district's Rajapur taluka, and Baveli and Talegaon in Kolhapur's Gaganbawada and Radhanagari talukas.

A Nagpur-based company had sought permission for mining in 95.57 ha at Kumbhawade, a site with evidence of leopard, wild boar and mouse deer presence. It is also a part of the tiger movement corridor and is located 39.58 km from the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and 55.16 km from the STR.

The second proposal by a Kolhapur-based company for open-cast bauxite mining on 206 ha in Kolhapur district was refused as this site is also close to the Radhanagari WLS. Forest officials note that the region was fragile, that the project may destroy the natural drainage

system and also endanger human habitation. They noted further that tiger movement has already been impeded in parts of Kolhapur's Shahuwadi area due to bauxite mining and additional mining sites will create a larger negative impact.

Source: Dhaval Kulkarni. 'Forest dept keeps mining proposals at bay', *DNA*, 03/06/17.

Rs 14 cr project for conservation in Vidarbha

The Maharashtra State Forest Department (FD) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has launched a Rs. 14 crore project that aims to save forests and wildlife with the intervention of communities in the region of Vidarbha. The project aims to connect people through direct community based interventions by fostering greater awareness and local support towards wildlife corridors and habitat management. Rs. three crore of the project money have already been released so far.

The idea is to bring together people to protect an area of around 33,000 sq km. The plan is to make 1,000 villagers voluntarily adopt different alternative livelihoods through 106 self-help groups (SHGs) and community forest rights management committees, thus reducing dependency on adjoining forests and other livelihood related resources in the Pench-Bor-Melghat and Navegaon-Nagzira-Tadoba corridors. Leading NGOs such as the Wildlife Trust of India, Satpuda Foundation, Bharat Agro Industries Federation, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Sustaining Environment & Wildlife Assemblage, Save Ecosystem & Tigers and the Bombay Natural History Society and local partners are expected to be involved in the implementation.

The project involves conducting consultative meetings in 21 and 59 villages respectively in the Melghat-Bor-Pench and the Navegaon-Nagzira-Tadoba corridors. The activities proposed as part of the initiative include the distribution of LPG connections in the Pench-Bor corridor, self-employment projects such as making furniture from lantana, development of fisheries in the Melghat region,

encouraging use of fuel-efficient cook-stoves to help minimize extraction of fuelwood from adjoining forests, setting up of an artificial insemination (AI) centre for gradual replacement of unproductive cattle in the Navegaon-Nagzira corridor, establishment of three rapid response teams (RRTs) to minimize conflict in critical areas like Bramhapuri and Gondia, and the constitution of over 100 primary response teams (PRTs) with villagers as members to address human-tiger conflict situations on the ground.

These teams will be trained in delivering first aid in cases of human injuries, as well as protocols of networking in order to facilitate quick resolution of conflict situations. The PRT teams will be well equipped and will also be trained in patrolling to prevent conflict situations and detect and report incidents of wildlife crimes within their respective regions.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Rs 14 cr project to bring people closer to forests', *The Times of India*, 05/06/17

MANIPUR

Workshop on Sangai conservation

A consultation workshop for the conservation of the sangai and management of Keibul Lamjao National Park (KLNP) was held recently at Keibul Lamjao Makha Leikai. Officials from the Manipur Forest Department, scientists, faculty members from the Wildlife Institute of India, and representatives from local communities attended the workshop.

The agenda was to consult with the local communities about the issues faced by them due to the park. The importance of active involvement of local stakeholders in addressing the issues facing Sangai conservation was stressed upon in the workshop. Emphasis was also laid on the role of the people and the necessity to provide alternative livelihoods for them for effective conservation.

Source: 'Sangai conservation consultation workshop held', *The Sangai Express*, 21/06/17.

ODISHA

Four elephants electrocuted in two days in early June

Three female elephants – a six-year old sub-adult, a 22 year old adult and a six-month-old calf - were electrocuted at Borapada forest in Dhenkanal in the early part of June. The pachyderms, reportedly, came in contact with a hanging electric cable near a defunct iron-grill-making unit resulting in their instant death. In another incident two days earlier, another elephant was electrocuted in the Betonati range in Baripada forest division.

