

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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### **Protected Area Update**

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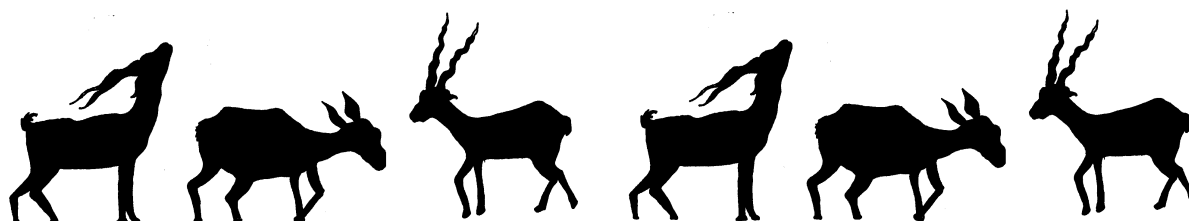
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## EDITORIAL

### The elephant's season of despair

If there is one animal that stands out for the reports in this issue of the *PA Update*, it is the elephant. And the news is not all good from across its entire range be it West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha or Karnataka. A large number of humans and elephants continue to die in conflict that only seems to intensify with every passing year.

If elephants have been killed in recent weeks in Assam in accidental firing by forest staff and in train accidents, in Odisha this is due to disease and uncovered wells, which have been particularly dangerous for younger animals. And there is the heart wrenching report from Karnataka (and a gruesome photo too) of blood stains from elephant feet on spiked fences that are meant to keep the animals from straying out into villages and destroying standing crop. Every thing and more that can go wrong, seems indeed to be going wrong.

Media, sure, has the propensity of playing up the 'bad' news, but there is also the adage that there can be no smoke without fire. Reports keep coming in regularly from all over the country of more elephant deaths in rail accidents, by electrocution and incidents of poaching not to mention the continued assault through change in land use in their habitat and movement corridors, and growing pressures on account of industrial, infrastructural and tourism related demands.

The discourse in the country is rich in its symbolism for the elephant be it as the mascot of the Indian railways, in its being named the national heritage animal, and indeed of Ganesha, the elephant headed god who is invoked every time we seek to begin anything new. None of this has helped the animal on the ground and the situation is only getting worse as time goes by.

One might also argue that we know all this and a continued rant is not going to help.

Even if that is partly true, it remains important we keep bearing witness, keep documenting and keep reminding ourselves of the injustice being done to creatures we share this world with and whose rights to the planet can in no way be any less than ours.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### Snow leopard photographed in Arunachal Pradesh

A Snow leopard was recently photographed by a camera trap set up at Thembang, one of the community conserved areas (CCAs) in the state. This was part of a statewide survey carried out by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India in collaboration with the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department. The study that was initiated in March 2017 focuses on unexplored areas of the state.

It notes that only a fraction of snow leopard habitat here falls under two protected areas – the Dibang Biosphere Reserve and the Namdapha National Park. The presence of the big cat outside protected areas highlights the importance of community support for conservation, as well as for curbing threats to the species, including retaliatory killings, infrastructure development and climate change-induced impacts on the habitats.

Over 80 per cent of the people surveyed as part of the study confirmed the presence of snow leopards in their area. Local communities in these CCAs have formed committees to undertake wildlife monitoring, patrolling and community-based tourism activities.

Source: 'Elusive snow leopard appears in Arunachal, excites WWF', [news.webindia123.com](http://news.webindia123.com), 06/10/17.

## ASSAM

### **Elephant electrocuted in Bijulee TE, near Nambhor WLS**

A female wild elephant was electrocuted in the Bijulee Tea Estate (TE) near the Nambhor Wildlife Sanctuary when it came in contact with a sagging high-tension electric wire. The estate is located near Numaligarh under the Murphuloni beat office.

The Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) is being blamed for the incident. Forest officials said they have repeatedly asked the APDCL to raise the height of power lines, repair the sagging lines and posts but nothing fruitful has been done thus far.

A joint co-ordination committee had been formed to monitor the maintenance of transmission lines to ensure prevention of electrocution of wild elephants in the region in 2013. The committee, which was headed by the Golaghat deputy commissioner and comprised the assistant general manager of APDCL, Golaghat electrical division, divisional forest officer and representatives of local NGOs as members, had been formed according to a notification of the department of forest and environment.

Source: Ritupallab Saikia. 'Elephant electrocuted', *The Telegraph*, 14/11/17.

### **Elephant killed due to firing by forest guard near Panidihing WLS**

An adult female elephant was killed in the first week of November after a bullet reportedly fired by a forest department (FD) guard hit the wild animal at Bokul Dupa under Demow Police Station within Sivasagar forest range. The spot is near the Panidihing Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). A team of forest staff, which was on duty and tasked to chase a herd of wild elephants that was damaging standing crops in the villages, came in very close proximity to a few animals of the herd. In order to protect themselves from an impending attack, a guard fired in the air from his .315 service rifle and

managed to run to safety from the spot. The incident occurred at around 2.45 am. The team found the carcass of an elephant with a gunshot injury the following morning. One of the bullets fired by the guard had hit the animal and caused its death.

The post-mortem of the elephant carcass was done on the spot by a veterinary department team led by a doctor and the carcass was then buried as per Government guidelines.

There have been a number of incidents in the recent past in the region involving the death of elephants. Four elephants were reported dead in Upper Assam within a month with two deaths reported in Dibrugarh district. Miscreants had, in the month of October, decamped with the trunk and flesh from a carcass of a male elephant that was also recovered near the Panidihing WLS.

Source: 'Elephant killed due to firing by forest guard in Sivasagar district', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/11/17.

## ASSAM/ WEST BENGAL

### **Forest and police officials awarded for solving rhino poaching case**

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal recently rewarded two forest officers of North Kamrup Division, an NGO official and two police officers for their contribution in helping solve a case of rhino poaching in the Gorumara National Park in West Bengal. The awards were given at a function held in the 63rd wildlife week.

The award recipients were Nripendra Nath Kalita, assistant conservator of forests, North Kamrup Division, Rabin Kumar Baishya, range officer - Sila range, Rahul Dutta of International Rhino Foundation, Mrinmoy Das, deputy superintendent of police, Kamrup and Twinkle Goswami, sub-inspector, Baihata Chariali police station of Kamrup who is now officer in-charge of Sualkuchi police station, Kamrup.

These officials successfully solved a rhino poaching case in which the rhino was

killed at Gorumara National Park in West Bengal and its horn was found at Baihata Chariali. This, reportedly, is the first case of wildlife crime in North East in which genetic examination was carried out to match the DNA of a rhino horn and a carcass.

Source: 'CM awards Forest, Police officials for cracking rhino poaching case', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/10/17.

## DELHI

### **NBWL clears hospital near Asola Bhatti WLS**

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared the setting up of the Central Armed Police Forces Institute of Medical Science (CAPFIMS) in land adjoining the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) with a caveat that such huge institutes should not come up in the city because they add to the traffic woes and pollution load.

The institute will have a 500-bed general hospital, a 300-bed super specialty unit, a nursing college and a school of paramedics. It will be built on the lines of the Armed Forces Medical College.

A committee headed by HS Singh, a member of the wildlife panel, visited the site in August and has proposed measures that the institute needs to take to prevent any impact on the sanctuary. The agency concerned has been directed to deposit 2% of total cost of the project for undertaking soil-moisture conservation and improvement of wildlife habitat in the sanctuary. It has also been directed to come up with a thick green belt of native plant species to buffer air, sound and water pollution inside the sanctuary. The green belt would have to be kept out of public use.

