

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIII, No. 5

October 2017 (No. 129)

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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXIII, No. 5, October 2017 (No. 129)

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Produced by

The Documentation and Outreach Centre

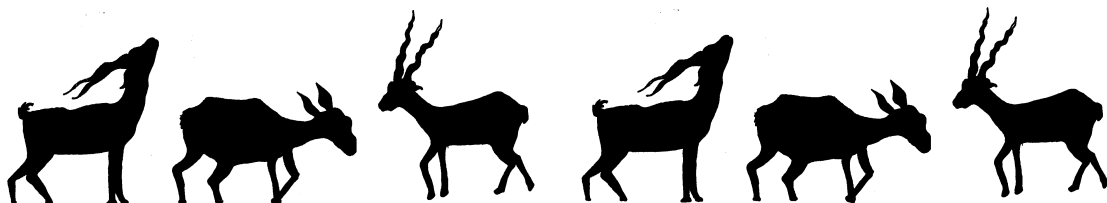
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Publication of the PA Update has been supported by

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

Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, C/o FES

Donations from a number of individual supporters

EDITORIAL

Systemic injuries, band-aid solutions

Even a quick survey of the conservation scenario in the country today makes one thing rather crystal clear – that the imperatives of conservation cannot (will not!) be allowed to come in the way of industrialization projects and economic growth. This, in fact, has become the defining narrative, and PAs are more in the news for policy that is constantly being diluted to make clearances and permissions easier; for railway lines, roads and canals that will cut through forests and other habitat; and for land in PAs (and elsewhere too) being made available for mining, dams, and infrastructure projects.

We have in this issue of the *PA Update*, like we've always had in the past, a number of such examples: of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) being undermined by structural change, of land around tiger reserves like Ranthambhore and Palamau being made available for mining and dam projects and of linear intrusions being approved in PAs in Maharashtra and Telangana.

There are two different kinds of narratives that seek to justify these developments. The first and the more blatant one articulates explicitly that PAs, environmental regulation and such concerns are impediments in the 'development' of the country. The other is the more confused and self-contradictory one. It pretends to be concerned even as it goes about its job of undermining precisely these concerns.

It offers, in cities for example, to transplant full-grown trees because roads have to be widened and growth in vehicle population cannot be questioned; it claims to be concerned about climate change even as it pushes the economy towards a larger emission load; and it allows for linear intrusions like power lines, roads and canals to splice through PAs and then offers underpasses and over bridges so that wild animals can cross over. We have very little idea

of how the underpasses and bridges for animals will actually work, if they work at all, but caught up in the belief that we can have the cake even as we eat it, we are willing to go along with these solutions.

We are being enticed and dissuaded by band-aid solutions when the injuries being inflicted are systemic and deep. The price to pay will also be very high!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

SC asks for explanation on permission for oil and gas drilling beneath Dibru-Saikhowa NP

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), had in its 44th meeting in July earlier this year, agreed to recommend the proposal of sub-surface mining to extract hydrocarbons from 3900-4000 metres beneath the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (NP). This information was provided recently to the Supreme Court (SC) of India by the Solicitor General (SG), Ranjit Kumar, by giving a copy of the letter dated August 9, regarding minutes of the 44th meeting of the NBWL.

The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has proposed to drill seven wells and extract and evacuate oil and gas from under the Dibru-Saikhowa NP by using horizontal deviation directional drilling technology and also the extended reach drilling technology through drill pads which will be placed at a distance of 1.5 km. from the boundary of the park and through horizontal pipes which will go underneath the boundary. The IOC has already obtained the relevant environmental clearances from the Standing Committee of the NBWL with regard to construction of production related infrastructure facilities for pipe lines, oil collecting stations, gas compressor stations and gas gathering stations in the 10 km ecological sensitive zones of the NP and also the Bherjan-Borjan-Podumoni Wildlife Sanctuary.

IOC, through the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), had earlier assured the SC that its proposal to extract and evacuate petroleum and natural gas from deep beneath the earth under the provisions of the Oil Fields (Development and Regulation) Act (OFDRA), 1948, would have no adverse impact on the forest and wildlife in the area. It contended that the SC's judgment dated 21.4.2014 in the Goa Foundation case prohibiting mining within one km from the boundary of any national park and sanctuary was applicable only to open cast/surface mining leases granted under the MMDRA Act and not leases under OFDRA. Based on this, the IOC requested the SC to direct the NBWL to consider its proposal. The SC appointed CEC had also recommended on May 6, 2016, that the technology to be used by IOC would in no way adversely impact the flora and fauna in and around the NP.

The SC has asked the SG to place the letter with the NBWL meeting minutes by way of an affidavit along with conditions on which permission has been granted including safety measures and protection and mitigation measures to be taken by the forest department and IOC for the welfare of the existing wildlife and also to prevent environmental damage and pollution in the vicinity of the NP.

Source: 'SC Asks National Board For Wildlife to explain how it permitted mining at Dibru-Saikhowa National Park', www.livelaw.in, 20/08/17.

Eviction drive to remove encroachers from Amchang WLS

An eviction drive was carried out in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the last week of August to free illegally occupied forest areas. A total of about 300 houses were dismantled and families were asked to leave during the operation conducted by the forest department (FD) with the support of Kamrup (Metro) District Administration, police, health department, and the Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd (APDCL). The eviction was

carried out on the direction of the Gauhati High Court.

Two teams carried out the exercise at Botaghuli and two other teams carried out the drive at the sanctuary. They were instructed by the Deputy Commissioner Kamrup (M), Dr M Angamuthu before the operation not to damage/destroy or burn any belongings of the encroachers and also directed the police to use minimum force for the eviction operation.

The operation included more than 500 police and forest personnel, elephants, cranes and wage labourers with tool kits.

Source: 'Eviction drive to remove encroachers from Amchang wildlife sanctuary', <http://indiatoday.intoday.in>, 25/08/19.

GOA

Goa excluded from NGT's Pune bench; activists condemn the move

Activists have condemned the move of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to group Goa in the distant northern zone of National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Delhi. Cases related to Goa are currently heard by the NGT bench in Pune.

The change has been made, the Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA) has alleged, to pave the way for massive projects being planned in collusion with the state government that will cause huge damage to the local environment. These include, among others, a proposal for building a slew of multi-lane highways, another for making Vasco port a coal trans-shipping hub, the illegal dredging of Vasco bay, construction of Mopa airport, national highway works without environmental impact assessment, and violations of the CRZ and forest laws.

A number of Goa related petitions have been filed before the Pune bench of the NGT and taking up these matters, it is feared, will become difficult if Goa is clubbed into the Northern zone. GBA has termed the government's move to place the NGT beyond

the people's reach as serious and also unconstitutional.

Source: 'Govt wants to block Goans from getting justice at NGT', *The Times of India*, 21/08/17.

GUJARAT

Number of lions in Gir touches 650

The number of lions in and around Gir and other areas in Gujarat has touched 650. This is a record number since 1936 as per available records. The population also includes 180-odd cubs between one and two years of age.

The number is based on a count conducted by the forest department in July earlier this year in areas that included the Gir National park and others in Amreli, Bhavnagar and Gir-Somnath districts.