According to forest department, 41 elephants have died in different forest divisions of the state in the past six months.

Source: Riyan Ramanath V, 'Three jumbos electrocuted in Dhenkanal forest division', *The Times of India*, 11/06/17.

SBW rejects private resort proposal inside Bhitarkanika WLS

The Standing Committee of the Odisha State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has rejected a proposal for the construction of a private resort within the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) on the grounds that it may open the floodgates for similar projects in the protected area. In its third meeting held recently, the 16-member standing panel chaired by forest and environment minister, Bijayshree Routray, discussed the resort project proposed by a private company over 1.416 ha private land in Nalitapatia mouza located within BWS limits.

There are about 410 villages inside BWS. Since no restriction can be imposed on transaction of revenue land, the standing committee decided not to encourage entry of the private sector for such resorts as these will require permanent construction work. The members pointed that if approved this could set a precedent for other wildlife sanctuaries such as Satkosia and Similipal.

The SBWL panel also discussed a proposal for re-diversion of 4.31 ha of forest

land in the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary for laying water supply pipelines for IIT, NISER, Infocity and other areas. It was given a go ahead with the condition that the project proponent will provide water supply to protection camps and temporary water holes in the sanctuary. The proposal will now be placed before the National Board for Wildlife for approval.

Source: Siba Mohanty. 'Panel says no to private resort in Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary', *The New Indian Express*, 10/06/17.

Rs 4.85 cr plan for Similipal BR gets state government nod

The Odisha State Government has approved a Rs 4.85 crore annual action plan for development and management of the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. The proposal of the forest and environment department got an in-principle approval of the Biosphere Reserve Management Council at a meeting chaired by Chief Secretary, AP Padhi. The annual plan is part of the five-year action plan with a budget of Rs 24.19 crore. This is to be now sent to the Centre for approval.

Source: 'Rs 4.85 cr plan for Similipal gets Government nod', *The New Indian Express*, 25/06/17.

PUNJAB

Blackbuck number stable in Abohar WLS

A recent census conducted at the Abohar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has put the number of blackbuck here at 3273. Though this is marginally lower than the count of 3500 animals in the 2011 census, it appears the population seems to have stabilized. The census, conducted using the line transect method, recorded the sex ratio of the animal as 35:65 (male: female) and a herd with maximum of 219 members was also seen. The highest density of blackbucks was found in Duttarawali, Rajahwali and Khairpur villages of the sanctuary.

The sanctuary, having an area of 186 sq km is spread across private lands of 13 villages, was notified in the year 2000. The land is mostly owned by the Bishnoi community and that, according to the forest officials, is a great challenge as the community needs to take measures to protect their crops from the blackbuck.

Some measures such as the putting up of barbed wires including the deadly cobra wires with blade edged iron wire mesh on the periphery of agricultural fields to avoid crop damages are particularly detrimental. The substantial rise in the population of stray dogs, leading to organised hunting by them in packs like feral dogs, targeting fawns/sub-adults and expecting females is another threat faced here. The fencing of agriculture fields with the barbed wires also restricts the free movement of blackbucks, putting them under stress, besides causing severe and fatal injuries especially when chased by the dogs. The injured animals are very easily predated upon by the dogs.

The district administration recently issued a notification for banning the sale and use of cobra wires in the district under section 144 of CrPC for protecting wild animals. The population of cattle is also rising as farmers from nearby districts prefer to abandon their unproductive cattle here due to the protective behaviour of Bishnoi community towards all animals. The growing population of stray animals also competes with blackbucks for the already shrinking open grasslands, resulting in the migration of the blackbuck to adjoining areas outside the sanctuary.

Source: Nirupama Dutt. 'Tracking the state animal: Abohar sanctuary sees dip in blackbuck count, habitat changes prime concern', *Hindustan Times*, 20/06/17.

RAJASTHAN

Persuade people to move out of tiger reserves; introduce tigers to Mukundra TR: Minister

Rajasthan Forest Minister, Rajendra Singh Khimsar, has directed state forest officials to

persuade the people settled inside the three tiger reserves (TRs) of Ranthambore, Sariska and Mukundra to opt for the compensation package and move out. Addressing senior officials of the wildlife and forest department recently, the minister said the officials should personally take interest to interact with the people and convince them to opt for the 'attractive' rehabilitation package.