It has been further directed that the biomedical waste generated from the hospital should be disposed five km away from the boundary of the sanctuary. The boundary wall should be at least 10 feet high and be designed and constructed in such a way that no waste could be thrown over the wall. Exhaust fans,

vents of air-conditioners should also not be directed towards the sanctuary, the committee said.

Source: 'Wildlife board clears hospital near Delhi's Asola Bhatti sanctuary with a warning', *Hindustan Times*, 05/11/17.

## GUJARAT

### **Bikers caught on video chasing lions in Gir; three arrested**

Three men were arrested recently after a video showing motorcyclists chasing lions in the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary circulated online. The fourth suspect had still not been located. In a video posted on Facebook in early November, the four men can be heard speaking in Gujarati as lions and lionesses ran frantically.

The registration number of a motorcycle visible on the video led the Gujarat Police to one biker who was arrested in Rajkot. Another biker was held in Rajkot later in the day while the third was arrested from Amreli.

In June, earlier in the year, the Gujarat Forest Department had arrested four people for chasing a lion cub in their car in Visavadar taluka of Junagadh district located close to the Gir sanctuary.

Source: 'Bikers caught on video chasing lions in Gir sanctuary, 3 arrested', *Hindustan Times*, 10/11/17.

### **Whale shark satellite-tagged in Gujarat**

A 22 feet long male whale shark was satellite tagged by Gujarat Forest Department (FD) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in the fishing village of Sutrapada on the Saurashtra coast recently.

In an incident reported in mid-November, a fisherman informed the WTI rescue team that a Whale shark was trapped in his fishing net off the Sutrapada coast. As per procedure, the deputy conservator of forests, Junagadh was informed and local forest officials were involved in the rescue operation. The WTI

team collected a tissue sample for genetic analysis, after which the satellite tag was attached and the whale shark was freed. The deployed tag has been programmed to transmit signals every day for the first 20 days and every alternate day following that.

This is the eighth successful tagging accomplished under the Whale Shark Conservation Project, run by WTI and the FD. Thus far only one tag, which was used in December 2016, is active and is still sending signals after 300 days.

As per the altered operating protocol initiated in December 2016, the WTI team has been networking with outboard motor fishing boats to receive timely intimations of ongoing whale shark rescues. This has helped in two successful taggings; one of which was installed in December and has led to the longest whale shark migratory movement to be tracked from the Indian subcontinent.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Whale shark satellite-tagged in Gujarat', *The Times of India*, 16/11/17.

## **GUJARAT / MADHYA PRADESH**

### **SC issues notice on contempt petition over shifting lions to Madhya Pradesh**

The Supreme Court (SC) recently issued notices to the Central Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Gujarat Government in connection with a contempt petition demanding action against the Government of India and the Gujarat Government for not implementing the apex court order of April 2013 directing translocation of lions to Kuno Palpur in Madhya Pradesh. The petition was filed by wildlife activist, Ajay Dubey.

The petitioner highlighted the willful non-compliance of the apex court order of 2013. The said order had directed the respondents to constitute an expert committee to oversee and ensure re-introduction of lions from the Gir forests to Kuno Palpur. The petitioner submitted that the government of Gujarat through principal

chief conservator of forests (Wildlife) & chief wildlife warden had raised several issues that were already dealt by the apex court in its April 2013 order. He submitted that Gujarat has contended that for translocation of lions to take place it must first be proved that Kuno is a suitable habitat in accordance with the IUCN guidelines. The petitioner submitted that a survey conducted by the Research Advisory Committee of the Wildlife Institute of India in 1995 had found Kuno to be the most suitable site for the reintroduction. He also noted that Gujarat had contended that prey density at Kuno is not adequate even though surveys conducted by various experts, the WII and the Government of Madhya Pradesh in 2004-2005, 2008 and 2012 had found that the density was more than the existing prey base in Gir.

The Gujarat government has also argued that the presence of tigers in the area was one of the major obstacles for the relocation project. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, No. 4; Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, Nos. 6, 5, 4, & 3).

Source: P Naveen. 'SC issues notice on contempt petition over shifting Gujarat lions to Madhya Pradesh', *The Times of India*, 14/11/17.

## **JHARKHAND**

### **Intensifying human-elephant conflict in Jharkhand**

The rising human-elephant conflict has claimed the lives of about 59 people every year in the last one decade and 13 tuskers have been killed this year in Jharkhand. Five people were killed in a period of 48 hours in the month of November and two elephants died within a week around the same time. The recent human deaths were reported from near Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Gumla. Forest officials said that the families of the deceased would be given a compensation of Rs. four lakh each. Rs. 50,000 was handed over to the family as immediate relief.

Source: 'Five people killed by elephants in 48 hours in Jharkhand', *Hindustan Times*, 16/11/17.

## KARNATAKA

### Spiky fences around Nagarhole NP injure elephant

Spiky rail fences installed to keep elephants from moving outside the Nagarhole National Park (NP) into villages and destroying crops, seem to be causing injuries to the elephants. Farmers near the fringes of the park recently noticed bloodstains on the rail fence, which are believed to be from an elephant foot. An injured elephant was also spotted limping and roaring in pain in the forests in the area.

The iron spikes on the fences were rusted and similar iron spikes have also been reported from the concrete fence along the Taraka reservoir on the fringes of the park and along the Hosahalli boundary in the Antrasante range.

Source: MB Girish. 'Jumbo blood on fences, blame it on nails', *Deccan Chronicle*, 26/10/17.

### Speed breakers reduce road kills in Kali TR

Putting up speed breakers on roads that run through the Kali Tiger Reserve (KTR) has brought down the number of road kills here. It has been reported, in fact, that there have been no road kills at the locations where the speed breakers have been installed.

In view of the frequent deaths of wild animals caused by speeding vehicles on national and state highways cutting across the reserve, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) sanctioned Rs. 12 lakh for road hump construction in the Kulgi and Anshi wildlife ranges. 20 such road humps were constructed in 2016-17 at a cost of Rs. eight lakh on six roads — from Kulgi to Ambikanagar, Ambikanagar to Skyes Point, Ambikanagar to FRL, FRL Cross to Kulgi, Ambikanagar to FRL Cross and Ambikanagar to Power House Road. Another

six road humps are being installed between Kadra and Kodtalli and two on the Anshi-Ulavi Road at a cost of Rs. two lakh in Anshi Wildlife Range. The speed breakers have been installed almost every 200-400 m.

Wildlife activists, while welcoming the current developments have also noted that other roads that pass through KTR such as NH-4A, SH-30, 34, 46 and 146 have also been causing wildlife deaths in other ranges of the reserve. They have also demanded that state government should provide special funds for mitigation measures on roads passing through territorial divisions, which are equally good wildlife habitats.

Animals that have been killed on the roads here include the sloth bear, leopard, porcupine, langur, sambar, chital, leopard cat, civets, cobra, monitor lizard, common krait, sand boa and frogs.

Source: Meena Bhardwaj. 'Speed breakers reduce road kills in Karnataka's Kali reserve', *The New Indian Express*, 09/11/17.

### Entry fee for Bandipur NP increased

The entry fee for tourists visiting Bandipur National Park (NP) has been increased from November 1. The hike will be applicable for the national park, the tiger reserve, wildlife sanctuary, safari and accommodation.

The entry fee has gone up to Rs. 250 from the existing Rs. 200 and the safari will now cost Rs. 300 instead of Rs. 100. For foreigners it has been raised from the current Rs. 1000 to Rs. 1500. The cost of accommodation at the guesthouse for Indians will now be Rs. 2500. For foreigners it has been raised from the current Rs. 2000 to Rs. 5000.

