

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIV, No. 1

February 2018 (No. 131)

## LIST OF CONTENTS

### **EDITORIAL**

**On the challenges of reporting correctly** 3

### NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

#### **Arunachal Pradesh**

MP seeks snow leopard survey in the state

New moth discovered in Tale Valley WLS

New species of frog discovered in Tale Valley WLS

#### **Assam**

Five elephants mowed down by train near Balipara in Sonitpur dist

Hand raised rhino calves from Kaziranga released in Manas NP

408 houses razed for alleged encroachment in the Amchang WLS

#### **Chattisgarh**

199 people killed in elephant attacks in Chattisgarh in five years

State to use Rs. 250 cr from CAMPA fund to build water bodies in forests

#### **Goa**

State gives a go-ahead to four-laning of highway through Molem NP

#### **Gujarat**

Foreigners can soon book Gir visit online

#### **Himachal Pradesh**

Snow leopard spotted in Tirthan Valley of Great Himalayan NP

#### **Kerala**

New frog species described from Malabar WLS

#### **Kerala/Tamil Nadu**

SC seeks reply in car parking project inside Periyar Tiger Reserve

#### **Madhya Pradesh**

Two phases of the Ken-Betwa river-linking project to be clubbed; costs to escalate, fresh approvals needed

#### **Maharashtra**

Major decisions at SBWL meeting

Maharashtra to create special intelligence network to solve wildlife crime cases

Tadoba tigress walks 110 km to reach Umred-Karhandla

Major changes proposed in tourist booking system for Tadoba Andhari TR

State lost 63 sq km of forestland in the last three years

#### **Odisha**

Rs. 26 crore plan for repopulating Satkosia TR with tigers

16 held for 'unlawful' fishing in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary

#### **Punjab**

Ghazials re-introduced into the Beas upstream of the Harike WLS

#### **Rajasthan**

Five PAs to be equipped with hi-tech wildlife surveillance systems

Ban on river sand mining delays plan to relocate tigers to Mukundra Hills TR

Objections raised over use of CAMPA funds for village relocation from Mukundra Hills TR

#### **Tamil Nadu**

Coimbatore office of APCCF, Project Tiger shifted to Chennai; NTCA seeks explanation

#### **Telangana**

All vacant posts in FD to be filled up soon

#### **Uttarakhand**

NGT seeks information on measures to prevent disease in Himalayan blue sheep in Gangotri NP

Corbett TR to retire old elephants from active service

#### **West Bengal**

Buxa TR to get a dozen tigers from Assam

Two leopards radio-collared in North Bengal

Tiger camera trapped in Neora Valley NP

<b><u>NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA</u></b>	<b>15</b>	Restrictions for picnicking around Deepor Beel WLS	
40 leopards killed in January 2018; one third poached		<b>Kerala</b>	
Dogs attack around 80 species of wildlife; many around PAs		Cinereous vulture sighted in Wayanad WLS	
NGT functioning at half its strength		<b>Manipur</b>	
Pangolin scales, leopard and tiger parts, rhino horn most traded wildlife products		Black-headed bunting sighted in Manipur for the first time	
UP tops list of wildlife crimes in the country; Rajasthan 2nd		<b>Rajasthan</b>	
95 tiger deaths in India in 2017; 25 in Madhya Pradesh: NTCA		GIB dies after hitting high tension wire in Pokhran	
Withdraw exemption in Section 40 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; protect elephants: NGO		<b>Protected Areas and the FRA</b>	<b>20</b>
New guidelines for railway projects in forest lands		<b>National News</b>	
No forest clearance needed for projects within 16 km of international border with Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal		<b>Madhya Pradesh</b>	
		Panna TR	
		<b>Odisha</b>	
		Similipal TR	
		<b>Readers Write</b>	<b>22</b>
		<b>From the Archives</b>	<b>23</b>
		<b>PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>24</b>
<b><u>IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE</u></b>	<b>19</b>	'How to be a fig'?	
<b>Assam</b>			

### **Protected Area Update**

Vol. XXIV, No. 1, February 2018 (No. 131)

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Produced by

**The Documentation and Outreach Centre**

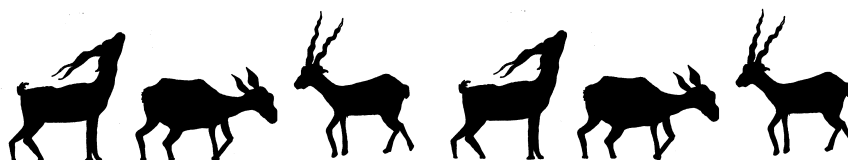
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### **Publication of the PA Update has been supported by**

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

**Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, C/o FES**

**Donations from a number of individual supporters**

## On the challenges of reporting correctly

It is not very often that the *PA Update* gets letters and communications from its readers. There is no newsletter without a reader and it is very welcome when readers write in. And the letter the *PA Update* received a few weeks ago (see Pg. 22) is particularly important because it is a reminder of the primary purpose of a newsletter such as this one and of its responsibility towards accuracy in reporting, even interpreting.

By reporting what has already appeared in the news media, the *PA Update* performs a double function. The more obvious one is of informing its readership of the various developments in and around PAs and wildlife conservation from across the country. In doing this and in the way it is done, it is also a reflection of the world of news itself. *The PA Update* is both a mirror and a lens through which the world of wildlife, of conservation and issues around PAs are sometimes reflected and sometimes refracted for its readership. It shines a light on the state of affairs on the field and at the same time also a light on how the media, that key channel of information and insight for the public, understands this field.