He also directed the officials to make preparations for the shifting of a pair of tigers to the Mukundra TR. He directed them, further, to prepare a detailed project report for the fencing of the reserve and augmenting the prey base for the tigers by shifting sambhar from the cantonment areas of Jodhpur, Ajmer and Kota and of cheetal and neelgai from Jodhpur. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) while giving the green signal for the tiger reintroduction programme has set the time limit at December 2018.

The state, however, wants to expedite the project by a year and the minister has asked the officials to initiate steps to get the necessary approvals of the NTCA for the same.



Source: 'Rajasthan forest officials given rehabilitation task in 3 tiger reserves', *The Times of India*, 22/06/17.

UTTARAKHAND

Increase in abandoned cattle inside Rajaji TR

The decision at the national and state level to tighten the noose around cattle sale for slaughter has led to an increase of cattle inside the Rajaji Tiger Reserve. The old bovines—that cannot be used for milking or tilling the land— have become a burden for the villagers near the reserve who are then abandoning them. Many of these animals wander off into the forests here.

Forest staff has in recent times found around 10 cattle carcasses in the reserve; these

are believed to have been preyed upon by the tigers here.

Source: 'Are Uttarakhand farmers dumping their old cows in forest?' www.outlook.com, 08/06/17.

NTCA approves tiger relocation plan for Rajaji TR

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has approved a Rs. 3.40 crore tiger relocation plan for the Rajaji Tiger Reserve (TR). The plan that was prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in 2010 envisages the relocation of five tigers from the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) and its territorial forest divisions to the western sector of the Rajaji TR. Three females and two males will be relocated to the western sector of the reserve that currently has only two tigresses with no breeding record. They are isolated from the rest of the big cat population in the Terai-Arc-Landscape.

The Motichur corridor located on the western side of the reserve is riddled with encroachments including an army depot set up 30 years ago, a big canal made by the irrigation department, and a township that houses people who shifted from old Tehri town and other villages. All these factors have obstructed movement of tigers from Motichur to the Chilla range (eastern side) and further into Lansdowne region leading to the Corbett TR.

Uttarakhand will become the third state in the country after Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to relocate tigers.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'State ready to translocate tigers to western half of Rajaji Tiger Reserve', *The Times of India*, 26/05/17. Nihari Sharma. 'Tiger translocation plan for Rajaji ready', *Hindustan Times*, 07/06/17. Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Rs. 3.40-cr for tiger relocation at Rajaji Park', *The Tribune*, 15/06/17.

UTTARAKHAND/KARNATAKA

Uttarakhand to bring nine more elephants from Karnataka

The Uttarakhand Forest Department is all set to get nine domesticated elephants from Karnataka for patrolling the forests here. Six of the nine elephants will be based in the Rajaji National Park (RNP) while the rest would be given to the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR). The chief wildlife warden, Karnataka, has already given in-principle approval for transporting the elephants.

These nine animals are in addition to the nine that were brought and successfully deployed in the CTR some time ago. Funded through the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority, it had taken about two years for the first set of nine elephants to be transported to Corbett.

Source: Nihi Sharma, 'Uttarakhand to bring nine more elephants from Karnataka', *Hindustan Times*, 02/06/17.

UTTAR PRADESH

Annual mela causing damage to Pilibhit TR



People visiting the annual mela at the Siddh Baba temple located within the core of the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR) are causing considerable damage to the forests and wildlife here. Thousands of people visited the shrine every day during the month long festival that started on May 15. They were seen to dump garbage, including plastic and polythene bags

and also light fires for cooking inside the forest area.

Many bhandaras (feasts) were arranged for the pilgrims by various people, including politicians. While LPG is used for the cooking, firewood collected from the forest is also used extensively. Further, 25 to 30 shops were set up within the core of the reserve, and the forest range officer of Mala claimed that the additional district magistrate (ADM) had pressurized the forest authorities to allow them. The ADM, however, maintained that he had only asked the forest officials concerned to maintain old traditions of the mela. Refuting the version of the range officer, he said that the forest department did not submit any requisition letter for any assistance from the district administration.