Safari timings have been extended by 30 minutes from the existing one hour.

The hike is attributed to the increase in the operational costs. A circular indicating the changes was issued recently by the forest department.

Source: 'Entry fee for tourists hiked in Bandipur National park from Nov 1', [www.newskarnataka.com](http://www.newskarnataka.com), 14/10/17.

### **Fees for cameras in PAs to be reduced**

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has decided to reduce the charges for taking cameras into protected areas in the state following strong negative feedback from wildlife photographers on a new rate regime imposed recently. Just after the new rates came into effect on November 1, many photographers and wildlife conservationists took to social media to vent their anger. Petitions were signed opposing it. In some cases, a simple message like #SafariBeda turned into a campaign.

Sources in the FD said the fee for cameras would now range from Rs. 100 to Rs. 500.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Forest dept likely to cut 'hefty' fees for taking cams into the wild', *Deccan Herald*, 03/11/17.

### **Revised norms for resorts detrimental to protected areas, say environmentalists**

A recent notification by the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) revising guidelines for private resorts, institutions and other entities operating in revenue enclosures within wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, has irked environmentalists. They allege that the order has diluted rules and this will be detrimental to wildlife.

As per the Karnataka's Wilderness Tourism Policy-2004, and subsequent government orders, private resorts were not permitted to operate within PAs and their enclosures. The new notification now allows existing and recognized resorts to operate within the eco-sensitive zones and enclosures of protected areas.

An official in the wildlife division said it would be difficult to remove all resorts and other entities that have come up in revenue enclosures of protected areas as many people, including locals, depend on them for their livelihood.

Source: Rohith BR. 'Revised norms for resorts irk greens', *The Times of India*, 03/10/17.

## **KERALA**

### **Move to redraw boundary of Kurinji Reserve draws strong criticism**

The decision of the Kerala state government to redraw the boundaries of the Kurinji Reserve following allegations of encroachment has invited massive criticism against the government and the state forest department (FD). It has been alleged that the move was designed to give legal sanctity to encroachers. The issue came to notice after the report submitted by Munnar forest wildlife warden R Laxshmi requesting the district collector to direct the Devikulam sub-collector to complete the land settlement with the redrawn boundary, was published in the media.

BJP state president Kummanam Rajasekharan has alleged that the move was aimed at providing land to those close to the chief minister. He said further that the centre will convene a high-level meeting of forest, wildlife and environment ministries to discuss the issue. The state government's move also invited strong criticism from veteran leaders like former chief minister VS Achuthanandan and the opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala.

The chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said, meanwhile, that the government will not reduce the area of the Kurinji Reserve in Idukki. He denied allegations that a survey was going on in the reserve. He also said that a ministerial committee would be constituted to alleviate the fears of the local people.

Source: 'Kurinji sanctuary row: Kerala BJP now seeks Centre's intervention', [www.newsminute.com](http://www.newsminute.com), 26/11/17.

### **FD to relocate 20,000 families living within forests and PAs**

The Kerala Forest Department (FD) has decided to relocate 20,000 tribal and non-tribal families living in 400-odd settlements within the forests and protected areas across the state. The plan is



modelled on the Rs. 80-crore relocation project that is being implemented in Wayanad, under which 800 families are being relocated (see adjoining story; also *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 5; Vol. XVIII, No. 2 & Vol. XVII, No. 1).

Forest minister, K. Raju, has written to the Union minister for environment, forest and climate change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, seeking Rs. 100 crore as a first tranche for the relocation. The project had assumed urgency in the light of increasing human-animal conflicts in the state, the letter to the Centre says.

37 people have been killed in wild animal attacks in the state in recent months, with areas of Malampuzha, Olavakkode, and Puthupariyaram in Palakkad district being among the worst affected. In Palakkad alone, the state government had shelled out nearly Rs. 80 lakh as compensation for crop loss in the last six months.

It has also been noted that the relocation is not being thrust on the people and that the FD has received representations from most of the 700-odd forest settlements seeking relocation from the forest areas.

Source: R Ayyappan. 'Kerala: 20,000 families in forests to be relocated to safety', *Deccan Chronicle*, 20/09/17.

### **Large landholders refuse to leave Wayanad WLS**

The single largest initiative by the government – to relocate people from Chettiyalathur, inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), has hit a major hurdle. While a majority of the 232 eligible families comprising small landholders, located deep inside the sanctuary, have agreed to move out, seven families who together possess around 40 acres have refused to do so. The reason is the uniform compensation of Rs. 10 lakh per eligible family that is offered for relocation irrespective of the size of the land in their possession. This has made the deal unattractive for large landholders. The Wayanad Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi has requested the government to either acquire the large land holdings or explore the possibility of getting additional funds through environmental organizations.

The project is being implemented with funds from the Central Government's Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat Scheme. The estimated cost of the project is Rs. 23 crore and it will be shared on 60:40 basis by the central and state government. Around Rs. 19 crore is already available with the district authorities to initiate the relocation.

A study conducted by the Kerala Forest Research Institute in 2009 had found that there were about 12,000 people belonging to 2,500 families residing within the WWS. Based on the report, the state government had submitted a Rs. 80-crore proposal for the relocation of the most-affected 800 families across 14 settlements. This was accepted and approved by the Centre in 2011 following which as many as 185 eligible families from six settlements inside WWS have been relocated.

Source: 'Compensation fails to attract large landholders', *The Times of India*, 01/10/17.

### **Canopy bridges model of Chinnar WLS to be replicated across the country**

The 'canopy bridges' of Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 2) will soon be taken up as a model for sanctuaries and national parks across the country.

In five months in 2013, 85 accidental road kills of animals were reported along the 15-km stretch of national highway 17 that passes through the sanctuary. Animals that were killed included Bonnet macaques, Tufted-grey langurs, Striped palm squirrels, Grizzled giant squirrels, Leopard cats, civets and the Slender loris. A canopy bridge across the road was suggested as a solution to the problem and 19 such bridges were constructed following a systematic survey to identify the most appropriate locations.

The accidents here have now come down to zero and this has encouraged the authorities to take the model across to other parts of the country.

Source: R Ayyappan. 'Chinnar model: Skywalk helps monkeys, squirrels to cross safe', *Deccan Chronicle*, 04/10/17.

## MADHYA PRADESH

### 4 MP tiger reserves contributed Rs. 75 cr to local communities: Study

A new report, "The Value of Wildlife Tourism for Conservation and Communities", by tiger conservationist Raghunandan Chundawat has claimed that tourism-related opportunities in and around four tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh contributed nearly Rs. 75 crore to the local community while generating Rs. 19 crore in revenue for the government during the financial year 2016-2017.

Based on surveys conducted around the Panna, Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Pench Tiger Reserves, the report notes that the local communities were among the major beneficiaries of the money generated by guided-tours, drivers, vehicle owners, local shops and eateries. A survey done in 133 lodges in the area found that the facilities see only 31 per cent occupancy per annum on average. Despite this, the tourism sector was able to plough nearly Rs. 75 crore back into the local economy. This, the report says, accounts for almost 45 per cent of the communities' total revenue.

The report, commissioned by conservation charity TOFTigers, also suggested that since the employment generated by wildlife tourism is higher "the dependency of these communities on the forest is reduced and their positive attitude towards wildlife conservation is much enhanced now".

Source: '4 MP tiger reserves contributed Rs 75 cr to local communities', *India Today*, 26/10/17.