There are various transactions and translations that take place before the news actually reaches the reader, and the case the letter mentioned above points to, is an excellent example of this. There is a research project that generates a research report. This is then translated and adapted to a briefer synopsis (or a press release or a policy brief) to increase outreach and in response to the often-asked question - who will read such a large report? This briefer account of a much larger report then goes through another round of interpretation and translation as a newspaper or some media outlet puts out an even smaller account of what the research has to say. The reach might increase

because a widely accessed news source reaches out to a few million, but that is at the cost of depth and nuance. This is perhaps an inevitable trade-off and as much a challenge to the news industry as it is to, say, the smaller community of wildlife researchers in this case.

The question before the *PA Update* then is quite a challenging one. At what point in the news cycle does it locate itself? Should it reflect the original work of the researcher? Or should it reflect the interpretation that has already reached out to a larger mass through the world of news? There are both logistical and interpretational issues here. Can every large report or the primary source indeed be accessed? Even if it can, what is the guarantee that errors in understanding, interpreting and reporting will not creep in?

Clearly there is a problem with reporting inaccuracies, certainly with perpetuating them. But how does one know considering the huge barrage of information one has to deal with and also that a *PA Update* kind of newsletter only has limited capabilities? Is it possible on the other hand, that by reporting what the media says, there is an opportunity to 'call out' the inaccuracies and the misinterpretations more effectively than might be otherwise possible?

That of course, is completely dependent on the readership, which is precisely why this letter from a reader who wishes to remain unnamed is so welcome and also so important!

PS: And as we go to press there is this amazing statement that has been made by a minister in the present government of India. For him evolution did not happen because none of our ancestors saw an ape transform into a human. Darwin was wrong and so is the idea of evolution. Now what can a newspaper, a little newsletter or an individual reader really say about that?



## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### MP seeks snow leopard survey in the state

Arunachal Pradesh Lok Sabha MP Ninong Ering has requested for a survey to find the number of Snow leopards in the state. The request follows photographic evidence of snow leopard presence at Thembang in West Kameng district that was obtained recently during a study of the animal by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6). Ering, in his letter on December 4, has also requested the minister to initiate Project Snow Leopard in Arunachal Pradesh.

The state-wide survey carried out by WWF-India in collaboration with the state forest department started in March 2017, focused on unexplored areas. It relied on the knowledge of the community members to understand the current distribution of snow leopards and other large mammals in the region.

The MP's letter has also sought publishing of a vision document with regard to the country's participation in 'The Bishkek Declaration 2017', which seeks to conserve the snow leopard and its ecosystem.

Source: 'Arunachal MP seeks survey on snow leopards in the state', *The Indian Express*, 09/12/17.

#### New moth discovered in Tale Valley WLS

*Elcysma ziroensis*, a new moth species, has been described from the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). This moth was first photographed in 2010 by Punyo Chada, an avid nature lover and member of the NGO, Ngunu Ziro. It was then spotted and photographed for the second time during the North East India Butterfly Meet in September, 2016, in Pange, Tale Valley WLS, by Chada and Monsoon Jyoti Gogoi.

The moth has been named the Apatani Glory after the community living in the Ziro valley. This discovery was announced in a recent issue of the journal, *Threatened Species*.

Source: 'New moth species discovered', *The Arunachal Times*, 09/01/18.

#### New species of frog discovered in Tale Valley WLS

A new species of frog, now named the *Odorrana arunachalensis*, has been recently described from the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

*Odorrana* – commonly known as the odorous frog – is a genus of true frogs from East Asia and surrounding regions including India. The medium-sized green frog adapted for a life in torrential waters of the state was discovered by a team of scientists from the Zoological Survey of India led by Bhaskar Saikia, Bikramjit Sinha and Ilona Jacinta Kharkongor. The presence of a black band-like mark between the eyes is a distinguishing character that separates this species from all the other frog species of this genus. The species is sighted during the wet season, from April to September.

It inhabits moss and fern covered rocky stratum along hill streams in mixed wet tropical forest type. Currently, they are reported from within and from the outskirts of the TVWS but are expected to be found in a wider range due to the availability of similar habitats in other parts of the state as well.

Source: 'New Frog Species Identified in Arunachal', [www.northeasttoday.in](http://www.northeasttoday.in), 23/12/17.

### ASSAM

#### Five elephants mowed down by train near Balipara in Sonitpur dist.

Five elephants were killed on the rail tracks off Bam Gaon tea estate under Chariduar police station near Balipara in Sonitpur district. The dead included four females and a male, besides

an unborn calf. The five were part of a group of seven that were crossing the railway track in-between Rangapara station and Dhalaibeel of Biswanath district when the Guwahati-Naharlagun Intercity Express hit them. The wild elephants were regularly frequenting the area after coming out from the Nameri National Park and had scattered in various areas of the Chariduar circle.

Reacting to the incident, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) chief public relations officer (CPRO) said that the incident happened at Km 135 between stations Balipara and Dhalaibeel. This is a non-notified area as the elephant corridors have been marked at Km 131 and Km 144. The CPRO further said that a group of about 30 elephants entered the railway track by breaking down the barrier at a level crossing. By that time the train was already in the section and it was impossible to stop it. Even though Whatsapp groups were in place there was no information about the movement of the elephant herd near the track. The Rangiya division has now imposed a speed restriction of non-stop 30 kmph at the site of the accident at Km 135.

This incident comes close on the heels of the death of two elephants in a similar manner near Thakurkuchi rail station on the outskirts of Guwahati on November 18, bringing the total number of train accident-induced elephant fatalities in the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) Zone for the year 2017 at 10.