The district president of the Bhartiya Janata Party is reported to have said that there was no hazard to the forest due to cooking either by using firewood or LPG; he also cited an example of annual urs of Selha Baba, whose Dargah is situated in the periphery of Barahi forest range of the reserve. He claimed that thousands of devotees gather there and violate the laws by slaughtering poultry in bulk and cooking food by using firewood.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. 'Mela causing damage to PTR core area', *The Times of India*, 08/06/17.

Two killed in tiger attacks in Pilibhit TR

Four days after a farm labourer was mauled to death by a tiger in Pilibhit Tiger Reserve's (PTR) Mala forest range, a 48-year-old man was killed by a tiger in Bithaura Khurd village in a cane field. The 2nd attack happened 150 meters from the 118 Dhamela compartment of Bankati beat. Local villagers said that they had spotted a tigress with two cubs in the fields and believe it was she who had killed the man.

Forest officials were unable to visit the spot in view of the anger among local people. It was only after the body was sent for an autopsy and the crowd dispersed that a joint team of the PTR staff and World Wide Fund for Nature

(WWF) – India were able to access the site and set up four pairs of camera traps. These and 12 other sets of cameras have been sent up in various parts of Dhamela compartment to find out if the same animal was responsible for the attacks that occurred on May 9 and June 16 and 20.

Two other villagers also claim to have had a narrow escape in encounters with a tiger in the area in recent weeks.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. ‘Tigress kills man, 2nd killing in 4 days’, *The Times of India*, 21/06/17.

Committee to decide fate of the Varanasi Turtle Sanctuary

The Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has set up a committee to decide whether the Varanasi Turtle Sanctuary should be de-notified. It has also ordered a third-party evaluation of the sanctuary to determine whether it is of any importance. A decision was also taken to set up a permanent Ganga observatory but its role will be further defined in future meetings. A committee consisting of the Divisional Forest Officer, Varanasi, District Magistrate, Varanasi and officials from the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was also formed. These decisions were taken at a recent meeting of forest officials from Uttar Pradesh and those from the NMCG.

The meeting itself was a follow up to a recent office memorandum from the MoEFCC which stated that the “PMO has desired a strategy on the turtle sanctuary and safeguarding of the ghats in Varanasi”. Scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) present at the meeting submitted a number of studies and data on the turtle sanctuary and the need for it. They noted about 41,000 turtles have been released in the sanctuary since its inception. The NMCG’s own studies were also submitted to the participants of the meeting and to the additional secretary, MoEFCC.

Some experts said that the sanctuary is being seen as an obstruction in making the

stretch of the river navigable while some pointed out that a serious study is needed before any decision to de-notify is taken because turtles play an important role in water cleaning. One MoEFCC official was reported to have said that the sanctuary was obstructing development projects near the ghats. While the MoEFCC claims that the Varanasi district administration is concerned about sedimentation along the right bank of Ganga which increased the velocity of the river on the left bank and apparently made it vulnerable to erosion, documents with Ganga Flood Control Department show no such damage has been done to the ghats.

The turtle sanctuary was set up in 1989 under the Ganga action plan so that carnivorous turtles could help scavenge half burnt corpses and aid in keeping the river clean.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. ‘Centre sets up committee to decide if turtle sanctuary in Varanasi should be de-notified’, *The Times of India*, 08/06/17.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

SC pulls up Centre for defying wetlands order

The Supreme Court (SC) has pulled up the central government for not complying with its order to frame rules for preservation of wetlands and warned that it would put the environment secretary behind bars if the government failed to take action. The SC had, in April earlier this year, set a deadline of June-end for the government to notify the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, but the Centre sought six more months to implement the law. This is what angered the SC bench, which said the government didn’t seem serious about conserving wetlands. The court reminded the Centre that being a signatory to the 1971 International Convention on Wetlands, it was bound to frame a policy for their preservation.