## MADHYA PRADESH/MAHARASHTRA

### 10 tigers and three leopards electrocuted in one year in Central Indian landscape

The death due to electrocution of the Brahmapuri tigress in Maharashtra has once again exposed the rampant problem of electrocution of wild animals in the Central Indian landscape. The death of the tigress came

to be noticed only because she was collared. Jai, an iconic tiger, who was radio-collared is presumed dead due to electrocution (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 3) and Jai's offspring Srinivas who was also radio-collared, died due to electrocution. Additionally, experts say, electrocution deaths of hundreds of herbivores go unnoticed.

According to statistics obtained by the Wildlife Protection Society of India, there have been 13 deaths – 10 tigers and three leopards – in the Central Indian landscape due to electrocution in the last one year. Six of the 10 tigers died in Maharashtra, while the remaining four were in Madhya Pradesh. All the three leopards' electrocutions were in MP.

Senior forest officials have admitted that there are no technological solutions to the problem. Though regular meetings are held with top electricity officials, there is no monitoring at the forest guard and linemen level. The forest officials have also failed to take up electrocution offences seriously. The tiger Srinivas was electrocuted on April 19, 2017 near Kothulna in Nagbhid range but till date no charge sheet has been filed against the accused farmer.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, '10 tigers, 3 leopards died due to electric shock in 1 year', *The Times of India*, 15/10/17.

## MAHARASHTRA

### All 13 accused of Pench tiger poaching cases absconding

In a major setback to the Pench tiger poaching cases (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1), all 13 accused whose bail was cancelled by the court, have gone absconding. The forest department (FD) had arrested 17 persons in connection with the Pench tiger poaching cases. One of the accused, Mahadeo Uikey fled from the FD and was later found dead. The forensic report revealed that he was poisoned but the police have not been able to crack the mystery behind his death.

Of the 16 accused in custody, all living in fringe villages of Pench, 13 were granted bail on September 1. The bail was cancelled on September 22 after it was challenged by the FD in the sessions court in Nagpur. The police did not take any action till September 29 and it was only after Pench officials wrote about it to the police did they ask forest officials to implement the orders. When the forest officials finally went in search of accused in their villages on October 5 and 6, they found that all were absconding.

It has also been reported, meanwhile, that the reconstituted special investigation team, set up by chief wildlife warden is only on paper. The team, which was to coordinate with Pench assistant conservator of forests for further investigations has not even met once.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'All 13 Pench tiger poaching case accused go absconding', *The Times of India*, 11/10/17

### **SGNP asks Film City to return 51 acres of forest land**

The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) has asked Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari, also known as Film City, to return 51 acres of forest land that was transferred to it by mistake.

Documents obtained by an NGO, Vanashakti, through a series of Right to Information applications, reveal that the land is disputed because there is no boundary wall between Film City and SGNP. According to the documents, the state government had handed over 215 acres of forest land that comprised of two villages Sai and Gundgaon to the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in 1969 and a government resolution issued in 1970 confirmed the same. However, the forest department (FD) said that when MIDC further handed over the area to Film City in 1977, over 245 acres had been transferred instead of 194 acres. This meant that 51 acres were additionally transferred and needed to be given back to the FD.

SGNP officials said that they have been asking for the land to be returned since the 1970s. A senior forest official said that the last

letter was sent to Film City authorities in August 2017, to which they responded stating that the land belongs to Film City and would not be given back.

Source: Badri Chatterjee, 'Sanjay Gandhi National Park wants Film City to return its 51 acres of forest land in Mumbai', *Hindustan Times*, 09/10/17

## **ODISHA**

### **GPS tracking system helping tackle human-elephant conflict: FD**

Odisha Forest Department officials have claimed that the decision to introduce global positioning systems (GPS) to track elephants is helping tackle human-elephant conflict in the state. GPS trackers have been introduced in the division's seven elephant-interference-prone forest ranges - Keonjhar, Bhuyan-Juanga-Pidha, Telkio, Ghatgaon, Patna, Champua and Barbil.

Nearly 230 contractual employees, with the assistance of forest officials, are keeping 24x7 watch in batches on the movement of the elephants armed with GPS. Once the elephants are tracked, their location is transmitted to the district control room, which then alerts the patrolling team nearby to drive them away from human habitations.

Source: 'Success in jumbo tracking – tech support to curb man-elephant conflicts', *The Telegraph*, 26/11/17.

### **Open wells emerge big threat to elephants in Odisha**

Open dug-wells in human habitations, located close to forest ranges and in elephant corridors, have emerged as a new threat for elephants in Odisha. With a spate of incidents of elephants - mostly young ones - falling into these uncovered dug-wells being reported, the wildlife wing of the state forest department has asked its divisions to survey the points and create barriers to prevent the pachyderms from getting trapped.

So far, three divisions - Angul, Dhenkanal and Sambalpur - have submitted the locations and GPS coordinates of these open wells and funds have been earmarked for them. Dhenkanal has provided GPS coordinates for 600 locations while Angul has furnished the details for over 1,500 points.

Instructions have been issued for immediate survey so that these wells can either be buried or covered. Three different approaches have been suggested. The divisions could bury the abandoned open wells whereas those in use could be covered with a T-shaped structure. The third suggestion involves a three and half feet structure to be kept around the wells so as to prevent the elephants from approaching the spot.

CAMPA funds are going to be used for the creation of these structures and allocations have already been made for Dhenkanal, Angul and Sambalpur.

Source: 'Creating barriers for safety of elephants', *The New Indian Express*, 09/11/17.

### **Rare bacteria in dead elephant in Dhenkanal sparks alarm; permission sought for further investigation**

The discovery of a rare bacteria *Chromobacterium violaceum* in an elephant, which was found dead in May in Dhenkanal, has raised concern over its spread in the region. It is believed to be the first instance in the world of this bacteria having caused the death of a wild elephant. The Centre for Wildlife Health, a specialised unit operating at the College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry (CVS&AH), Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), isolated the rare bacteria after a series of high level investigations in Odisha and outside. It has now sought a further investigation to ascertain if it exists in other areas as well.

The centre, which has developed a state-of-the-art lab to investigate wild animal health, was examining the death of the elephant when it found the animal to have nodules in its spleen and lungs. Initially, it was presumed to

be TB because that is the normal symptom of the disease but a deeper analysis led to the find of *Chromobacterium violaceum*. The bacterium was preserved and gene sequencing was carried out in Bengaluru to arrive at the conclusion. Scientists at the centre have said that the elephant contracted the bacteria from soil but since these are long ranging animals, it was difficult to ascertain the exact location of the pathogen's presence.

It is feared that other mammals - both domestic and wild - could be affected.

Source: Siba Mohanty. 'Rare bacteria in dead elephant sparks alarm', *The New Indian Express*, 16/10/17.

### **High-level team to assess elephant deaths in Similipal TR**

A high-level team, headed by Additional Director General, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Debabrata Swain, will visit Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) to assess the deaths of elephants, which were attributed to anthrax and in some cases elephant endothelial herpes virus (EEHV). The team comprises two chief wildlife wardens, the director, Project Elephant and three veterinarians.

A series of elephant deaths in and around STR were attributed to anthrax in 2016 as well as this year. Wildlife disease experts are also looking at the prevalence of EEHV. Though both the diseases appear similar, only a deeper investigation could zero in on the exact cause. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had submitted a report to the National Tiger Conservation Authority earlier this year about an elephant death after allegations that it was buried in haste in Mayurbhanj. The WII report confirmed that the elephant had contracted anthrax and its disposal was carried out as per protocol.

In the meanwhile, the Centre for Wildlife Health (CWH) at the College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry of Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology is now ready for sensitive molecular tests on wildlife diseases. Set up with

a one-time grant from Central Zoo Authority in 2002, it is now receiving financial assistance from Forest and Environment Department of the state government. The CWH recently reinforced itself with latest equipment and chemicals required for EEHV testing.