The 2015 census had put the lion number in Gujarat at 523

Source: 'Lion Population Roars To 650 In Gujarat, Nearly 15% More Than The 2015 Census', *outlookindia.com*, 04/08/17.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Biodiversity management committees set up in 366 gram panchayats

The Himachal Pradesh government has set up biodiversity management committees in 366 gram panchayats in Chamba, Kullu, Shimla, Sirmour, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts of the state under a United Nations project. These committees have taken up the initiative to document the biological diversity in their respective areas, including traditional knowledge, by way of preparing people's biodiversity registers (PBRs). Six such registers have already been prepared thus far while work on 117 others is currently under progress.

Focus has been placed on capacity-building of stakeholders by organising training and awareness workshops. 150 such awareness and training programmes have been organised in

the state so far, for which a sum of Rs. 2.32 crore has been received by the authorities.

Source: 'HP sets up biodiversity committees in 366 gram panchayats', *The Pioneer*, 21/08/17.

JHARKHAND

Government approves diversion of 1000 ha land from Palamau TR

The centre has approved diversion of 1000 hectares (ha) of forestland for the construction of the North Koel Reservoir in the Palamau Tiger Reserve (TR). The diversion would involve the felling of 3,44,644 trees and this loss is to be compensated by planting the same number of trees elsewhere.

The minutes of the meeting of the National Board for Wildlife that cleared the project state that the project will lead to the loss of substantial habitat for the tiger. The plan to compensate for this loss includes the incorporation of the adjoining wasteland owned by the government into the tiger reserve and its development as tiger habitat.

The North Koel Karo project was first proposed in the 1960s and work commenced in the 1970s. The project was estimated to cost Rs. 1,622 crore and provide irrigation to one lakh ha of farmland in Daltonganj and Palamau regions of Jharkhand and some districts of Bihar. According to the Ministry of Water Resources, the environmental losses of the project are estimated to be Rs. 51,065 lakh, while the benefits are calculated to be Rs. 12,21,515 lakh. There is likely to be a ten-fold increase in the net value of produce after irrigation. However, in its primary justification for forest clearance to be granted it has been stated that 90% of the work on the project has already been completed and Rs. 800 crore has already been spent (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 4).

Source: Malavika Vyawahare. 'Wildlife Board approves felling of 3.4 lakh trees in Palamau tiger reserve', *Hindustan Times*, 04/08/17.

Palamau TR brings captive sambars to increase tigers' prey base

The Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR) has brought 16 sambars – 11 male and five female - from Ranchi's Bhagwan Birsa Biological Park, popularly known as Birsa Zoo, to increase the prey base for the big cats in Jharkhand's lone tiger reserve. Two more animals will also be sent in due course. The zoo officials said that the sambar population has increased there and they had written to the state forest department (FD) with the idea of shifting the surplus animals to the PTR.

The state food, public distribution and consumer affairs minister, Saryu Rai, has, however, raised objections over shifting of the animals terming it a gross violation of wildlife norms. He has alleged that the guidelines and protocols of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) for shifting animals had not been followed and permission from the National Tiger Conservation Authority had also not been taken.

The chief conservator of forests-cum-field director of PTR has said meanwhile that the sambar were shifted to the reserve following the standard operating protocol. The Central Zoo Authority had approved the protocol of shifting deer and sambar from zoo with certain conditions in 2012. He added further that the animals were not released in the wild but they were kept in captivity in the reserve. They will first be acclimatized to the wild and it is only their progeny that will be released.

Source: Sanjoy Dey. 'Palamu reserve brings captive sambars to increase tiger prey base; Jharkhand minister says the move is gross violation of wildlife norms', *Hindustan Times*, 07/08/17.

KARNATAKA

Kali TR to lose 75% of its ESZ; state bows to public pressure

Bowing to public pressure, the Karnataka state government has reduced the eco-sensitive zone

(ESZ) around the Kali Tiger Reserve (TR) by 75%. While the draft notification, issued in November 2016, listed 1,201.94 sq km spread across three taluks of Uttara Kannada district as the ESZ, a recent submission made to the central government's expert committee on ESZs states that it should be limited to only 312.52 sq km – a reduction of nearly 75%.

At a meeting held in July, state forest officials informed the expert committee that the reduction in the ESZ area was owing to public demand and the cabinet sub-committee formed by the state government to look into the ESZs that encompass habitations. The ESZ committee, after a detailed deliberation, recommended finalisation of the draft notification with above mentioned changes.

Source: Mohit M Rao, 'Kali Tiger Reserve set to lose 75% of its protective cover', *The Hindu*, 02/08/17.

Policy for private conservancies for wildlife conservation adjoining PAs

The Karnataka State Government has proposed a Karnataka Forest Policy on private conservancies (PC) in which land owners/institutions can voluntarily donate their land for increasing wildlife habitat. The policy, which was cleared by the Department of Forest and Environment recently encourages land owners living close to protected areas and wildlife corridors for establishing these PCs by changing the land use from the present practice of agriculture/plantation crops to "silvi-pasture system", which can be termed as private forests.

As a replacement for income from agriculture/plantation/horticulture practices, the landowners opting for declaring their lands under PCs will be allowed to take up eco-tourism activities. Not more than 5% of land declared as a conservancy, however, will be utilised for the construction of buildings for tourism and related activities. Moreover, the land use within the PC will have to be approved by the chief wildlife warden (CWLW).

Acts such as the Karnataka Forests Act and Rules, Wildlife (Protection) Act and

Rules, the Environment (Protection) Act and Rules, and relevant Revenue Act and Rules are to be amended for enabling PCs and to avoid legal impediments. The proposed rules stipulate that the individuals, farmers, planters, companies, and NGOs owning lands adjacent to protected areas/corridors have to apply to the nearest deputy conservator of forests (DCF) expressing the willingness to form the conservancy. The DCF, after field inspections, will recommend the proposal to the CWLW. The state government will constitute a PC management committee, which will be the authority responsible for their conservation, maintenance and management. It will also advise the CWLW in the matter.

Source: Nagesh Prabhu. 'Now, a policy to involve farmers in wildlife conservation', *The Hindu*, 26/08/17.

Over 3000 families displaced from Nagarahole NP to be rehabilitated; NGO express concern over implementation of plan

The Mysuru district administration has submitted a report recommending rehabilitation of 3,145 tribal families who were historically displaced from the Nagarahole forests. Activists, however, fear that the project may remain only on paper as there is no clarity on availability of land. A special committee, set up by the Deputy Commissioner of Mysuru, recently completed a survey to ascertain the present status of 3,418 families displaced from Nagarahole. The findings of the special committee were in broad corroboration of the list in the 2014 Asadi report. But instead of 3,418 families mentioned in the Asadi report, the district administration has pruned the numbers to 3,145 families as information related to 273 families could not be corroborated and verified.

Of the families identified, 1,801 are in H.D. Kote taluk of Mysuru district, 1,032 families are in Hunsur taluk of Mysuru district, and 312 families are in the Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district. The Asadi report, submitted to the government in 2014, had made a slew of

recommendations under 34 major heads to economically empower the adivasis displaced from the Nagarahole National Park, besides suggesting long-term measures for their social well-being and protecting their cultural identity.