The court has been examining issues related to wetlands since 2001 following interventions by activists and others on the state of wetlands in the country. It was noted that the Centre had been consistently flouting the court's orders and pleaded that action be taken against its officials. The petitioners said that government had released more than Rs 900 crore over the years but its expenditure was never audited. The Centre's counsel argued that the court should seek explanation from states on how they had spent the money, but the bench was not satisfied.

In 2011, ISRO had prepared a national wetlands atlas on the basis of satellite images and mapped 2,01,503 wetlands. Total wetlands area was estimated at 15.26 million hectares, or 4.63% of the country's area. Lakshadweep had 96.12% of its area under wetlands followed by Andaman and Nicobar Islands (18.52%), Daman and Diu (18.46%), Gujarat (17.56%), Puducherry (12.88%), West Bengal (12.48%), Assam (9.74%), Tamil Nadu (6.92%), Goa (5.76%), Andhra (5.26%) and UP (5.16%). (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 5).

Source: Amit Anand Choudhary. 'SC pulls up Centre for defying wetlands order', *The Times of India*, 14/07/17.

NGT directs MoEFCC to finalise CZMP with states

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken exception to the delay of six years in finalisation of the Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMP) and has directed the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to decide the issue in consultation with the coastal states.

Terming the stand taken by the MoEFCC on delay in CZMP as "unsatisfactory", the NGT expressed strong disapproval over the ministry's submission that the states were not cooperating in the matter. The NGT has directed the MoEFCC secretary to convene a meeting of all the principal secretaries of environment of the coastal states

and also directed the Surveyor General of India to be present in the meeting.

Source: 'NGT directs environment ministry to finalise coastal zone plan with states', *Firstpost.com*, 06/06/17.

313 new species of animals and 186 of plants discovered in India in 2016

Information released by the Zoological Survey of India and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) indicates that a total of 313 species of animals and 186 species of plants were discovered in India in the year 2016. Most of the new species were from the four biological hotspots of the country — the Himalayas, the North East, the Western Ghats and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The new animal species discovered include 258 invertebrates and 55 vertebrates. As many as 97 species of insects, 27 of fish, 12 of amphibians, 10 of Platyhelminthes, nine of crustacea and six of reptiles have been discovered and described by the scientists. There are also 61 species of moths and butterflies and 38 of beetles on the list. The number of animal species in the country, including protozoa, has now crossed one lakh — it is 1,00,693.

Plant Discoveries 2016, the publication of the BSI, says that along with 186 new species, scientists have discovered seven new genera, four subspecies and nine new varieties from India.

Source: 'Over 400 plants & animals discovered last year', *The Shillong Times*, 11/06/17.

ZSI, BSI to train nature guides

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) will soon launch a countrywide pilot project for nature guides to help tourists interested in environment and wildlife. The pilot project is to be undertaken in 11 places across the country - Jodhpur, Andaman Islands, Sikkim, Itanagar,

Dehradun, Pune, Coimbatore, Kozhikode, Kolkata, Allahabad and Bengaluru.

The first batch of 10 students has been selected following a walk-in interview. The 420-hour curriculum includes seven hours of theory in addition to field visits. The course which is being offered free of cost will teach the selected students about vegetation and wildlife in a scientific way. After completing the three-month course, they will have the option to choose a specialization course in botany or zoology for another three months to become a para-taxonomist. After the training, they will be able to guide tourists interested in flora and fauna in specific regions. They will also have the additional task of sensitising villagers on the importance and protection of biodiversity.

This project, part of Harit Kaushal Yojna of the central government, has been developed on the lines of National Skill Development Programme.



Source: 'Soon, Jodhpur to have nature guides', *The Times of India*, 25/06/17.

BSI team documents endemic trees of Western Ghats

A team of experts from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) recently visited the southern Western Ghats regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu to explore the endemic tree resources in the region. The visit is part of a three-year research programme to document economically important endemic trees and covers the Malabar coast, the Periyar and Eravikulam National Parks, the Sholayar-Valparai region, and the Anaimalai, Agasthyamalai and Tirunelveli hills in the Western Ghats.

Other regions of the country to be covered as the part of the study include northeast India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The team documented 127 endemic trees and its ecological and economic values during a recent survey in the islands.