Source: Siba Mohanty, 'High-level panel to assess jumbo deaths in Similipal', *The New Indian Express*, 10/10/17.

## 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 that 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 eviction orders of the high court.

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.

## TRIPURA

### NBWL okays diversion of forest land from Trishna WLS for railway line

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared the diversion of 9.94 ha of land from the Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) for a new broad gauge railway line between Agartala and Sabroom. Among the three alignments explored for the construction of the railway line between Udaipur and Sabroom, the NBWL was convinced that the alignment requiring 9.94 ha of sanctuary land was the most practical with least conservation impact and best technical/economic/social viability.

The NBWL has also applied a number of conditions while clearing the diversion. These include keeping a distance of 100 m for fencing or tunneling in the vicinity of the underpass on either side of the track passing through the forest and the ensuring that any steep embankment on either side of the railway line needs to be flattened or has a gentle gradient to prevent wild animals from being trapped on the tracks. The speed of the trains plying through the sanctuary needs to be regulated to below 45 km per hour and there will have to be separate smaller passageways for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians all along the railway tracks when passing through the forest patches.

Source: 'Forestland cleared for railway tracks – Trains to run through Tripura sanctuary', *The Telegraph*, 09/10/17.

## UTTARAKHAND

### **Probe in wildlife case stalled in Corbett TR as IFS officers yet to respond to queries**

The probe into the confiscation of five tiger skins and 130 kg of bones in 2016 from Shyampur in Haridwar forest division is not moving ahead as six Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers are yet to respond to queries of a fact-finding team. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had confirmed that four skins were of tigers from Corbett.

Rajeev Mehta of the NGO 'Operation Eye of The Tiger-India' had requested state forest minister Harak Singh Rawat to order a probe following which a questionnaire was sent to a former director of the tiger reserve, his deputy, the chief wildlife warden of the state, the additional principal chief conservator of forest and the divisional forest officers of Haridwar and Lansdowne.

Mehta had accused chief wildlife warden Digvijay Singh Khati and other forest officers of 'erasing' evidence of poaching. Earlier, additional principal chief conservator of forest Dhananjai Mohan had investigated the case but his report was not 'substantial', according to sources in the forest department. Khati, has meanwhile said that there was no delay at his end and that he had already responded to the questions sent to him.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'Probe in wildlife case stalled as IFS officers yet to respond to queries', *Hindustan Times*, 25/10/17.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### **Blackbuck conservation reserve to come up in Allahabad region**

A wildlife conservation reserve for the blackbuck is to be created over 126 ha of land in the trans-Yamuna region of Allahabad. The Uttar Pradesh state cabinet has agreed to the creation of a Blackbuck Conservation Reserve in the Meja forest division that is known for its rocky, undulating and arid terrain. It is dotted

with Dhak, Mahua, Neem and Acacia trees and also supports nearly 200 species of birds besides animals such as the blackbuck, nilgai, jackal and the striped hyena.

On the initiative of the District Magistrate of Allahabad, who is a keen wildlifer, the National Thermal Power Corporation which runs the Meja power plant has sanctioned an amount of Rs. 1.20 crore under its corporate social responsibility to support the work of the blackbuck habitat through construction of approach roads, waterholes and erection of signages. The district authority has sanctioned funds for setting up solar pumps and establishing an interpretation centre for visiting tourists here.

Source: Omar Rashid. 'Blackbuck conservation reserve to come up in U.P.', *The Hindu* 03/11/17.

### **JFM committees in villages near TRs to be replaced by EDCs**

The Uttar Pradesh (UP) government has decided to dissolve all joint forest management committees (JFMCs) in villages near tiger reserves and replace them with eco-development committees (EDCs). The JFMCs had been formed as a collaborative effort of the forest department (FD) and residents of these villages, who had permission to take out forest produce for their consumption. The EDCs that will replace the JFMCs will be run by the FD to promote 'sustainable practices', and villagers will be completely barred from accessing any forest produce. Directions to this effect were issued in a meeting between UP JFMCs chief director Eva Sharma, and additional principal chief conservator of social forestry, VK Sinha, in early October.

In the case of Pilibhit, the JFMCs had been formed in 2010, before the declaration of the Pilibhit forest division as a tiger reserve in June 2014. Under the management of JFMCs, villagers were allowed to collect forest produce. Now with laws governing tiger reserves prohibiting exploitation of forest produce in any form, the FD has said it is essential to dissolve

the JFMCs. There were 15 JFMCs around the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR), each having nine committee members and office bearers with the residents of villages concerned as general members.

Directions have been issued to form EDCs instead, and villagers would be provided solar stoves, smokeless burners as well as LPG connections as substitute for firewood. Other JFMC activities such as creation of income generating schemes for villagers, would be continued by EDCs. In the initial phase, the FD will select 10 villages around both PTR and the forest region under the command and control of social forestry division, to form EDCs. The divisional forest officer of the tiger reserve and the divisional director of social forestry have been directed to chalk out a micro plan for the EDCs. The members of JFMCs would be given priority in being integral parts of EDCs in view of their working experience.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. 'UP villagers around tiger reserves to be barred from taking forest produce', *The Times of India*, 05/10/17.

## UTTAR PRADESH/ NEPAL

### **Elephants from Nepal's Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve damage crops in Pilibhit district**

Villagers of the Tatargani village located on the Indo-Nepal border said that a herd of 30 to 35 elephants from Nepal's Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve strayed into their village and damaged standing paddy and sugarcane crops over an area of 25 acres. A thatched-roof house was also damaged by the animals. The villagers have also alleged that forest staff of Sampurna Nagar forest range of district Kheri were informed about the marauding wild elephants but they extended no help to the villagers.

However, both, sub divisional magistrate, Puranpur circle, JB Singh, and the commandant of 49<sup>th</sup> battalion of SSB, Dilbag Singh, denied that the herd had caused extensive damage. They said the villagers had fabricated a

false story about massive damage to standing crops by the elephants with an intention of filing claims for compensation.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. 'Villagers claim elephants from Nepal damaged crops, officials say no' *The Times of India*, 15/10/17.

## WEST BENGAL

### **Human-elephant conflict abates in south Bengal; intense in north Bengal**

Information provided by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shows that 32 people were killed by elephants in West Bengal between April and September 2017. 84 had been killed in 2016-17 and that the number was even higher at 112 for the year 2015-16.

The break up suggests that the conflict has abated in south Bengal where the number of deaths has come down from 71 in 2015-16 to 36 in 2016-17 to only 10 in the first half of the current fiscal year. In Bankura district, for instance, the number of human deaths has come down from 35 in 2015-16 to 13 in 2016-17. There were only three deaths for the period April-September 2017.

According to West Bengal Forest Minister, Binay Krishna Barman, a drop in human deaths in the first half of 2017-18 is a result of a number of initiatives of the state government. These include creating plantations of bamboo and Sal in the forests of south Bengal and the setting up of an Elephant Movement Coordination Committee, where updates on the movement of elephant herds are given via bulk SMS alerts. Four vehicles with facilities for tranquillising animals and tracking their movement have also been deployed in south Bengal.

The situation in north Bengal, however, remains unchanged with 41 human deaths in 2015-16, 47 human deaths in 2016-17, and 22 human deaths in the first six months of 2017-18. The state FD recently launched four special vehicles named Airawat for tackling human-

wildlife conflict in north Bengal on lines similar to those in the southern part of the state.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh, 'Casualties increase as humans, jumbos cross paths in West Bengal', *The Hindu*, 15/10/17.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### India to host the next CMS global conference in 2020

India will host the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in the year 2020. The announcement in this regard was made at the CMS COP12 that was held in Manila recently.