While NGOs working for tribal rehabilitation have generally welcomed the district administration's recommendations, there are concerns that the rehabilitation scheme would be an open-ended one that could take decades to implement since the land required for this would be at least 6,500 to 9,000 acres. Organisations like the Hunsur based Development through Education (DEED), want the government to denotify 6,500 to 9,000 acres of reserve forest, if need be, to compensate the tribal families displaced from the national park.

Close on the heels of the government's decision to extend the rehabilitation package to families evicted from the Nagarahole National Park, NGOs are bracing up for an extended struggle to seek a similar package for about 3000 tribal people who were evicted from Bandipur almost 45 years ago.

It has been estimated that at least 20,000 families have been uprooted in Karnataka for notifying national parks and wildlife sanctuaries or to pave the way for infrastructure projects.

Source: R Krishna Kumar. 'Concern over plan to rehabilitate tribal families displaced from Nagarahole', *The Hindu*, 01/09/17.

Stop to illegal electrification work in Bhimgad WLS

Electrification work that was going on illegally in the Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has been stopped with action and penalties now staring at the organisations and officials who allowed the violations inside the sanctuary.

The matter is related to the electrification work carried out by the Hubli Electric Supply Company Ltd (HESCOM) in Hemmadaga village between October and December 2016. The work was undertaken under the Prime Minister's Mission Mode

programme without seeking necessary permission or clearances from the state forest department or the National Board for Wildlife. HESCOM had also sought approval for work in four other villages - Degaon, Holda, Mendil and Krishnapur.

Following many protests and complaints filed by wildlife activists, forest officials inspected the site and all electrification work in the five villages was stopped. A proposal for solar electrification was mooted and HESCOM has now agreed to take up electrification of these villages through solar power. The forest department, too, has agreed to the solar proposal as people living in these remote villages need power. However, no further poles, lines or cables will be allowed in these villages.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Illegal electrification works in Bhimgad Sanctuary stopped', *The New Indian Express*, 08/08/17.

New management plan for otter conservation in Tungabhadra

The state forest department has devised a new management plan for conservation of otters in the state. As a part of this, mapping and survey of otter population has already begun. This move is expected to provide a fillip to the ongoing programme to protect otters and other aquatic species in the 34-km stretch of Tungabhadra riverbed.

According to conservationists and forest officials, the smooth-coated otters have benefitted immensely due to the declaration of Tungabhadra Otter Conservation Reserve (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, No. 4 and Vol. XX, No. 5) and, the Tungabhadra riverbed near Hampi houses a healthy population of otters.

Recently, an exercise was also carried out to clean the riverbed and to spread awareness on the need to protecting the otters and other aquatic species.

Source: 'Otter conservation plan in place, survey begins in state', *The New Indian Express*, 31/07/17.

KERALA

Institute for Western Ghats wildlife research

The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) plans to set up an exclusive Western Ghats Regional Institute for Wildlife Research and Tribal Welfare. It will be in Wayanad, either at Pookode, where the varsity is located, or at Sugandhagiri, where government land of around 40 acres is available. Edinburgh University, which already has a tie-up with the KVASU, has offered to provide technical assistance for setting up of the new institute.

The board of management (BoM) of the university has approved the detailed project report (DPR) for the institute to be set up at a cost of Rs. 500 crore. It will now be sent to the state government for its approval. The institute is expected to start functioning within two years of approval being granted by the government.

A wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre and regional field research station for treatment and rehabilitation of injured wild animals will be set up as part of the institute at Idukki. The location has been decided considering its proximity to the Periyar Tiger Reserve and Eravikulam National Park. The proposal has provisions, additionally, for a wildlife forensic unit, a dedicated hospital for wildlife and a Wayanad Natural History and Tribal Museum, among others.

Source: 'KVASU plans institute for Ghats wildlife research', *The Times of India*, 08/08/17.

Survey records over 120 species of amphibians and reptiles in Periyar TR

The first part of a recently conducted survey of amphibians and reptiles has recorded 62 species of amphibians and 63 species of reptiles inside the Periyar Tiger Reserve (TR). This includes species of frogs such as the critically-endangered Great bush frog, Star-eyed tree frog, Anaimalai night frog, and the Yellow-eyed bush frog. Other species that were recorded include

the Cochin cane turtle, Blue-tailed skink, Travancore kurki and Malabar pit viper

22 five-member teams participated in the survey that was conducted over 925 sq km area of east and west divisions of the PTR. In the survey, 22 five-member teams participated.

Source: 'Critically endangered species spotted', *The Times of India*, 08/08/17.

58 tigers in Periyar and Parambikulam TRs

A census conducted at the Periyar and Parambikulam Tiger Reserves (TRs) in 2016 has confirmed the presence of 58 tigers here – 33 in Periyar and 25 in Parambikulam. The information was provided recently in the state assembly by forest minister, K Raju. The 2010 national level census had put the numbers at 38 in Parambikulam and 34 in Periyar.

According to additional information provided by the minister, a total of 21 wild animals including ten elephants, five monkeys and one leopard were killed due to electrocution in the past one year. Further ten persons were killed and 39 injured in different animal attacks in the Wayanad district in the same period.

Source: 'Fifty-eight tigers in Kerala's two tiger reserves: Forest Minister', *The Indian Express*, 18/08/17.

400+ families relocated from Wayanad WLS

The Kerala government has informed the Centre that it has so far relocated 454 families from the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. It has also noted that the area from which the relocation has taken place is now teeming with wildlife. This information was provided recently in the Rajya Sabha by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XVII, No. 1).

Source: 'Ker govt rehabilitated 454 families from Wayanad Sanctuary', *DNA*, 31/07/17.

Two new species of earthworm discovered in Western Ghats

Two new species of earthworms, *Drawida polydiverticulata* and *Drawida thomasi* have recently been described from the Western Ghats in Kerala. The discoveries were made by researchers of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala and the Shoolini University, Himachal Pradesh.

Drawida polydiverticulata was found to be widespread in the shola grasslands of Munnar region, including in the Eravikulam and Pampadun Shola National Parks and the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. The second new earthworm, *Drawida thomasi*, was collected at the Kozhippara waterfalls near Kakkadampoyil, at the border between Malappuram and Kozhikode.

In addition to the new species belonging to the primitive family Moniligastridae, the scientists also reported the occurrence of five species of the same genus that have not previously been recorded from the state. To date, there are 73 species of the genus *Drawida* confirmed to be living in the Indian subcontinent. The greatest concentration (43 species) is found in the Western Ghats. The genus has an important centre of speciation in Kerala.

Prior to this study published in the journal *ZooKeys*, there were sixteen *Drawida* species known from the state with ten of them being unique.

Source: 'Two new species of earthworm found in Western Ghats', *Deccan Herald*, 18/08/17.

MAHARASHTRA

NHAI to build only one wildlife underpass near Tipeswar WLS

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has agreed to construct a 30 m long underpass for tigers and other wildlife the near Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The national highway (NH)-7 wildlife mitigation

measures related issue near Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) is already being heard by the Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court. Though the NHAI agreed to take up mitigation measures in Pench it is silent about similar steps near Tipeswar. One 750 m, two 300 m and ten 50 m structures for animal movement are being constructed for wildlife on NH-7 along Pench Tiger Reserve (*PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 6 & 5) and similar mitigation measures are needed near Tipeswar.