Source: E.M. Manoj. 'Team counts endemic trees of Western Ghats', *The Hindu*, 08/06/17.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

At least 20 elephants killed in Myanmar so far this year

Myanmar's wild elephants are being poached in record numbers with at least 20 killed this year due to surging demand for their hide. Hunters are increasingly targeting mothers and calves; poisoned arrows are used to inflict a slow and agonising death before stripping them of their skin, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

At least 20 elephant corpses have been found stripped of their skin in two sites – the Bago Yoma and the Irrawaddy Delta - so far in 2017. This is more than the numbers that are usually killed in a whole year. Elephant skin has become one of the latest animal products to be touted as having medical properties, although there is no scientific support for those claims.

The WWF estimates that there are 1,400-2,000 elephants roaming wild in Myanmar but their numbers have dwindled as Myanmar has emerged as a key hub in the USD 20 billion a year global wildlife trafficking trade. Myanmar's government said in January that elephant poaching had jumped ten-fold in recent years, driven by growing demand for skin and body parts used in traditional medicine.

Vendors say that a paste made of its ash and coconut oil would cure eczema, while ground up elephant teeth would smooth and whiten skin. Much of the trade runs through the country's eastern periphery, controlled by a sophisticated criminal network that is thought to be armed and funded by powerful kingpins in China.

Source: 'Skin cure fad driving Myanmar elephant poaching surge: WWF', *The Times of India*, 05/06/17.

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

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

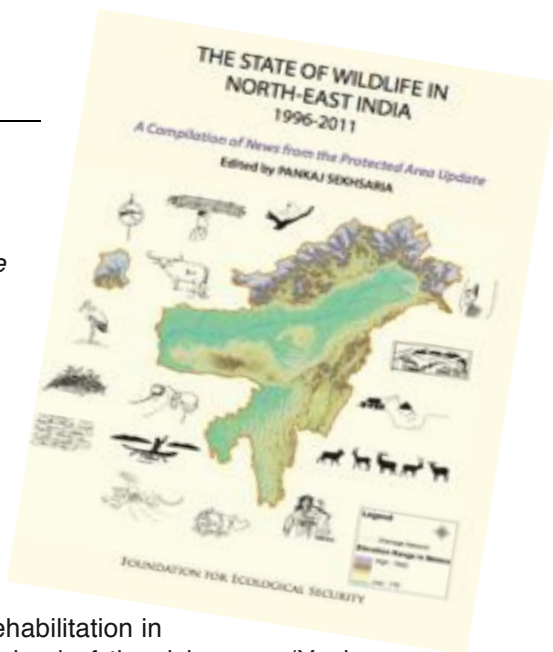
List of Contents: North East India Regional News; News from the States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.

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



NATIONAL NEWS

Proposals invited for raptor related research

The Raptor Research & Conservation Foundation (RRCF) has invited project proposals for 2017-18 from wildlife researchers having good raptor identification skills for well defined and high conservation impact projects. A grant of up to Rs. 2,50,000/- is available for projects with a duration of one year. RRCF will also consider larger grants for projects of longer duration.

Contact: **Kiran Srivastava**, RRCF, Godrej & Boyce Premises - 1st floor, Next to Stone Source, Old Mumbai Gas Work Lane Lalbaug, Parel Mumbai 400012. Tel: 022-24713380 & 24713381. Email: rccf@raptors.org.in. Website: www.raptors.net.in

GUJARAT

Electricity line kills GIB in Lala

A satellite tagged Great Indian Bustard (GIB) was killed in Lala when it flew into high-tension wires of the Gujarat Energy Transmission Corporation Limited. It was navigating through four high tension lines, when it collided with one of them and died. The bird that died had been tagged in May (PA Update XXIII, No. 3) and had flown from Naliya to Jhakhau and had even been spotted in Lala before it was electrocuted. It was one of two that had been

tagged and was an active juvenile as noted by its active movement.