Source: '5 elephants mowed down by train near Balipara', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/12/17.

### **361 animals lost to floods, 40 in road accidents, in Kaziranga NP in 2017**

The Kaziranga National Park lost 361 animals, including 31 rhinos, to floods in the year 2017. Another 40 were killed in road accidents on national highway (NH) – 37 that runs through the park.

The hog deer was the biggest casualty, with 282 dying in floods and 14 in road

accidents. The park also lost a tiger, 16 sambar and eight buffalos to floods in 2017.

An estimated 130 rhinos are reported to have died in floods here between 2002 and 2017

Source: Malavika Vyawahare. 'Kaziranga lost 31 rhinos as 361 animals drowned in 2017 floods', *Hindustan Times*, 01/01/18.

### **Hand raised rhino calves from Kaziranga released in Manas NP**

Three female rhino calves that were rescued during the devastating monsoon floods that hit Kaziranga National Park (NP) in 2016, and subsequently hand-raised at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC), were recently relocated to the Manas NP. The calves had been rescued from floodwaters in the Haldhibari, Deopani and Sildubi areas adjacent to Kaziranga through the efforts of local people, the Assam Forest Department (FD), and CWRC's Mobile Veterinary Service unit.

They have been shifted to a pre-release boma in Manas and, after a period of careful monitoring, will be released into the wild.

The CWRC is a wildlife rescue, care and rehabilitation facility jointly run by Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the FD. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 6; Vol. XXI, No. 5; Vol. XX, No. 3; Vol. XIX, No. 5; Vol XVIII, Nos. 6 & 2; Vol. XIV, Nos. 6 & 5; and Vol. XIII, Nos. 5 & 3)

Source: 'Hand-raised rhino calves to be released in wild', [www.uniindia.com](http://www.uniindia.com), 05/01/18.

### **408 houses razed for alleged encroachment in the Amchang WLS**

A three day eviction drive by the Assam Forest Department (FD) razed 408 houses for alleged encroachment in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The drive that was carried out from the 27-29 November was in response to a court order and was stopped following a stay order issued by the Gauhati High Court.

As per the notification that was issued by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2017, there were 37 villages that were listed as revenue villages as part of the ecosensitive zone and the residents who faced illegal eviction mentioned that their houses were part of these revenue villages.

Source: 'In Assam, a massive eviction drive throws new light on old pressures on land', [www.Scroll.in](http://www.Scroll.in), 1/12/2017

## CHATTISGARH

### 199 people killed in elephant attacks in Chattisgarh in five years

199 people have been killed in elephant attacks in Chattisgarh in the last five years. 7,000 houses and crops spread over 32,952.891 ha were also damaged in this period and the state government disbursed a total compensation of Rs. 39,49,85,650 to the victims in this connection. This information was provided in the state assembly recently by the Chhattisgarh forest minister, Mahesh Gagda. He also noted that 17 districts were affected by these issues and that several measures were being undertaken to deal with the situation.

Awareness campaigns comprising street plays, rallies, workshops are being conducted. Villagers are being informed about the movement and location of wild elephants in their areas through Akashvani centres. An elephant rescue and rehabilitation centre is also being set up in Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary for the training of wild tuskers who frequently stray into human settlements.

Source: 'Elephant attacks kill 199 people in 5 years in Chhattisgarh', [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in), 21/12/17.

### State to use Rs. 250 cr from CAMPA fund to build water bodies in forests

The Chhattisgarh government has approved a Rs. 250 crore plan for the construction of over

1300 water conservation structures in the state's forests. These will include stop dams, canals, small ponds and waterholes and will be built in forest areas under the jurisdiction of the Van Prabhandan Samitis (forest management committees). The structures will be constructed through several schemes including the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee scheme, and with funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).

In the first phase of the project, water conservation facilities will be developed in Raigarh forest division under Bilaspur forest circle, which is experiencing serious human-elephant conflict. The water bodies, it is hoped, will provide relief to elephants and stop them from moving out of the forests and will at the same time also act as a source of irrigation for the local farmers.

Source: 'Rs 250cr plan to build water bodies in Chhattisgarh forests', [www.indiatoday.intoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.intoday.in), 25/11/17.

## GOA

### State gives a go-ahead to four-laning of highway through Molem NP

The Goa state wildlife advisory board has given an in-principle approval to four-laning of the 13 km Anmod section of national highway 4A running through the Molem National Park (NP). The board has also agreed to the double-track of the south western railway (SWR) rail track through the Western Ghats in the state.

The decisions were taken at a recent meeting chaired by chief minister Manohar Parrikar in his capacity as the state forest minister. Parrikar said that the other highway through Chorla Ghat, which also is part of an eco-sensitive zone, could be used for light vehicular traffic after the broadening of the Anmod section.

On the issue of declaring some species of wildlife as vermin, Parrikar told the board members that no wild animals would be shot.

Source: 'Nod for four-laning of NH in Western Ghats', *The Times of India*, 17/12/17.

## GUJARAT

### Foreigners can soon book Gir visit online

Foreign tourists will soon be able to book online their visit to the Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. The forest department is in talks with several banks to facilitate payment in international currencies on its safari booking website [www.girlion.com](http://www.girlion.com) for the same.

This facility, it is hoped, will make the online process easier for foreign tourists and result in increased numbers visiting the park.

Source: 'Foreigners can book Gir visit online', *The Times of India*, 09/01/18.