The NHAI says it will construct one 30 m underpass between Sunna and Kopamandvi; it is from here that tigers are believed to move to the Pandharkawda division and beyond. This will be apart from the five natural water nullahs, whose span will also be widened for animal movement. The NHAI is in process of preparing the design and get it approved from the headquarters.

The NHAI needs nine hectares of forest land for four laning of the highway near Sunna and experts say that this will have a serious negative impact if mitigation measures are not taken up, especially in the three-km vulnerable patch between Sunna and Kopamandvi.

Estimates suggest that there are 8-10 tigers in the sanctuary, which move on either side of the highway.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'NHAI agrees to build underpass for tigers', *The Times of India*, 11/08/17.

High-level committee to decide about tiger translocation

The Maharashtra State Government has constituted an 11-member high-level committee to formulate a strategy to decide whether translocation of tigers to areas devoid of the big cat will be feasible or not. The committee is headed by the principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), AK Misra, with conservator of forest and field director of Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve, Ravikiran Govekar as member-secretary. Other members of the committee include additional principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), Nagpur, chief conservator of

forests of Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Amravati circles, field directors of Melghat, Tadoba, Pench-Bor Tiger Reserves, regional-in-charge of the National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India scientist, Bilal Habib.

The committee will submit a report in three months.

There is a proposal to translocate some tigers from Bramhapuri in Chandrapur district to areas which are devoid of tigers. With at least 26-28 tigers, the Bramhapuri area has been in news for human-tiger conflict.

Owing to poaching and human-animal conflict, the issue of tiger translocation also figured in the monsoon session of the assembly where forest minister Sudhir Mungantiwar said that the decision on translocation will be based on the report of the committee.

Source: '11-member panel for tiger translocation', *The Times of India*, 07/08/17.

ODISHA

Advance payment for human kills by wildlife

The wildlife wing of the Odisha Forest Department has created a revolving fund for payment of compensation to victims of human kills in attacks by wild animals including elephants. Under the new scheme, eight divisions designated as high-depredation prone will get an annual revolving fund of Rs. 5 lakh each while 11 others, placed in medium-depredation category, will get Rs. 3 lakh per year to meet advance payment for killings by wild animals. The rest of the divisions are treated as less-depredation prone and will be allocated Rs. one lakh each per year. The financial requirement for the revolving fund will be sourced from Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) pool. It will meet only the advance payments up to the first 35%.

It has been estimated that every year about 60 persons are killed by elephants while another 15 fall prey to other wild animals in the state. In most cases, the deaths trigger a law and

order situation and public agitation over payment of compensation which is riddled with procedural bottlenecks such as post-mortem reports and legal heir certificates which are not easy to get.

The new scheme attempts to overcome the delay and tide over the law and order issues by allowing the range office (RO) to pay 10% of the ex-gratia to the legal heir of the deceased within 24 hours of the incident by way of an office order. The DFO then will release the amount from the revolving fund and submit a proposal to PCCL (Wildlife) for reimbursement.

The RO will not insist on the legal heir certificate for the advance payment but seek reasonable proof for identification for the same. Local PRI members and prominent persons of the village can be used for identification. The subsequent 25% will be paid within 10 days of the death and the balance 65% will be paid upon receipt of police inquest report, legal heir certificate from the tehsildar and post mortem report within a month.

The compensation money for all other forms of depredation will be made from other budget heads or CAMPA heads as per availability and sanction. The FD annually shells out about Rs 17 crore for compensation of which Rs 12 crore is payment towards crop damage. Of the rest, around Rs. two crore is ex-gratia towards human deaths whereas about Rs three crore is for house damage and cattle kills by wild animals.

The high-depredation prone districts in Odisha are Angul, Athagarh, Athamallik, Dhenkanal, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Rourkela and Sundargarh; while the medium-depredation prone districts include Bargarh, Baripada, Berhampur, Bonai, Deogarh, Jeypore, Karanjia, Rajnagar Mangrove Wildlife Division, Rairakhole, Rairangpur and Sambalpur.

Source: Siba Mohanty. 'Advance payment for human kills by jumbos', *The New Indian Express*, 16/09/17.

RAJASTHAN

NBWL denotifies over 400 ha of forest from buffer of Ranthambhore TR for mining

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has recommended denotification of 409.88 hectare of forest from the buffer area of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (TR) for ACC Limited's mining project. The decision was taken even as the matter is sub-judice before the National Green Tribunal. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) too has opposed the denotification on grounds that it would affect dispersal of tigers to neighbouring areas, affecting their genetic diversity and had instead suggested mining for a period of eight years. ACC's Lakheri Chamavoli limestone mine in Bundi district feeds their cement plant, which is the oldest in the country.

When the proposal to denotify was discussed in the NTCA's technical committee on October 7, 2016, it had said that mine falls in the southern boundary of the park, the buffer area of the tiger reserve and would thus be a violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. As a middle way out, the NTCA had recommended that instead of denotifying the forest land, the mine could operate for eight years, till 2023, as reserves would exhaust during that period. NTCA's recommendations were accepted by then environment minister, Anil Dave. The NTCA had added that this would provide long-term protection for established routes tigers used to move outside Ranthambhore into the Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), the National Chambal Sanctuary, the Mukundara Tiger Hills Reserve, and the Ramgarh and Kuno-Palpur WLSs in Madhya Pradesh.

The NBWL's decision in favour of denotification came after a full-body meeting of the NTCA, chaired by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change recommended the denotification proposal on September 4. During the meeting, environment secretary Ajay Narayan Jha and Director General of Forests Siddhanta Das favoured denotification of the forest land,

prevailing over NTCA's opposition to the proposal. The top officials felt that since the mine was supporting an old cement plant, the forest should be denotified.

The decision has not gone down well with some members of the NTCA who have opposed the move stating it would set a bad precedence.

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. 'Opposed by Dave last year, wildlife board denotifies forest in Ranthambhore for mine', *DNA*, 14/09/17.

TAMIL NADU

60 Irular families evicted from buffer zone of Mudumalai TR

The revenue department along with a posse of police waiting nearby recently demolished the homes and evicted 60 families of the Irular community from the buffer zone of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (TR). While those evicted claim these are their traditional lands, officials have claimed that they had "encroached" on 17 acres of government land located along an elephant corridor and had to be removed following high court orders for their eviction.

They added that steps were being taken by the district administration to find alternative housing for the families residing here. The residents have, however, said that each small house that was built by the government many decades ago now housed 3-4 families and that they were forced to "reoccupy" their ancestral lands because the government was not providing them alternative lands. The Irulars claim that the lands had belonged to them for many generations, that the Tamil Nadu Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation Limited (Aavin) had "cheated" them and had taken over the lands promising jobs in return.

The opportunities never materialized according to them and the farm that was established here was also closed down. They also noted that they were being evicted but private cottages and resorts in the same area were not being touched.

The district collector has said that the tribal residents had been assured that they would be given an alternative site where they can build their homes. A site for that has also been identified and the evicted families have been asked to inspect it.

Source: K Bathran. 'Tribal people evicted from land, houses demolished', *The Hindu*, 16/08/17.

TELANGANA

NBWL diverts tiger corridor for irrigation project; asks for 16 eco-bridges to avoid fragmentation

The standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has agreed to the diversion of 622 hectares (ha) of forests in the corridor linking the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) with the Tadoba Andhari TR and the Indravathi TR for construction of the Pranahita canal. It has also asked for the creation of 16 eco-bridges to avoid fragmentation of the tiger corridor and to permit free movement of tigers and other wild animals. The NBWL has, additionally, formed a committee with experts from the Wildlife Institute of India, in response to the government's pleas to decrease the number of bridges.