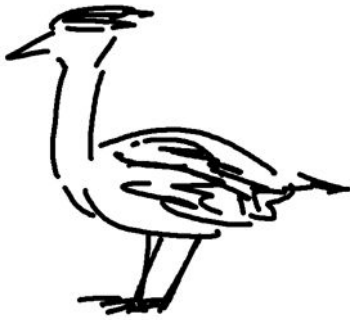
This is not the first case of such electrocution of birds (see *PA Updates* Vol. XIX, No. 4 and Vol. XVIII, Nos. 6 & 1) and the state government's recent decision to allow 16 more 11kV overhead power lines had set alarm bells ringing among wildlife lovers and environment activists. This is in addition to the main power line passing through the area has 13 cables, which is a virtual death trap for the birds. It has been suggested repeatedly that bird diverters be installed on the power lines in this area and that all power lines here should be underground in the future. Following an earlier case of electrocution of a GIB in Khadir the principal secretary for environment and forests, S K Nanda, had announced that all high-tension wires near the bird sanctuary would go underground. However, since then, except for Khadir and Dholka, there has been no other area where cables have been laid underground.

The Gujarat Forest Department is said to have convened a meeting with the energy department following the latest incident to find a solution to the situation. Experts and bird researchers have now written to the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, to take action in the matter.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Electricity line kills great Indian bustard', *The Times of India*, 11/07/17.

Himanshu Kaushik. 'Experts implore PM to move cables underground', *The Times of India*, 12/07/17.

Gujarat to set up bustard breeding centre



The Gujarat state government is planning to set up a breeding centre for great Indian bustards (GIB) at Naliya in Kutch in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and using expertise offered by United Arab Emirates (UAE). Officials in the state forest department (FD) have said that the UAE has been a frontrunner in bustard conservation since 1970 and has brought back the houbara bustard from the brink of extinction with successful breeding centres within its own boundaries.

An earlier proposal to set up a GIB breeding centre in Gujarat did not take off as Rajasthan refused to send GIB eggs for incubation. Consequently, the Union government decided to set up the breeding centre in Rajasthan.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Gujarat to set up its own bustard breeding centre', *The Times of India*, 14/07/17.

HARYANA

Pinjore centre to release eight tagged vultures in wild

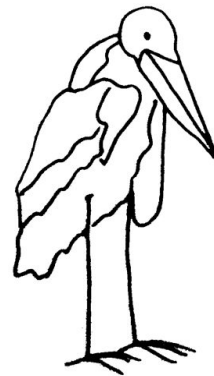
Six endangered vultures, born and bred in captivity in Pinjore's Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre, will fly free by the end of 2017. Two adult vultures will accompany them. Of the eight vultures to be released, six are white-backed. The two adult vultures were caught at the beginning of the breeding programme.

Two Himalayan Griffons that had been brought in 2005 to lay eggs were also released by the centre last year. They couldn't, however, be tracked after release. This time the birds will be tagged by satellite transmitters that would make their monitoring possible in the wild.

The telecom department has allowed the satellite-based tracking system to be tagged to the wings of the birds and the Haryana Forest Department (FD) will buy satellite transmitters. A senior FD official informed that the transmitters are available in Europe and USA and the FD has applied for the import licence and placed the order. A single piece costs Rs. five lakh.



Source: Vivek Gupta. 'Pinjore's vultures on a wing and a prayer for survival', *Hindustan Times*, 17/06/17



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



A Decade Ago
Protected Area Update 68, August 2007

ODISHA

**Night safari proposed by Satkosia
Wildlife Division**

The Satkosia Wildlife Division has proposed the starting of a night safari at Tikarpara on the banks of the River Mahanadi. Tikarpara is the site of the world's longest gorge measuring 22 kms. Forest officials have said the safari would provide dual benefits: it would boost the tourist arrivals in the area and also help in patrolling.

The night safari proposal is in addition to tourism facilities and projects that have already been introduced here (see *PA Update* Vol. XIII, No. 3, June 2007). An initiative started earlier this year by the Forest Department in collaboration with a local NGO is reported to have already made an earning Rs 70,000. Facilities that have been set up include 10 temporary tents with the provision of toilets, drinking water, kitchen and solar light lighting. Boating has also been introduced.

Source: 'Take a night ride in Tikarpara', www.newindpress.com, 17/05/07.