## HIMACHAL PRADESH

### Snow leopard spotted in Tirthan Valley of Great Himalayan NP

A snow leopard has been spotted for the first time in the Tirthan Valley of the Great Himalayan National Park, in Kullu district. The picture was taken by a trap camera installed by Megha Bandyopadhyay, a research scholar of the Wildlife Institute of India. This has also been confirmed by the divisional forest officer of the national park.

Source: 'Snow leopard spotted in Tirthan Valley for the first time', *Business Standard*, 10/12/17.

## KERALA

### New frog species described from Malabar WLS

A new frog species has been discovered in the Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). It has been named as Mewa Singh's Night Frog *Nyctibatrachus mewasinghi*. The paper describing the frog was published in the December 2017 issue of *The Journal of Threatened Taxa*.

The frog is light brown in colour with an off-white underside and sports faintly

wrinkled skin with prominent granular projections. Since many frogs in the genus *Nyctibatrachus* look similar, scientists from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, and the Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, used both physical characteristics as well as genetic methods to confirm the frog as a new species. Using tissue samples of 10 collected specimens, the scientists analysed portions of two genes and found that it varied enough from other closely-related species to make the Mewa Singh's night frog a different species. They also found that the frog's genetically closest relatives are the Athirappally night frog (found south of the Palakkad Gap in Thrissur and Idukki) and the Kempholey night frog (found in the northern Western Ghats of Kerala and Karnataka).

The new frog is currently known only from Peruvannamuzhi in the Malabar WLS, where the scientists found it in a small stream running along the Peruvannamuzhi dam.

This discovery takes the number of frogs in the *Nyctibatrachus* genus to 36.

Source: 'Malabar sanctuary home to new night frog species', *The Hindu*, 30/12/17.

## KERALA/ TAMIL NADU

### SC seeks reply in car parking project inside Periyar TR

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to respond to Tamil Nadu's plea against a decision of the National Green Tribunal allowing Kerala to go ahead with a car-parking project in the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) near the Mullaperiyar dam. A bench comprising Justices AK Sikri and Ashok Bhushan also sought a response from Kerala on the plea and said no permanent construction should be made while the plea was being heard. It, however, said its order would not prevent Kerala from erecting a temporary structure in connection with the parking.

The Tamil Nadu government had approached the apex court alleging that the car parking facility was being built in the core area

of the PTR near the reservoir. It had claimed that there was no permission from the Centre for the same and that it was also being constructed in violation of the relevant laws. It has also claimed that the project was located in the area leased to the state. It stated further that the project would affect the catchment and water spread area of the dam and consequently, the water of the reservoir, which is used for drinking and irrigation purposes by people of five districts.

Source: 'Car parking project in tiger reserve: SC seeks Centre's reply', *The New Indian Express*, 04/12/17.

## MADHYA PRADESH

### **Two phases of the Ken-Betwa river-linking project to be clubbed; costs to escalate, fresh approvals needed**

There is a proposal to club phase I and phase II of the Ken-Betwa river linking project leading to cost escalations and also needing fresh approvals. In September last year, the water resources minister Nitin Gadkari had announced that phase-I of the project will be launched by 2017-end. His ministry is now reworking the details and a proposal for extra funding has been sent to the finance ministry.

In July, Madhya Pradesh (MP) had proposed the inclusion of Kotha Barrage, Bina Complex and Lower Orr Dam in phase-I. Earlier, these projects were parts of phase-II. The cost for the first phase was estimated at Rs. 18,000 crore and for the second phase at Rs. 8000 crore. MP had earlier indicated that 2.87 lakh ha could be irrigated through micro-irrigation projects, but recently decided to add an extra 1.6 lakh ha to its plans. Now, Uttar Pradesh is also demanding expansion of the irrigation area.

Clubbing of the two phases will escalate the cost of the project and water allocation between the two states. Additional environmental clearances will also have to be obtained (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII,

Nos. 3, 2 & 1; Vol. XXII, Nos. 4, 3 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 & 1).

Source: Richa Sharma. 'Ken-Betwa river linking project hits new hurdles', *The New Indian Express*, 15/12/17.

Sowmiya Ashok. 'Ken-Betwa river-linking project: Two phases to be clubbed', *The Indian Express*, 15/12/17.

## MAHARASHTRA

### **Major decisions at SBWL meeting**

A number of major decisions were taken at the meeting of the Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife that was held in Mumbai on 31<sup>st</sup> January under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister, Devendra Phadnavis.

The decisions include:

- approval for a proposal of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) to conduct a geo-technical survey for a tunnel under the Sanjay Gandhi National Park connecting Borivli and Thane.
- approval to widen national highway (NH) - 8 (Surat to Dahisar stretch) from four to six lanes. This includes a section of an already existing road on the fringes of the SGNP. Nearly 1.5 km of NH-8 passes through the SGNP periphery, and 4.5 hectares are needed for this.
- approval to the Mumbai-Nagpur expressway E-way which will pass through the Katepurna, Karanja, Sohul Wildlife Sanctuaries and also the eco sensitive zone of the Tansa WLS
- approval to a project proposed by Tejas Thackeray, son of Shiv Sena chief Uddhv Thackeray, to collect specimens of freshwater crabs for research in Chandoli National Park. The permission has been given as Thackeray claims to have discovered new species of freshwater crabs.
- declaration of the Ghodazari WLS spread over 159 sq kms in the Brahmapuri forests



Source: 'Wildlife board approves survey for 11-km tunnel under Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai', *Hindustan Times*, 01/02/18.