Source: 'India to host UN wildlife summit in 2020', *Hindustan Times*, 28/10/17.

### Tracking animals by signs more cost-effective than camera traps: Study

The more recent method of tracking animals in the wild by using camera traps is only as good as the previously followed cost-effective method of identifying them based on footprints and fecal matter, new research has revealed. In fact, results of both types of surveys have been found to be nearly identical, paving the way for a mix of both methods in the future. The new studies were conducted by Wildlife Conservation Society-India Programme, the Centre for Wildlife Studies and the University of Florida-Gainesville.

The scientists point out that direct sighting of animals or from camera trap captures involve greater cost and effort. They studied sloth bears in the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary employing the two methods for monitoring the distribution of the bears in the habitat. The sign survey was conducted along forest and plantation roads and intensively searched for fresh scats and tracks. The scientists felt that surveys of animal signs are more abundant and

easier to find. These findings have important implications for conservation as animal sign surveys are a cheaper data source compared to direct detection methods.

The study (based on a long-term ecological study of tigers) was led by Wildlife Conservation Society scientist Dr. Ullas Karanth and, provides for the first time, a rigorous comparison of two different methods to estimate the proportion of a habitat occupied by sloth bears in a 754 sq km area.

Sloth bears were chosen as a study species as they offered clear advantages in ensuring no false positive detection.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Tracking animals by signs more cost-effective than camera traps: Study', *Deccan Herald*, 04/11/17.

### NGT heading towards appointment crisis

With most of its judicial members and expert members set to retire over the coming months, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) seems to be heading towards a crisis. This comes amid an ongoing legal tangle over the validity of making appointments to various tribunals that has been prompted by a change in the Finance Act (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 5). If the appointments are not made soon, the NGT will be left with only three judicial members and two expert members after February 2018. As per the changes that were brought to the Finance Act, anyone who has held a judicial office for at least 10 years in India would be eligible to apply. Under the NGT Act, only judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts would be considered eligible.

While the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has called for applications to fill five judicial member and seven expert member positions, the southern bench of the NGT in Chennai may face issues from mid-November, as a judicial member and the sole expert member would have retired by then. The southern bench is second only to the principal bench in Delhi in terms of the number of cases filed.



In the meanwhile, there is a concern that the Central government might do away with the NGT or they will interfere with the functioning of the Tribunal, given that they have already tampered with the rules regarding the appointments.

Source: T. K. Rohit. 'Green Tribunal hits appointments hurdle', *The Hindu*, 16/10/17.

### **Future of tigers depends on connected populations, says a study**

Genetically connected tiger populations in Central India, Terai and North-East show high variation and the future of tigers will depend on connected populations only, says a latest study by wildlife scientists and tiger researchers from leading Indian institutes. The said regions are geographically the largest connected forest units with maximum tiger genetic variation.

The study was conducted jointly by tiger genetics labs from across the country, including those at the Wildlife Institute of India, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, National Centre for Biological Sciences-Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Kerala Veterinary & Agricultural Sciences University, and Aaranyak.

Tigers in India have been divided into three genetic units. One unit includes Ranthambore in the north-west, the second unit comprise tigers from Terai, North-East and Central India, and third unit includes tigers from Southern Indian reserves. The findings suggest that the second unit (Central India, Terai & North-East) was geographically the largest and had maximum genetic variation. The third (southern Indian) unit had intermediate genetic diversity. The results suggest that inbreeding or mating between close relatives could threaten the small and isolated tiger population of Ranthambore.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Central India region has highest tiger genetic variation, says study', *The Times of India*, 04/10/17.

### **71 tiger deaths in India in 2017 thus far**

Information released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority indicates that 71 tigers were killed in the country in the first nine months of 2017. The highest number of 17 deaths were reported from Madhya Pradesh (MP), followed by 14 in Karnataka, 12 each in Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, six in Uttar Pradesh, four in Assam, two each in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and one each in Odisha and Rajasthan.

Of the total 100 tiger deaths in India in 2016, 30 were reported from Madhya Pradesh. It has been pointed out that states like Karnataka, Maharashtra and Odisha that have a sizable number of big cats have formed the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF), while MP is yet to do it. The state principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) (wildlife) has also refuted the charge of wide-spread poaching in the state saying that MP was an ideal state in terms of wildlife management in the country.

On the formation of STPF, the PCCF said the state government has to take a call on it.

Source: 'MP loses 17 tigers in 2017: NTCA', *Business Line*, 07/10/17.



# *Important Bird Areas Update*



## **ANDHRA PRADESH**

### **Early arrival of pelicans at Kolleru**

Signaling an early start to the annual breeding season, nearly 50,000 spot-billed pelicans or grey pelicans were counted at the lake's Atapaka bird sanctuary in mid-October. The authorities have chalked out a plan to develop an artificial pond at Munuguluru to make the area more attractive for the birds. They are also working with the local communities to avoid poaching of the birds.

Source: T. Appala Naidu, 'Winged visitors call in early', *The Hindu*, 15/10/17.

## **GUJARAT**

### **Symposium on vulture conservation at Gandhinagar**

A symposium on vulture conservation was held in Gandhinagar recently as part of the wildlife week celebrations organized by the Wildlife Circle of the Gujarat Forest Department. Those participating included 44 NGO representatives, 16 researchers, 12 veterinary doctors, 20 nature enthusiasts and wildlife lovers, six scientists, representatives from state level Panjrapole management body, 50 government officers from different departments and two representatives from the Parsi Panchayat.

Addressing the audience in the inaugural session, Dr. Chris Bowden, head of the vulture conservation group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and head of the vulture program of the Royal Society for Protection of Birds strongly advocated the ban of harmful non-steroidal anti-

inflammatory drugs like ketoprofen, aceclofenac and nimosulide. The gathering was also addressed by Dr. Vibhu Prakash of the Bombay Natural History Society.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, 'Ban of harmful NSAIDs sought for vulture conservation', *The Times of India*, 09/10/17

## **KARNATAKA**

### **ESZ notified for Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary**

An eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) has been notified for the Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary in Ramanagara district. An area from 1.3 m to 1.8 km from the boundary of the sanctuary has been included in the ESZ, the total area of which is 7.08 km<sup>2</sup>. It covers a total of six villages and one hamlet.

The zonal master plan for the ESZ is expected to be ready within two years and forest officials said it will help regulate development in the marked area. Further, a lot of harmful activities like mining, stone quarrying, and setting up of pollution-causing industries will be prohibited, while commercial establishment of hotels, resorts and construction activities will be regulated. The use of Diclofenac, establishment of meat processing units and rock climbing and other allied activities will also be prohibited in the ESZ area.

The Ramdevara Temple inside the sanctuary attracts thousands of devotees and tourists during the festival season while the rocky hills attract frequent climbers and trespassers. Recent research has revealed that the high tourist traffic to the temple and people visiting on their bikes has been a major cause of disturbance to the birds here.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary is now an eco-sensitive zone', *The New Indian Express*, 04/10/17.

## MANIPUR

### Amur Falcon festival observed in Manipur

The third edition of Amur Falcon festival was organised by Rain Forest Club under the aegis of Western Forest Division, Tamenglong. The local MLA, Samuel Jendai, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest WPR & Training, Dr. Lokho Puni, and Chief Conservator of Forest, S Dhananjay Singh, attended the inaugural function of the festival.

Addressing the gathering, the MLA said conserving the Amur Falcon was not an easy job as killing and poaching of the bird was a source of livelihood in some areas in the past. Urging the forest department to restrict the killing of all kinds of birds, he assured that he will give utmost interest to the festival and be a defender of the birds.