A number of other conditions have been put in place for construction of the irrigation project. The user agency has been instructed to cut a minimum number of trees while executing the work, no labour camp is to be set up inside the PAs and all construction materials and machinery also have to be kept outside. The legal status of the forestland will also not be changed.

Wildlife activists and officials have, however, expressed concern over the approval and the mitigation measures that have been proposed. According to them the proposed eco-bridges of 7.5 m wide would serve little purpose. The regional director, wildlife, has suggested, in fact, that the bridges should not be less than 30 m in several locations. It has also been pointed out that it was agreed at a recent

meeting of the State Board for Wildlife, that the western areas of the corridor, where tigers are sighted regularly, would be declared as the extended core to the Kawal TR. This however is not being done.

Source: U Sudhakar Reddy. 'Telangana to build tiger bridges', *Deccan Chronicle*, 11/08/17.
'Telangana: Plan to extend core of Kawal reserve dropped', *Deccan Chronicle*, 11/08/17.

UTTAR PRADESH

Build toilets to curb human-tiger conflict in Pilibhit: CM

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's recent meeting with the officials of Pilibhit district to discuss human-tiger conflicts in the region is reported to have started with tigers and ended with toilets! Forest official said that the chief minister heard about the problem keenly but did not go too much into the scientific aspects of it. The state government has now decided to build more toilets in the villages where tiger attacks were reported and provide them with cooking gas cylinders. The government will also help the forest department (FD) build a fence on 50-km stretch of the forest where most of these attacks have occurred.

The attacks started two years after the Pilibhit forest was declared a tiger reserve. The first attack occurred on October 24, 2016 followed by three more deaths by the end of the year. Seven deaths were reported in quick succession till March 2017. The attacks started again in May and seven people were killed till August. According to experts, the reason for the attacks were many –increase in tiger population in the forest, changing in land use, thin buffer zone and the unique horseshoe shape of the forest which is interspersed with human habitation. These reasons were all overlooked in the meeting.

According to environmentalists, the suggestions proposed by the CM were non-scientific and customary. They said that the

biggest challenge near PTR is to prevent animals from straying out of the forest by changing the land use of nearby farms but the issue was overlooked; also they have pointed out that none of the 18 people killed in tiger attacks were out to attend nature's calls and neither were they out collecting firewood. All of them were farmers who were either guarding or doing farm work in their fields at the time of attack.

The FD which is functioning with half its assigned strength has also become the first target of enraged villagers following these incidents of attack. The ill-equipped staff relies on local police for their safety and assistance. Commenting on the issue, the forest minister said that recruitment of staff is an administrative process, which takes time.

Source: Chandan Kumar. 'Uttar Pradesh: Meet on man-tiger conflicts ends with customary suggestions', *Hindustan Times*, 17/08/19.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Tiger cell at WII gets three years extension

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has granted a three-year extension to the country's lone tiger cell at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in Dehradun.

The tiger cell has a repository of information of more than 1,650 tigers of the total 2,226 reported in the All India Tiger Estimation - 2014. It also DNA fingerprints from tiger reserves across the nation with photographic evidence of the big cats. At present, it is collecting Phase IV monitoring results from 50 tiger reserves. Simultaneously, it is also preparing for the upcoming tiger estimation, slated to start in October. The NTCA came up with the idea of tiger monitoring programme in 2012. The first three phases covered spatial mapping, monitoring of tiger habitats, assimilation of spatial data and estimation of tiger and prey population. The

authority had inked a memorandum of understanding with the WII last year in August.

The tiger cell has formulated the management effective evaluation framework that includes evaluation of tiger reserves, developed Monitoring System for Tigers' Intensive Protection and Ecological Status (MSTripES), a software based monitoring system, and adopted globally recognised standard operating procedures for the all India tiger estimation.

The cell has four researchers, each one getting an annual salary package of ₹60 lakh, which is borne by the NTCA. It has approval from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Flora and Fauna – CITES – granted at South Africa in October last year, for housing the global tiger repository.

Source: Nihi Sharma, 'Tiger cell at WII gets 3-year extension', *Hindustan Times*, 02/08/17.

Over 27,000 wild elephants in India; highest number of 6,049 in Karnataka

A recent census has put the total number of wild elephants in India at 27,312. Karnataka tops the list with 6,049 elephants and is followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054). Other major elephants bearing states are Tamil Nadu (2,761), Odisha (1,976), Uttarakhand (1,839), Meghalaya (1,754), Arunachal Pradesh (1,614), West Bengal (682) and Jharkhand (679).

The report has cautioned against comparing the number with the 2012 census figures as two different counting methods have been used in the two exercises. The estimated population in the 2012 census was 29,391-30,711 elephants, which the experts now feel is erroneous.

Source: Kalyan Ray, 'Elephant Census: With more than 6000 jumbos, Karnataka tops the list', *Deccan Herald*, 13/08/17.

Over 15% of species in India threatened: IUCN

IUCN's latest update on its 'Red List' suggests that 15% of all species found in India are threatened as these have been included in the critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable categories. There are a total of 6939 species of India and 1055 are listed in these three categories.

Globally the 'Red List' has a total of 87,967 species of which 25,062 are threatened with extinction. The detailed breakdown for Indian species on the list is the following: Extinct: 6; Extinct in Wild: 2; Critically Endangered: 154; Endangered: 376; Vulnerable: 525; Near Threatened: 385; Least Concern: 4643; Data deficient: 845; Undergoing Reassessment: 3.

Source: Malavika Vyawahare. 'Over 15% of species found in India are threatened' *Hindustan Times*, 16/09/17.

Dr. Mahesh Sharma takes charge as Minister of State in MoEFCC

Dr. Mahesh Sharma has been appointed as the new Minister of State of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. This was one of the many changes made by the prime minister during the recent change and shuffle of the union cabinet.

Source: www.orissadiary.com, 04/09/17.

Centre seeks Supreme Court's approval for cheetah re-introduction

The central government has once again sought the permission of the Supreme Court (SC) for the re-introduction of the cheetah in India. In an application filed before the apex court, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has asked the SC to clarify its 2013 order, which had then quashed a notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to introduce African cheetah to the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Madhya Pradesh. The SC had noted the government

must give priority to protect Asiatic lions and to provide them a second home. The court had, however, not closed the doors for re-introduction of cheetahs. Rather, it had asked the government to do a detailed scientific study because objections were raised against the proposed introduction.

Armed with surveys and field research, the government now wants the court to clarify the 2013 order. Despite reports favouring the Centre's re-introduction programme, the states have showed reluctance owing to the court order, the NTCA said in its application. Tracing the creature's history, the government said it was incorrect to suggest that cheetah is a foreign animal. Several parts of northern India under the Mughal empire had habitats occupied by the cheetah.

The NTCA noted that the Wildlife Institute of India had identified suitable locations for the re-introduction; these include the Kuno and Nauradehi WLSs in Madhya Pradesh and the Shahgarh area in Rajasthan. Kuno had been found most appropriate, considering its feasibility on account of its improved habitat status owing to relocation of 24 villages.