### **Maharashtra to create special intelligence network to solve wildlife crime cases**

Maharashtra will create a special intelligence network to deal with smuggling and poaching of protected wildlife species. The decision was taken during an inter-agency coordination meeting on 'Strengthening Wildlife Law Enforcement in Western Region' held recently. Chaired by N Vasudevan, additional principal chief conservator of forests, state mangrove cell, the meeting was attended by representatives of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and various departments.

The Police, Forest Department, Customs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Enforcement Directorate, Central Industrial Security Force, Railway Protection Force, State Reserve Police Force, Coast Guard, municipal corporations from Thane, Navi Mumbai and Mumbai, Mumbai's municipal zoo, Botanical Survey of India and Zoological Survey of India will have a nodal officer each to coordinate in investigating wildlife crime. Various agencies such as Haffkine Institute, Marine Products Export Development Authority, Plant Quarantine Regional Station, and Directorate of Forensic Science Laboratory will help research the cases. The Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Byculla zoo have been roped in for safe custody of seized wild animals and birds.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'State govt departments in Maharashtra join hands to solve crimes related to wildlife', *Hindustan Times*, 21/11/17.

### **Tadoba tigress walks 110 km to reach Umred-Karhandla**

A young tigress from the Kolsa range of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) has walked 110 km to reach the Paoni range of Umred-Karhandla-Paoni Wildlife Sanctuary

(UKPWS). According to Dr. Bilal Habib of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), this is, perhaps, the first long-range dispersal by a female tiger fitted with a GPS collar. Other such dispersals have all been by male tigers.

Two of the four cubs – one male and the other female - of the Shivanzari zone tigress were collared at Kolsa on March 6 & 9, 2017 respectively, as part of a WII-forest department (FD) study. The cubs were 22 months old then. On November 30, about 10 months later, the tigress started off from Kolsa and reached Paoni in 24 days, passing through Talodi and Nagbhid ranges in Brahmapuri forest division in the journey. The animal crossed canals, nullahs, highways, power lines, electrified farm fences, human settlements and the Wainganga river.

The FD will be doing distant monitoring as the tigress is already being tracked via satellite. FD staff has been put on high alert to take on threats like electrocution. Where the tigress goes is part of the study and the FD would not interfere much.

A Bor tigress (BTR-T1) had travelled 150 km from the Bor Tiger Reserve to Pohra-Malkhed forest in Amravati some time ago. But she was not collared.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'In a 1st, radio-collared Kolsa tigress travels 110km to Paoni for new home', *The Times of India*, 25/12/17.

### **Major changes proposed in tourist booking system for Tadoba Andhari TR**

Major changes are being proposed in the tourist booking system for the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). A tatkal quota on lines of the system in the railways (and also the Ranthambhore TR) and a dynamic pricing system are to be introduced soon. The tatkal entry will cost Rs. 4,000 per safari and will not include the Rs. 2,200 gypsy charges, camera and guide fees.

Presently, the Ranthambhore TR (RTR) has the tatkal facility with a daily quota of eight vehicles in both shifts. Though there is no dynamic pricing, it charges Rs. 10,000 for a tatkal entry. The RTR has introduced many

booking changes, which is said to have increased park revenue from Rs. 12 crore to Rs. 23 crore. Maharashtra is replicating the RTR model, and the proposal, which is under consideration of the government, was also discussed at the two-day senior forest officers' conference held in Pune in November. TATR has proposed to go in for a long booking cycle with enhanced rates and no cancellation policy. While tatkal bookings will be allowed two-three days prior to the date of safari, normal bookings will continue to be available 120 days prior.

To deal with the problem of fake bookings, the proposal states that those booking safari 120-60 days before will have to pay Rs. 4,000 (Rs. 8,000 on weekends) and no cancellations will be allowed. Those booking 60 days prior will have to pay Rs. 1,000 (Rs. 2000 on weekends).

Entry time is proposed to be restricted to 30 minutes, after which booking will be cancelled and slot will be available for spot bookings. TATR also plans to allow registration of vehicles from outside buffer zones and charge a conservation fee for the same. It is also proposed to allow resort owners a jump rotation system. It means that if a tourist wants to enjoy safari in a specific resort vehicle then the resort owner will compensate the individual gypsy owner with Rs. 2,200 safari charge and also pay Rs. 1,000 to the Tadoba Foundation.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Tadoba follows Ranthambore, introduces tatkal bookings', *The Times of India*, 27/11/17.

### **State lost 63 sq km of forestland in the last three years**

Data from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) indicates that the state of Maharashtra lost a little more than 63 sq km of forests for non-forestry purposes including mining, between 2014 and 2017. Maharashtra ranked fourth in India for forestland diverted, with 40 proposals sanctioned over the three year period.

Of the total land diverted, a little more than 10.5 sq km was diverted for mining,

while the other activities that needed diversion included development of transmission lines, railways, national highways, irrigation projects, and rehabilitation of villages from core forest areas to fringes.

The total forestland diverted across the country in these three years was 623 sq km.

Source: 'Maharashtra lost 63 sq km of forest land in 3 years', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 01/01/18.

## **ODISHA**

### **Rs. 26 crore plan for repopulating Satkosia TR with tigers**

The Odisha Forest Department (FD) has submitted a Rs. 26 crore plan to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to augment the tiger population in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR). Satkosia is said to have only one tiger currently and the proposal is to procure three pairs of tigers from Madhya Pradesh over a period of five years. The NTCA had already given its in-principle approval and budgetary details have also been prepared. The centre is proposed to bear 60% of the expenditure for the project while the state will contribute the rest.