Source: Sobhupati Samom. 'Amur Falcon festival observed in Manipur', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/11/17.

## MADHYA PRADESH

### GIB sanctuary in Shivpuri may be shut down

The Great Indian Bustard (GIB) Bird Sanctuary in Shivpuri is likely to be shut down as the bird for which it was notified has not been seen here for many years now. The chief conservator of forests, Shivpuri, said that all options are open before the government, which has to take a final decision. A committee comprising the collector and other officials has been constituted to advise the government in the matter.

As the reports of the closure of the sanctuary have gained momentum, locals are pressuring the administration to return their land as the sanctuary had been created primarily using private and revenue land.

10 GIBs had been reported from the sanctuary in 2005. The number decreased to

three in 2008 and to one in 2011. No GIBs have been seen here since 2013.

Source: Mithilesh Pandey. 'State govt has no plans to revive GIB sanctuary', *Free Press Journal*, 08/10/17.

## RAJASTHAN

### Houbara Bustards arrive early this year

The Houbara Bustard, locally known as *Tilore*, has arrived early this year in the Indian side of the Thar desert. A few of these birds were seen at the Sam sand dunes near Jaisalmer by forest officials in early October, which is much earlier than their regular arrival.

Houbara bustard numbers are dwindling fast due to falconry being practiced in Pakistan and other areas of its territory. Its meat is considered a delicacy and falcons are also used to hunt them as a sport. The birds are also poached in their wintering areas of Jaisalmer and Barmer.

Source: Kartikey Dev Singh. 'Western desertland welcomes Houbara Bustard a little early', *DNA*, 03/10/17.

### ICF to take up research on Sarus cranes in Rajasthan

The International Crane Foundation (ICF), which has been monitoring Sarus cranes in the Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh districts of Rajasthan for the last four years, now plans to expand its research and conservation work across the state. This has been prompted by reports from conservationists, wildlife activists and photographers that the population of the Sarus was dwindling in Kota, Banswara, Dungarpur and other districts. In Kota district for instance, the population of the bird is said to have come down from 80-90 three decades ago, to less than 10 today.

The population of the Sarus cranes in Rajasthan was estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000 in the 90s and early 2000s. The current numbers are not known and the ICF intends to

get more information on the present population, habitat, distribution and factors affecting the bird as part of the research initiative.

Increased human disturbance following agricultural activity, encroachment on wetlands and destruction of eggs by agricultural workers

are believed to be some of the reasons behind the decline.

Source: Aabshar H Quazi. 'Global body to study dwindling sarus count in Rajasthan', *Hindustan Times*, 03/10/17.

### The *Protected Area Update* needs your support

The *Protected Area Update* is now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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 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 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 thankful 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 and we seek your help in this endeavor. Please do consider 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](mailto:psekhsaria@gmail.com) or mail us at the editorial address.

### INVITING COLLABORATIONS

The *Protected Area Update*, which is now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.

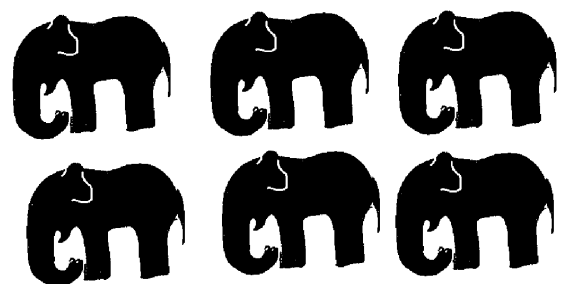
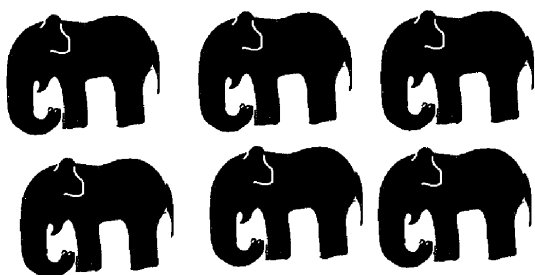
Please write to the editor at [psekhsaria@gmail.com](mailto:psekhsaria@gmail.com) with ideas, queries and suggestions on how these collaborations could be made to work and for specific proposals that are of interest to you.

## List of recent conflict incidents involving elephants

No.	Date, Source	State, Area	Details
	14/09/17, <i>The Shillong Times</i>	Meghalaya, Tikrikilla, West Garo Hills	Two women were killed by elephants in Nayapara village, Pedalbola
	19/09/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Uttarakhand, Ranipur, Haridwar	Four people of the Labour Colony, near the BHEL township of Haridwar were injured in two different incidents of attacks by elephants.
	22/09/17, <i>Eenadu India</i>	Latu village, Palamau TR	A full-grown elephant was grievously injured after it stepped on a landmine in Latu village in the buffer of the TR. The animal died eventually.
	22/09/17, <i>The Hindu</i>	Andhra Pradesh, Koundinya WLS, Chittoor dist.	A 32 year-old man from Chettapana village of Palamaner mandal was found dead in Koundinya Wildlife Sanctuary. He is believed to have entered the forest with his cows and encountered a herd of elephants.
	15/10/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Bihar, Tatarganj vil., Pilibhit dist.	A herd of 30-35 elephants migrating from Nepal's Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve damaged standing paddy and sugarcane over 25 acres in Tatarganj village on the Indo-Nepal border. Officials however said that the damage caused was not as extensive as claimed by the villagers.
	25/10/17, <i>The Tribune</i>	Uttarakhand, Udham Singh Nagar and Haridwar dists	A man was trampled to death in the Rudrapur area of Udham Singh Nagar district; in another incident in Haridwar district a forest guard, a police man and a home guard jawan were injured by an elephant in the BHEL campus.
	26/10/17, <i>Deccan Chronicle</i>	Boundary of Nagarahole NP	Blood stains on spiky railway fences surrounding the Nagarahole National Park suggest elephants are being injured by the spikes erected to prevent them from leaving the park and entering adjoining villages and farm lands.
	30/10/17, <i>Hindustan Times</i>	Uttarakhand, Roorkee	An adult tusker was electrocuted when it contacted a high-tension wire near Roorkee; a fortnight earlier a herd of elephants blocked traffic on the main Rishikesh-Dehradun road.
	05/11/17, <i>The New Indian Express</i>	Odisha, Patasahi Kumarposh vil, Sundargarh dist.	A herd of elephants destroyed the boundary walls of a police station and a primary school and ransacked the kitchen of a CRPF camp.
	7/11/17, <i>The Assam Tribune</i>	Boluk Dapa, Sivasagar dist.	An adult female elephant was killed near the Panidihing WLS when it was struck by a bullet fired by a forest guard to chase away the herd damaging standing crops
	10/11/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Tamil Nadu, Thalavady, near Sathyaman-galam forests	A priest at the Ayyappan temple in village Aruvadi was crushed to death by an elephant. He was killed when trying to drive away a herd that was destroying the ragi crop on his 1.5 acre farm. Rs. 50,000 was provided as compensation to the family.