**NREGS for tribals affected by Satkosia
Wildlife Sanctuary**

At least 20,000 tribals whose lives and livelihoods have been negatively impacted because of the Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary would be benefited by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which came into effect from April 1 in Angul district.

The affected people are those whose livelihood activities like bamboo cutting and collection of NTFPs like mahua from the forests of the sanctuary were stopped following Supreme Court orders in 2000. They belong to nine villages under Prunakote panchayat and are reported to be suffering from hunger and malnutrition following the ban.

Forest officials and NGOs have welcomed the implementation of the NREGS in

the area in this context. The Forest Department (FD) is reported to have already prepared a blue print to provide 100 days of minimum work to these people as per the scheme. This will mainly focus on water harvesting and road construction works permissible inside the sanctuary. A job card registration drive too has been undertaken.

Source: 'To benefit Satkosia villagers', www.newindpress.com, 28/04/07.

WEST BENGAL

**Narrow gauge line proposed inside Senchal
WLS**

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) is working on a project to set up a rail link between Ghum — at 7408 feet, among the highest railway stations in the world — and Tiger Hill (8,482 ft). The project is expected to be a major tourist attraction and funds are being sought from the Ministry of Tourism for the same. The 8-km distance from Ghum to Tiger Hill, where tourists flock to see the sun rise over Kanchenjunga, could take between 45 minutes and an hour to cover by train because of the steep climb. Driving the distance takes only 20-25 minutes. The DGHC was to officially bring the project proposal to the Railway Ministry during the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway's standing committee meeting on June 29 in New Delhi. It is then upto the railways to decide whether to take up the project. The details of the meeting are not yet known.

Environmentalists have pointed out that the entire Tiger Hill stretch of the proposed railway line lies in Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary and was therefore not desirable. The DGHC has, however, dismissed the concerns, insisting that if proper precautions are taken, the narrow gauge rail line would do no damage.

Source: Vivek Chhetri. 'Tiger down, train can now turn to Tiger Hill', *The Telegraph*, 21/06/07.

PERSPECTIVE

Understanding the Indian Sloth Bear

It was only in the year 2010, when I first came across a very 'different' looking bear in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh (UP), that I realized there are bears other than the very popular Polar and Grizzly Bears, both of which are, in fact, not found in India. It was also my belief that the dancing bears one saw around were actually Black bears found in Himalayas. It took me a while to understand that there is one more species of bear about which we are almost never told - not in school textbooks, not in wildlife documentaries on TV. Even in the recent Walt Disney movie *Jungle Book*, the bear looked like a Grizzly, when Rudyard Kipling's original character was a Sloth bear. The truth is that there is very little discussion around the Indian Sloth bear and this is now becoming the biggest hurdle in its conservation.

The Sloth bear is endemic to the Indian subcontinent and is concentrated mostly in and around the Central Indian landscape, with the range extending upto Nepal and Bhutan. It is reported to have recently gone extinct in Bangladesh.

There are also a number of interesting things about Sloth bears – they never hibernate, they have the largest canines with respect to body size of all bear species and are specially adapted to feed on ants and termites which form their staple food, along with fruits and flowers. The flexibility of their diet is their greatest adaptation to survive in harsh climates. The only natural competition for food comes from the pangolin. In recent times, however, human activity is becoming the single greatest threat to their survival.

We recently mapped Sloth bear distribution and movement in reserve forests of UP's Mirzapur district and also studied human-bear conflict here (available at: <https://goo.gl/Nu7h45>). Our observation suggests that most of the conflict incidents occur in areas where there has been a reduction in habitat, the main reasons being loss of forest continuity, agricultural encroachments, mining and most importantly, settlements along

important water sources and forest corridors. Most of the incidents happen during collection of Mahua fruits and defecation in the early morning hours, while the other confrontations occur during collection of fuelwood inside forests. It is also important to note that a major population of the Sloth bear exists outside of protected areas and this makes them highly vulnerable to conflict with humans.

IUCN has classified the Sloth bear as 'Vulnerable' while India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 has classified them under Schedule-I – placing them in the same category as the tiger, leopard and elephant. The conservation of Sloth bears in India, however, is yet to gain momentum and it is high time attention is directed to this animal.

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