The plan includes selection, translocation, soft release, re-introduction and monitoring of the animals through radio collaring. Infrastructure requirements such as communication and surveillance set-up and staff are part of the scheme submitted to the NTCA. The first pair is expected to be introduced in STR in 2018. The FD will seek help of the Wildlife Institute of India in identification of tigers from Madhya Pradesh. Currently, the FD is preparing a notification boundary rationalization of the PA. As many as 118 villages would be taken off the sanctuary limits and more forest blocks would be added, making the STR bigger by 172 sq km.

Source: 'Government's wild care: Rs 26 crore for big cats in Satkosia', *The New Indian Express*, 24/11/17.

## **Unemployed youth around Bhitarkanika NP trained as tourist guides**

The Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) authorities have engaged unemployed local youth in the vicinity of the park as tourist guides in an attempt to make them self-sufficient and reduce their dependence on forest resources for livelihood.

The charge for hiring a guide has been fixed at Rs 100 and varies depending on the duration and numerical strength of the tourist groups. The income being earned by the youth is said to be substantial because of the large number of tourists visiting the park. It helps that the guides are local and well versed with the geography and topography of the park.

Source: 'New role for Bhitarkanika residents', *The Telegraph*, 03/01/18.

## **16 held for 'unlawful' fishing in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary**

16 fishermen from Paradip in Jagatsinghpur district were arrested recently for allegedly trespassing into the Gahirmatha marine sanctuary. Two fishing trawlers were also seized by the patrolling unit near Babuballi Island. They were said to be in violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act and rules of the marine sanctuary (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 1; Vol. XXII, No. 6 & 1; Vol. XXI, No. 1; Vol. XX, No. 1 and Vol XIX, No. 6)).

Source: '16 held for unlawful fishing in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary', [www.india.com](http://www.india.com), 05/01/18.

## **PUNJAB**

### **Ghariais re-introduced into the Beas upstream of the Harike WLS**

10 ghariais from the Chhatbir zoo were released into Beas River at Gagdewal, upstream of the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary. The re-introduction of this critically endangered species comes

nearly six decades after it was officially declared extinct in Punjab. The seven female and three male ghariais are the first to have been re-introduced into Indus river system and fulfilled the long-term aim of 'Project Crocodile' initiated in 1975.

The Pakistan government is also working to re-introduce the ghariais at the Indus's Sukkur barrage.

Source: Vikram Jit Singh, 'Tide turns, ghariais swim back from brink of extinction', *The Times of India*, 26/12/17.

## **RAJASTHAN**

### **Five PAs to be equipped with hi-tech wildlife surveillance systems**

The core areas of five PAs in Rajasthan – Sariska, Ranthambore, Mukundra, Jhalana and Jawai Bandh – will be equipped with hi-tech wildlife surveillance and anti-poaching system. The state information technology department is working with the forest department to put a technologically advanced system in place to ensure effective monitoring and protection of endangered animals, especially tigers.

The equipment includes thermal-imaging cameras and high-resolution optical cameras that will provide live feeds to control rooms being set up in each location. The surveillance will be backed up by drones to quickly zero in on any suspicious movement. A modular container-based local data centre will be established at each core area and will be connected to state headquarters. Personnel manning the data centres and deployed in the core areas will also be equipped with radio sets.

Source: 'To monitor big cats, Rajasthan will have hi-tech anti-poaching system by January', *Hindustan Times*, 23/12/17.

### **Ban on river sand mining delays plan to relocate tigers to Mukundra Hills TR**

The Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) has deferred its plans to introduce tigers to the

Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve (TR), at least till February because of the ban on mining of river sand in the state. Non-availability of sand has meant that the department is unable to complete construction of the 36 km long wall around the reserve to prevent human and cattle intrusion.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority had approved the tiger relocation plan in September 2017 and three tigers from the Ranthambhore TR are to be moved here.

Source: Aabshar H Quazi. 'Ban on river sand mining delays plan to relocate tigers in Rajasthan's Mukundra', *Hindustan Times*, 31/12/17.

### **Objections raised over use of CAMPA funds for village relocation from Mukundra Hills TR**

The Auditor General (AG) of Rajasthan has raised objections over the use of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) fund by the state forest department (FD) for relocation of villages from the Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve (MHTR). The AG said it was against the Supreme Court guidelines on the use of CAMPA fund.

The matter came to light through an RTI application filed by an activist, Tapeshwar Singh Bhati, seeking information from the FD on the allocation of CAMPA funds in 2015-16. The AG's audit report stated that the CAMPA fund can be used for compensatory afforestation and for environment services including provisioning goods such as non-timber forest products, fuel, fodder and water. It can also be utilised for research, training and capacity building but not for the relocation of villages.

The FD reportedly sought Rs. five crore in 2014-15 and Rs. 1.35 crore in 2015-16 from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for the relocation of 16 villages of MHTR. Although the NTCA released funds for other works, it did not release any fund for the relocation of villages. The additional principal chief conservator of forest (APCCF) of Rajasthan went ahead and allocated Rs. 1.35

crore for the purpose from the CAMPA fund in 2015-16 hoping that the Union government will release some money as well, but this did not happen. When the APCCF released the money, around Rs. 65.75 lakh were already spent from the fund.

The FD responded to the objections in the AG's audit report by stating that the money was "used for ensuring conservation and protection of wildlife". The AG's office then forwarded the matter to the state forest secretary for comments. It is reported that of the 16 villages to be relocated from the MHTR, only two villages have been relocated so far. It has been noted further that the Rajasthan High Court had in its earlier decisions on other issues also objected to the misuse of the CAMPA fund by the state FD.