Source: Bhadra Sinha. 'Not foreign': Govt seeks Supreme Court nod to re-introduce cheetah in India', *Hindustan Times*, 11/08/17.

One person killed a day in wildlife attacks in India

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has stated that 1,144 people were killed in wild animal attacks across India in 1,143 days between April 2014 and May 2017. This amounts to one person being killed a day on average in these attacks. Elephants accounted for 1,052 of these deaths and tigers were responsible for 92. West Bengal accounted for more than a quarter of these deaths.

Source: 'Elephants, tigers kill one human a day in India', *The Times of India*, 01/08/17.

12 important mangroves forests of the country identified

The Mangrove Society of India (MSI) has identified 12 important mangrove forests of the country. The list was released by the MSI and the Goa state biodiversity board at the National Mangrove Conference in Dona Paula, Goa in July. According to the MSI, the idea behind selecting these 12 locations is to enhance conservation and protection of different mangrove species, their biodiversity and to establish them as international tourism destinations.

Following are the 12 forest locations that the MSI has identified: Gulf of Kutch (Gujarat); Vikhroli mangroves, Mumbai, Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Centre, Airoli, Navi Mumbai; Achra (Maharashtra), Dr. Salim Ali Mangrove Sanctuary (Goa), Kali Nadi estuary (Karnataka), Kannur (Kerala); Pichavaram and Muthupet (Tamil Nadu); Coringa and Krishna Wildlife Sanctuaries (Andhra Pradesh); Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary and Kendrapada Mangroves (Odisha), Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve (West Bengal) and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Two of Mumbai's mangrove forests on list of 12 unique wetlands in India', *Hindustan Times*, 02/08/17.

Exotic species invading PAs: Minister

Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, informed parliament recently that weed species such as *Lantana*, *Eupatorium* and *Parthenium* have been found over large areas in a number of PAs such as the Mudumalai National Park (NP), the Bandipur area of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, and the Gir and Kaziranga NPs. The invasive species were found by an evaluation committee constituted by the ministry.

Insofar as tiger reserves are concerned, the minister pointed out that there is provision for the removal of weeds under habitat development which, inter alia, is an important

part of Tiger Conservation Plan of the concerned tiger reserve. He further stated that removal of these weeds was one of the components which was supported under the centrally-sponsored scheme of Project Tiger.

Source: 'Invasive weed taking over tiger reserves: Government', *Business Standard*, 01/08/17.

Meeting held to discuss, curb wildlife trafficking using postal services

In an attempt to formulate a strategy to check wildlife crimes and trafficking through governmental agencies such as postal services in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha, an inter-agency co-ordination meeting was organized recently in Kolkata by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB). Representatives of more than a dozen investigating and law enforcement agencies, the border security force and forest departments of the different states participated. It was decided to hold sensitisation workshops and train the postal department and other enforcement agencies to familiarise them with wildlife articles and the modus operandi of criminal networks.

The initiative comes following the discovery by the WCCB recently that the postal service was being to sell parts of endangered animals. They stumbled upon feathers of the grey jungle fowl being smuggled out in larger numbers. In another case reported earlier this year, it was found that pangolin scales were smuggled to Southeast Asian countries using the Indian Postal service.

Other issues discussed during the meeting included the traditional hunting festivals in the tribal regions of South Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand and turtle smuggling that happens via West Bengal.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'India Post catches up with wildlife smugglers', *The Hindu*, 03/08/17.

SC asks Centre to consider suggestions on safe corridors for wild animals

The Supreme Court (SC) has asked the Centre to consider suggestions, including making 27 corridors across the country safe for passage of elephants and other endangered animals and directed it to "positively" file a response within three months.

A bench comprising Chief Justice J S Khehar and Justice DY Chandrachud told the Centre to consider the suggestions given by the petitioners after taking the help of experts. Additional Solicitor General Pinky Anand said the government would file a counter affidavit after consulting experts. Senior advocate Shyam Divan, representing ecologist Vidya Athreya and others, handed over the suggestions to Anand and said that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change might consider identifying 27 corridors across the country.

The apex court had earlier sought the Centre's response on a petition seeking measures, including one for a national policy to save endangered species like the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and the snow leopard. The petitioners had told the court that species like the GIB, snow leopard and the wolf were on the verge of extinction and they needed to be conserved. They had also referred to unnatural deaths of elephants on the highways and railway tracks and said that the areas earmarked for the largest mammal were not sufficient. The PIL has said that the railways and highways authorities should evolve mechanisms like constructing underpasses and fencing roads to ensure that elephants do not get killed.

Source: 'Supreme Court asks Centre to consider suggestions on safe corridors for wild animals', *firstpost.com*, 04/08/17.

Eurasian otter presence confirmed in the trans-Himalayas

A pair of researchers, Melissa Savage and Pushpinder Singh Jamwal, have discovered the

presence of the Eurasian otters in the trans-Himalayas.

First, they found otter's dropping in Ladakh that had all the markings - bits of fish scales, fins, bone and vertebrae cast into tubular poop. Pictures were sent to Dr. Nicole Duplaix, the chair of International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission's Otter Specialist Group. She confirmed that that was indeed from the Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*, one of the three otter species found in India. Her confirmation meant that, this was the first scientific evidence of the presence of otters in the trans-Himalayas.

Next, on August 27, 2016, an otter was caught on a camera trap, thus, further confirming its presence. A systematic study of otter populations, their habitats and threat factors in the region has now been initiated.

Source: Preksha Sharma. 'A King in Hiding: The barren, cold desert of Ladakh sees signs of a new life – the otter', *The Indian Express*, 06/08/17.

Finance Act dilutes the NGT Act says Jairam Ramesh; SC issues notice to Centre

The Supreme Court (SC) has issued a notice to the Centre on a petition filed by Congress MP and former environment minister, Jairam Ramesh, challenging certain provisions of the Finance Act 2017 as they dilute the National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010.

According to Ramesh, the Finance Act gives undue power to the Centre to decide on qualifications, appointment, term of office, salary and removal of the chairperson and other members of the NGT by overturning the minimum requirements laid down by the NGT Act. The petition states that the change in minimum requirement is a serious encroachment into the composition and functioning of the NGT and cannot be constitutionally countenanced in light of several decisions of the SC.

The new rules state that the NGT chairperson need not be a SC judge or High Court chief justice, and allows non-judicial

members or experts with more than three years of experience to serve as the tribunal's head. It also dilutes the role of the committee that nominates the expert members of the tribunal.

The SC is also hearing a similar petition by an NGO.

Source: Jayashree Nandi, 'SC notice after Jairam says Finance Act dilutes NGT', *The Times of India*, 07/08/17.

Inclusion of Net Present Value of diverted forest in cost-benefit-analysis mandatory; NPV to be 10 and five times more than normal for NP and WLS respectively

Public and private projects that require forest land will now have to include the Net Present Value (NPV) of the forest being diverted as part of the cost-benefit analysis that is submitted with their proposals to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). NPV is the monetised value of the forest that is to be felled or diverted for projects, paid as compensation for the ecosystem services forests provide. NPV is calculated on the basis of the class and type of forests taking into a consideration a period of 50 years as compensatory plantation or afforestation takes that much time to fully mature.