14/11/17, <i>The Telegraph</i>	Assam, Bijulee TE, Numaligarh, Golaghat dist.	A female elephant from the Nambor Sanctuary was electrocuted after it came in contact with a high-tension line in the tea estate. A FIR was filed against the Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd. for alleged negligence.
16/11/17, <i>The Pioneer</i>	Jharkhand, Bhawandi vil, Ichagarh	A 53 year-old man was killed by elephants from a herd of 13. Four herds of four to 26 elephants have been destroying crops and houses in this area of the Seraikela-Kharsawan district of the state.
17/11/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Jharkhand, Kamdara, Gumla dist.	Two herders from Aurangabad, Bihar, who were camping near a village in Kamdara were crushed by a wild elephant.
17/11/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Jharkhand, Ranchi dist.	Two people were killed in two different incidents on the same evening by an elephant. The first was in Silli block and the other, an hour later, in Sonahatu block. A compensation of Rs. 50,000 each was announced for families of the deceased.
21/11/17, <i>The Times of India</i>	Jharkhand, Mahuataad, Nawadih block	A 50 year-old man was trampled to death while watching a herd of 18 elephants that had entered from Hazaribagh. The incident occurred when the elephants ran amok following stone throwing by a villager.
23/11/17, ndtv.com	West Bengal, Lataguri forests, Jalpaiguri dist.	Man who stepped out of his car to take a photo of a wild elephant was trampled to death by the animal.
19/11/17, <i>Indian Express</i>	Assam, Amchang WLS	Two elephants from a herd of 15 trying to cross the railway line near the Amchang WLS were killed when hit by a train on the route. The incident occurred on the night of 19 November.
25/11/17, <i>India Today</i>	Odisha, Goshani block, Gajapati dist.	A herd of seven elephants destroyed standing paddy crop. It was believed to have migrated from the Lakheri Elephant Reserve via Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh.
26/11/17, <i>The Telegraph</i>	Assam, Borkhelia Village, Meleng, Jorhat district	A two-year-old male elephant, part of a herd of 50, was electrocuted in a paddy field in the village. The herd had been creating damage to crops for a number of days.

Note: This is only an indicative (and not a comprehensive) listing of such incidents culled out from different news sources.



**A Decade Ago**  
**Protected Area Update 70, December 2007**

**JAMMU & KASHMIR**

***Hangul* population between 117 and 190**

A recent *Hangul* population estimation carried out by the Jammu & Kashmir Department of Wildlife Protection and subsequent analysis by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has put the *hangul* population in the Dachigam National Park between 117 and 190.

A study published in 2005 has suggested that the *Hangul* population was between 250 and 300 animals (*PA Update* Vol. XI, No. 4, August 2005) while an even earlier survey of 2004 had put the number at 140 (*PA Update* 47)

According to the researchers the major threats to the animal include disease transmissions from the sheep and goats, habitat degradation due to the collection of firewood, small timber and palatable foliage for cattle by local people, livestock and the grazers who camp in the upper Dachigam during summer, harassment by sheep dogs, frequent uncontrolled fires, lack of connectivity between the relic populations and the main (Dachigam) population and predation by the leopard (see *PA Update* Vol XIII, No. 1, February, 2007).

It has been suggested that the upper Dachigam area should be made free from livestock and human use to enable the animal to use its traditional summer range and not remain confined to lower Dachigam only. The forest department is also said to have prepared a plan for *Hangul* conservation. It envisages in-situ breeding of *Hangul* and restoration of its summer habitats in Dachigam National Park and conservation of its relic habitations like Khanmoh and Wangath. Approval for the plan is awaited.

The Central Government is reported to have also agreed in principle to a Rs. 8.6 crore project for *hangul* conservation from the next financial year. Setting up Project *Hangul* is also being considered.

Source: Arif Shafi Wani. 'Kashmiri *Hangul* faces extinction threat', [http://www.greaterkashmir.com/full\\_story.asp?Date=22\\_11\\_2007&ItemID=31&cat=1](http://www.greaterkashmir.com/full_story.asp?Date=22_11_2007&ItemID=31&cat=1)

Arif Shafi Wani. 'Govt. mulls action plan for *hangul* conservation', [www.GreaterKashmir.com](http://www.GreaterKashmir.com), 24/11/07.

**KARNATAKA**

**Elephant population dips in Karnataka**

A census carried out in the month of May has revealed that the elephant population in Karnataka has come down from 4,347 in 2005 to 4,035 now. This figure is also considerably lower than the 5,800 elephants counted here in 2002. Experts have, however, said that there is no reason to be worried because numbers tend to vary as elephants continually migrate from one state to another

The Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) conducted the present study using sample block counting, line transects count, waterhole count and the block count method.

The census was carried out in 23 forest divisions, where the ANCF, using densities, calculated the number of elephants sighted and divided it by the total population in all divisions.

According to the final report there were 1,005 elephants in the Bandipur NP while 692 and 591 elephants were counted in the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary and the Nagarhole NP respectively. The overall male-female ratio for all divisions together is 1:2.1, where the sex ratio at sub-adult class showed a higher skew towards females than in the adult class.

The census was conducted with Rs. 15 lakh that was sanctioned to the state by the Centre under Project Elephant.

Source: Ashwini YS. 'Elephant population dips in Karnataka', *The Times of India*, 24/10/07.

## PERSPECTIVE

### **Envisioning Gurgaon's Aravali Biodiversity Park**

The Aravali Biodiversity Park (ABDP) is a city forest developed by the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) and Iamgurgaon (IAG), a non-profit, citizen movement. Until recently, this 380-acre rocky land in the Aravalis was mined for quartzite stone. Today, there eight stone crushers lie silent after the Supreme Court banned mining and stone crushing here in 2004.

In the new millennium, Gurgaon was developing fast, and any open, unclaimed land was either being encroached upon or used for dumping. The area earmarked for the park faced a similar fate. It was littered with all kinds of waste—construction and development, industrial and domestic. The IAG team spotted this degraded land and proposed to the MCG, in 2009, to convert it into a park.

I was contacted by IAG team to guide the plantation work at the park in 2010. My first visit to this fissured land was quite depressing. The site itself was bleak, almost forbidding. A former mining site for quartzite rock and its gravelly degrade, known as 'badarpur', there was hardly any cover except for some straggling exotic invasive vilaiti keekar (*Prosopis juliflora*). Many scars of extraction and stone-crushing were still visible even though mining had ceased several years ago. It was April, and there were no grasses or green shrubs to relieve the bleak picture. My heart sank a little as I walked around, taking it all in.

In the earliest proposals and drawings, the park was visualized as a 'bio-preserve', a water conservation zone and a recreation area. Visitors would choose between different kinds of trails – a recreational trail, for instance, laid out with restaurants, a nursery, flower park, butterfly enclosure and amphi-theatre. An ecology trail would lead through a biodiversity interpretation zone, geography plaza, geomorphology garden and sustainability park. A heritage trail would lead to historic and cultural sites and a sacred meditation grove. And so on. It sounded very grand and ambitious.

In my opinion the land should tell its story of healing – of rewilding, a journey of transformation from a mining site to becoming a

forest. With this thought in mind, I started raising questions about sustainability, character and resources. Taking the team members to Aravali wildscapes and educating them on forests of the Aravali was very helpful in rethinking the vision of the park. We collectively realized that it was important to bring in forests into the cityscape and changed the vision for the Park accordingly - *to rewild the fissured mined land and bring back the Aravali forests into the city of Gurgaon.*

Today, the Park showcases more than 300 species of plants, many of them reintroductions to Haryana. With its diverse microhabitats, the park has become a haven for 175 species of birds, making it one of the richest birding habitats in Delhi's National Capital Region. Animals such as the neelgai, jackal, common palm civet, porcupine, hare, various snakes, lizards and skinks are thriving here and that is even more true of butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs, aphids, ants and spiders.

- **Vijay Dhasmana** is an ecological gardener who specializes in 'rewilding' projects. He has been curating a 380 acre site called the Aravali Biodiversity Park in Gurgaon, Haryana and is presently engaged in rewilding projects in Rajasthan and Delhi/NCR.  
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