The MHTR was announced as the third tiger reserve of Rajasthan in 2013 and was formed by including wildlife sanctuaries of Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar and Chittorgarh districts. The FD plans to introduce tigers to MHTR and this is one of the main reasons why the villages are sought to be relocated.

Source: Aabshar H Quazi. 'AG questions CAMPA fund use for relocation of Mukundra villages', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 18/12/17.

### **TAMIL NADU**

#### **32 tiger deaths in Tamil Nadu since 2014; no conviction in tiger poaching case in the past decade**

As many as 32 tigers have been found dead in Tamil Nadu since 2014. While the number of deaths of tigers, per se, is going down, the poaching rate is going up. Neither have any of the tiger poaching cases seen conviction in the past 10 years.

Three tiger deaths were reported in 2017. While one male tiger was found poisoned in the Sathyamangalam division on May 5, a tiger cub was killed in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (TR) due to an old snare wound in its neck on November 19. In 2016, out of the eight

tiger deaths, two were due to poisoning. While one case was reported in the Kodaikanal forest division, another took place in the Nilgiris south division. In 2015, though there was no report of poaching of tigers, forest officials confiscated fresh tiger bones and claws from a few places. Officials of the Biligiri Ranga Temple TR arrested a villager near Mettupalayam, for possessing a bag of tiger bones, close to Sathyamangalam forest area on October 1, 2015.

Source: '32 tiger deaths in TN since 2014, poachers have a free run', *The Times of India*, 20/12/17.

### **Coimbatore office of APCCF, Project Tiger shifted to Chennai; NTCA seeks explanation**

The office of the additional principal chief conservator of forests (APCCF), Project Tiger that was located in Coimbatore has been shifted to Chennai for administrative reasons. The official does not have any power with the job being only to monitor the four tiger reserves (TRs) in the state. The official had to visit Chennai at least 5-6 times a month to attend departmental meetings. The rationale for moving the office to Chennai is that these costs could be saved.

The APCCF will now visit Coimbatore once a month and inspect all the four TRs – the Anaimalai TR, Mudumalai TR and Sathyamangalam TR (all near Coimbatore) and Kalakad Mundanthurai TR, which is located in Tirunelveli district. The office was set up in Coimbatore four years ago in a bid to have the official closer to the TRs and ensure instant, swift communication and coordination among field directors.

The Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam has, however, raised concern over the shift, stating that it will cause difficulty for forest staff, public and farmers as they will be forced to travel to Chennai for various needs.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) too has sought an explanation from the chief secretary of Tamil Nadu on the move. The office was officially

shifted to Chennai on November 20 amidst an outcry from environmentalists, activists and even farmers. Many in the forest department (FD) were also of the opinion that the office could be retained in Coimbatore due to proximity to the three TRs. NGOs in Coimbatore had taken up the issue and represented their concerns before senior officials of the FD when shifting of the office was under consideration.

Source: 'Project tiger office shifted to Chennai', *The Times of India*, 23/11/17.  
'Retain Project Tiger office in Coimbatore', *The Hindu*, 05/12/17.  
Wilson Thomas, 'NTCA questions shifting of Project Tiger office to Chennai', *The Hindu*, 20/12/17.

## **TELANGANA**

### **All vacant posts in FD to be filled up soon**

The Telangana government has decided to fill up all the vacant posts in state's forest department (FD). Half of the nearly 4000 posts have been empty and this had affected the conservation and maintenance operations of the department. Among the vacancies to be filled are 1,857 Forest Beat Officers, 90 Forest Section Officers and 67 Forest Range Officers.

Source: '100% muscle for Telangana Forest Dept soon', *Telangana Today*, 03/01/18.

## **UTTARAKHAND**

### **NGT seeks information on measures to prevent disease in Himalayan blue sheep in Gangotri NP**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has served notices to the Union Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Uttarakhand state chief secretary, the Uttarakhand Wildlife Board and several other parties asking them to inform it about the measures that have been taken to prevent disease in Himalayan blue

sheep in the Gangotri National Park (GNP). This follows reports of the sheep going blind and also bleeding from their eyes. Notices have also been served to the Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board, the National Biodiversity Authority and the principal secretary of the forest department.

The matter of the infected blue sheep in GNP came to light when a Border Security Force team spotted animals in the Kedar Tal area of the park in September with eyes that were protruding and also bleeding. Some of the sheep had empty sockets in place of eyes.

In his petition in the NGT, Gaurav Bansal, a Delhi-based advocate, has appealed for translocation of diseased sheep to prevent the infection from spreading further. He also sought constitution of a high-level team, including experts from the Wildlife Institute of India and the Indian Veterinary Research Institute to study the infected animals in the park and formulate an action plan for conservation of species and the ecosystem of the region.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'What have you done to prevent disease in blind blue sheep? NGT asks MoEF, U'khand chief secy', *The Times of India*, 21/12/17.

### **Corbett TR to retire old elephants from active service**

Authorities at the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) have started a drive to identify elephants above 65 years of age so as to stop them from being used for safaris. This follows recent central government guidelines saying that elephants aged 65 and above should not be used for safaris and patrols.

The medical team at CTR is checking the 13 elephants and those identified as aged will be sent to the Kalagarh camp, which will be their retirement home.

In another development, the Uttarakhand High Court, on December 20, 2017, directed the state government to constitute a special cadre of tiger/elephant protection force in the Corbett and Rajaji TRs within three months to protect these wild animals from poaching. The court also asked for the obsolete weapons of forest guards be replaced by semi-automatic weapons.

Source: 'CTR starts drive to retire old jumbos', *The Times of India*, 23/12/17.