The MoEFCC has tweaked certain directions for carrying out the cost-benefit analysis (CBA), and had issued revised guidelines to all central ministries and state governments on August 1. CBAs are mandated as part of the project proposals for forest clearances to weigh the ecological, environmental and economic losses to people against social and economic gains. They are an essential part of proposals that involve the diversion of more than 20 ha of forests in the plains, and more than five ha in the hilly areas.

The revised guidelines for CBA state that costs for economic loss of ecosystem services due to forest 'diversion', as it is officially termed, should be estimated on the basis of the NPV of the forestland. In case the forestland being diverted for projects is in a national park or wildlife sanctuary, the NPV

should be ten times and five times respectively of the normal rate. The guidelines note that the loss of animal husbandry productivity should be quantified and expressed in monetary terms or 10 per cent of NPV applicable in the CBA. Further, the cost of fragmentation of habitats, too, has to be accounted for in the CBA. This, the guidelines said, should be pegged at 50% of NPV applicable as a thumb rule.

Source: 'Include cost of felling forests in cost-benefit analysis of projects: MoEF', *DNA*, 07/08/17.

NGT asks MoEFCC to prepare a policy for prevention of forest fires

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to evolve a national policy for prevention and control of forest fires. It also sought a network of automated surveillance or watch towers at strategic locations to provide regular, real-time data for forest fire alerts. The NGT's order came on a 2016 plea that had sought immediate directions to control massive forest fires in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh that had damaged hundreds of hectares of forests. It also sought steps to ensure that such disasters do not recur.

The three-member principal bench of the NGT headed by chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar said that state authorities had failed miserably to prevent an avoidable natural disaster despite the so-called forest fire management plans being in place. The central government has also been a mute spectator in this natural calamity and ecological disaster which keeps repeating itself with greater intensity and devastation year after year. Except for routinely clearing the Forest Fire Management Plans and releasing funds mechanically, the impact of its policies and scheme on the ground has rarely been assessed, the NGT's order said.

The NGT has directed that financial resources, manpower, transport/vehicle and fire-fighting equipment should be made available to the forest department at the state and

district/division level at the beginning of the financial year so that forest fire management plan could be implemented in totality and effectively. The order also sought a forest fire vulnerability mapping of the entire forest area to identify hotspots in vulnerable areas and locations where stations for fire prevention and control could be set up. It directed that the forest fire management plan be prepared with active partnership of the village level authorities and revised every year based on the experience gained.

The NGT also asked for the satellite based Forest Fire Alert System to be strengthened in collaboration with National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), the Forest Survey of India and the field staff trained in prevention and control. It asked additionally for the use of social media, print and electronic media and for a dedicated website for the purpose of information dissemination and for details of the officers to be contacted in the event of fire.

Source: Mayank Aggarwal. 'NGT asks environment ministry to evolve national policy to prevent forest fires', *Mint*, 04/08/17.

More than 700 projects awaiting environmental clearance: Minister

In a written reply to Rajya Sabha, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr Harsh Vardhan, has said that a total of 741 proposals are awaiting environmental clearance. These include 194 from Maharashtra, 95 from Gujarat and 86 from Uttar Pradesh.

He noted that the environment ministry has taken various steps to speed up the process of disposing the applications for environmental clearance. These include a dedicated online portal for effective monitoring, standardisation of terms of reference for preparation of environment impact assessment reports and the environment management plan, exemption from public consultations to certain projects and the streamlining of procedures, among others

Replying to another question on forest based projects approved by the central government during the last three years, he said that the proposals for forest clearances under the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, for diversion of forest lands for non-forestry use are considered in the ministry and accorded in two stages. A total of 2,196 proposals have been accorded stage I or in principle approval by the central government during the period 2014-2017. At present a total of 357 cases are pending for stage II – prior approval of the central government.

Source: ‘Around 750 projects awaiting environmental clearance: Government’, *The Times of India*, 31/07/17.

SC questions Centre over reduction of ESZ by 100 times

The Supreme Court (SC) has questioned the Central government’s decision in many cases to reduce the eco-sensitive zone around protected areas from 10-km to 100 m. It has termed the move ‘prima facie arbitrary’ and is likely to examine the validity of the Centre’s policy in the matter.

These observations of the highest court of the country were made by a bench hearing a case related to environmental clearance to an industrial unit, within a 10-km radius of the Dadara and Nagar Haveli Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Central government had its own standard guidelines of having 10-km as eco-fragile zones around a protected area under the Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2002, which was later endorsed by the Supreme Court. The Court had directed that a 10-km limit was to be treated as the eco-sensitive zone until there is a notification by the Centre. However, in the last two years, the centre has by a series of notifications approved a reduction of eco-sensitive zone for a number of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries across the country.

Source: ‘SC pulls up centre over decision to reduce eco sensitive zones by 100 times’ www.news18.com, 16/09/17

NEPAL/INDIA

50 rhino calves swept away from Nepal to India; eight returned

It is estimated that at least 50 rhino calves from Nepal’s Chitwan National Park might have been swept across the Indian border in the recent floods that hit the region. Of these, eight were captured in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (TR) in Bihar and have been re-located back to Chitwan. The successful trans-boundary collaboration carried out under challenging conditions saw two people were injured in the operation. It also marks a lost opportunity for repopulating the Valmiki TR with rhinos.

Valmiki TR got its first chance in 2001 when a female and two males visiting from Chitwan settled down to breed here. But a railway track running through the reserve claimed the female in 2006 and subsequent unnatural deaths destroyed the small resident population. Since then, rare solitary rhinos entering Valmiki TR have either been poached or sent to the Patna zoo.

It is keeping in mind the safety of the animals that the joint decision to relocate them back to Chitwan was taken.

Source: Jay Mazoomdar. ‘Displaced rhinos back in Nepal, Bihar reserve loses rare chance’, *The Indian Express*, 11/09/17.
50 rhino calves swept away in recent floods in Nepal’, www.india.com, 15/09/17.

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

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

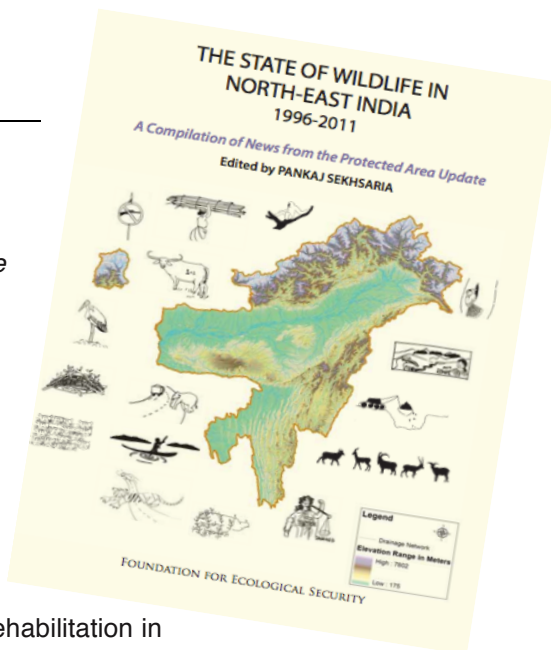
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Perspective & Opinion: The Print Media's Kaziranga obsession – An analysis (Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi); A case study of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in western Assam (Sonali Ghosh: Snow leopards in the land of the rising sun (Yash Veer 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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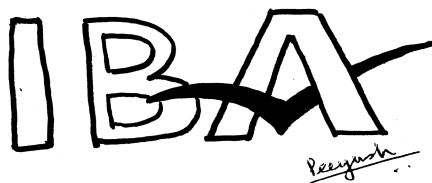
INVITING COLLABORATIONS

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



MANIPUR

Call to decommission the Ithai dam

An intensified call to scrap the Ithai Dam was made recently at a meeting held at Thanga, Haorang Chingya. The local fishing community along with other activists argued that the Ithai dam constructed as part of the 105 MW Loktak project was a curse and had brought no development. It was noted that the project had resulted in the disappearance of indigenous fish and prawns, of edible water plants and of paddy cultivated in the phumdis. It was pointed out further that the electric supply promised by the project too had not materialized and the dam was one of the main causes for flash floods in the state

The meet was organized by Citizens Concern for Dams and Development, North East Dialogue Forum, Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur, Committee on Human Rights, Irabot Foundation, United Clubs of Thanga, All Thanga Meira Paibi Apunba Organization, Loktak Project Affected Areas Action Committee and the Loktak Fisheries Welfare Association.

Source: 'Decommission Ithai dam cry gets shriller', *The Imphal Free Press*, 02/04/17.

RAJASTHAN

Openbill storks abandon nesting in Keoladeo NP because of water shortage

With the Keoladeo National Park (KNP) facing a severe shortage of water this year, nearly 300 Openbill storks abandoned nesting to migrate to the Yamuna and the Chambal river habitat in early August. This was on account of the Goverdhan drain being parched and the park also not getting water from Panchana Dam due to deficit in rainfall in Karauli. Severe water shortage has been a recurring problem for the wetlands here that ideally need about 550 million cubic feet (mcft) of water between July and October for the breeding season of the birds.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had undertaken a Rs. 65-crore project to supply water to the KNP from the Goverdhan drain. This was enabled by laying pipelines over a distance of 17 km from Santruk village. Further augmentation work was also carried out within the park area. The government in the past has also tried catering to the park's water requirements with water from the Panchana Dam. Both these external water sources have, however, not been able to help this year.

Forest officials have also recently written to the government for an additional minimum requirement of 50 mcft water. The proposal is still pending.

Source: Rachna Singh. 'Openbill Storks abandon nesting at Keoladeo national park', *The Times of India*, 10/08/10.

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 69, October 2007

ASSAM

Two flyovers in Manas to protect wildlife

Two flyovers will be built on a stretch of National Highway 152, flanked by the wilds of Manas National Park, to divert speeding vehicles away from wild animals crossing the road. A 12-km stretch of the busy highway, which connects Pathsala in Barpeta district to Nganglam in Bhutan, cuts through the park.

The project for the flyovers was sanctioned recently by the Union ministry of Surface Transport. The budget and the specifications of the proposed flyovers have not been finalised yet, but each of the structures would be between 1km and 2km long.

The highway is also to be realigned to facilitate construction of the flyovers, resulting in a portion of it moving further east. The project includes two more bridges on the Pota, which flows along the Indo-Bhutan border. The Manas flyover project is the result of a suggestion made by the Deputy Commissioner of Baksa District, Anwaruddin Choudhury, to the Public Works Department (PWD) in September 2005.

A meeting was convened on December 3 that very year to discuss the issue with engineers of the PWD's highway division following which they gave their ascent.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Fly over forest, spare animals', *The Telegraph*, 21/09/07.

KARNATAKA

Wildlife research institute for Karnataka

The Central Government has sanctioned Rs Two crores for an animal husbandry and wildlife research institute to be set up in Kodagu in Karnataka. The institution will be the first of its kind in the country. It will come up on 74 acres

of land in Chikkaaluvaara village of Somwarpet taluk in about a year's time.

It will be governed and monitored by the Karnataka Animal Husbandry and Fisheries University, Bidar.

Source: 'Wildlife research institute to be set up in Karnataka',
<http://www.wildlifewatch.in/news/area/karnataka/2007/09/6,10/09/07>.

MADHYA PRADESH

Cash incentive for florican conservation in Sailana and Sardarpur WLS not working

Last year's initiative of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department to give cash incentives to local people for information on the lesser florican in the Sailana and Sardarpur Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLS) is reportedly not yielding good results. Reports last year had indicated that the scheme had been a good success. Incentives of upto Rs. 5000 are being given for information on the bird and for protection of its eggs (see *PA Update* Vol. XII, No. 4, Aug. 2006).

It has been found that people, in lure of the cash being awarded have started to tamper with the nest and the eggs at the bird's breeding sites. Many farmers also reportedly tried to shift the nests from their actual breeding sites to their fields to be eligible for the money. In other cases farmers received the cash awards by showing eggs of other birds, which looked identical to the eggs of the florican.

A total of 16 birds have been sighted in the two sanctuaries this season

According to official records, 26 floricans were spotted in Ratlam in 1997, 31 in 1998, 26 in 1999, 30 in 2000, 35 in 2001, 38 in 2002, 38 in 2003, 32 in 2004 and 28 in 2006. The reporting of 2007 has not been done yet.

Source: 'Jumping kharmors a rare sight now.' *The Pioneer*, Wednesday, 29/08/2007

PERSPECTIVE

Why I care about the KBR National Park?

Let me begin with my introduction – I am no environmentalist or activist – just a concerned parent of a four year old who lives in the city of Hyderabad. Saving trees of the walkway around the city’s KBR National Park (NP) is not a protest against anything. Neither is it a service that we are doing to anybody. It is our only hope to ensure that our children have a fair chance to live a quality life.

Hyderabad’s KBR NP is the lifeline of the city– a large forest patch in its heart that serves as a carbon sink, a source of water also as habitat for rich biodiversity of flora and fauna. These are the lungs of a city that has amongst the lowest green cover (2.5%) of cities in India.

The government has proposed to declare a zero meter eco sensitive zone around the park, which essentially means that they want to wipe out the buffer zone of the Park and then construct roads and flyovers right around its entire periphery. This is similar to what we have done to our lakes - we block all the streams that provide them water and when the lake dries out, we say it died a natural death and is hence now ready for construction activities. (An excellent example of this is the Telangana government’s Government Order (GO) 111)

A similar fate awaits the KBR NP. With flyovers coming up all around, and the resultant pollution settling in 24/7, are we headed for a moment when we will say also the park died a natural death? Common citizens are surprised and ask, “Is this not a national park and hence lawfully entitled to a buffer zone?” Well yes, it should be, but the question is does anybody care?

A group of citizens have indeed been rallying together under the banner of “Hyderabad Rising”. This group is protesting the flyovers around KBR and asking the government for more sustainable options. We need to realise that when we choose not to

intervene, the damage can be irreversible and we shall all suffer. By turning our back, we are setting a wrong example to our coming generations. The biggest cause for the downfall of any city will be that its citizens are waiting for somebody else to come and save it. Decreasing water tables, a changing climate and polluted air are all real issues and knocking at our door right at this moment. We don’t have a choice but to respond!

- **Kaajal Maheshwari** is an active member of Hyderabad Rising (www.facebook.com/hydrising/). Email: kaajalguptaa@gmail.com

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