## **WEST BENGAL**

### **Buxa TR to get a dozen tigers from Assam**

The Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) is set to get a dozen tigers from Assam in a bid to augment the tiger population there. The state forest minister Binay Krishna Barman said that he has already written to the Assam government for getting the animals.

Sunderbans in South Bengal is home to about 100 tigers but the forest department (FD) has consciously decided not to bring tigers from here as this is a completely different ecosystem and it would be difficult for its animals to survive in Buxa. The forests in Assam are much closer to those in Buxa.

The FD has also decided to bring sambar and bison to the BTR from other wildlife sanctuaries to augment the tiger's prey base ahead of the introduction of big cats here. A year long camera trapping exercise conducted here by the Wildlife Institute of India in 2014-15 had reported no tigers in Buxa. The state forest department had claimed, however that the reserve was home to between 13 and 19 tigers (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3).

Source: Soumitra Nandi. 'Buxa Reserve to get 12 Royal Bengal Tigers', [www.millenniumpost.in](http://www.millenniumpost.in), 04/12/17.

### **Two leopards radio-collared in North Bengal**

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) has, in a first-of-its-kind experiment with leopards in Bengal, radio-collared and released two of them in the wild. This, it is hoped, will help get crucial information about the animal's behaviour and help check human-leopard conflict in north Bengal in the long run. At least 60-70 human injuries are reported every year in north Bengal because of leopard attacks but foresters, in the absence of data, do not even have an estimate of the leopard population in the region.

One of the leopards that was collared was captured close to Dalgaon tea estate near the Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) while the other was in a private tea estate in Sukna near the Mahananda WLS.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee. 'North Bengal leopards get tracking collars', *The Times of India*, 09/01/18.

### Tiger camera trapped in Neora Valley NP

One camera trap photo of a tiger in December 2017 and three more in January 2018 have affirmed the big cat's presence in the Neora Valley National Park. The three photos in January were clicked within 24 hours and efforts were being made to ascertain whether these were photos of one or more tigers. These were clicked at an altitude of 7500 ft. Tiger photos had also been clicked in February 2017 and indirect signs of the tiger presence were first found a decade and a half ago in 1993.

Presence of pugmarks, tiger scat, leftovers of prey and other such indirect evidence have led experts to believe the park has 13 tigers.

The first confirmed sighting of the tiger here in 24 years had happened in January 2017 when a cab driver saw a tiger near Lava, which is on the outer areas of the park. He had also clicked a picture of the animal then. The forest department (FD) immediately installed trap cameras in some locations of the park, which led to two tigers being photographed within a month's time.

22 camera traps have now been installed in the park to get a more comprehensive picture of tiger presence here.

Source: 'Photos fuel tiger hope at Neora Park', *The Telegraph*, 06/01/18.



### 40 leopards killed in January 2018; one third poached

Data put together by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) suggests that at least 40 leopards were killed across the country in the first month of 2018. 15 (38%) of these were poached, three died in road and rail accidents and two were killed by villagers. The other 15 died from causes that have not been identified.

Most deaths were recorded in Uttarakhand with 12 deaths and four poaching cases, followed by Maharashtra with seven deaths and two poaching cases while Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh recorded four and three deaths respectively. Other states like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, all recorded at least one leopard death in January.

431 leopard deaths were recorded in the country in 2017. Of these 159 were poached and 63 were casualties of road and rail accidents. The number of deaths in 2016 was 436 of which 282 died of natural causes and 154 were killed by poachers.

More than 1,600 leopards have been killed by poachers in the past decade, according to the WPSI. According to a country-wide census conducted in 2015, the first-ever leopard count, there are between 12,000 to 14,000 leopards in the country.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. '40 leopards killed in January this year, one third of them by poachers', *Hindustan Times*, 31/01/18.

### Dogs attack around 80 species of wildlife; many around PAs

No less than 80 species of wildlife in India have been attacked, often fatally, by domestic dogs in the last decade and a half. A good proportion of

these attacks have taken place in or around the country's protected areas.

Blackbuck, Desert foxes, Olive ridley turtles, vultures and even a leopard are among the species attacked between 2000 and 2016, finds a study published in the journal *Animal Conservation*. As much as 48% of these incidents occurred within or near protected areas. Of the 80 species that the dogs attacked, 31 are listed as 'threatened' and four as 'critically endangered' in the IUCN Red List.

At 60 million, the dog population in India is the fourth highest in the world, and this owes largely to poor population control programmes, weak dog ownership rules and freely available food waste, says the study.

It also reveals other interesting patterns. The majority of attacks are not by individual animals but by packs comprising as many as 25 dogs and 45% of these attacks led to the death of the wild animal. Most of the dogs' targets are ungulates, largely spotted deer and sambar. Domestic dogs don't just threaten wildlife through predation, they also transmit diseases and trigger fear-mediated behavioural changes.

As mitigation measures, the authors recommend 'responsible dog ownership,' which focuses on population control, vaccination and control of free-ranging behaviour to minimise contact with wildlife. In areas of ecological importance however, the active removal of feral dogs has also been suggested.

Source: Divya Gandhi. 'Dogs that have turned predators', *The Hindu*, 23/12/17.

### **NGT functioning at half its strength**

Ten months after it first issued advertisements to fill up 95 vacancies in the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the government is yet to finalise the candidates for these posts. The total sanctioned posts in the NGT are 182. This includes the chairperson, 10 judicial members, 10 expert members and 161 other posts. Of these, the posts of the chairperson, five judicial members, eight expert members and 81 other posts are vacant.

The NGT is currently working with an acting chief and at nearly half its sanctioned strength. Justice U.D. Salvi who is working as the acting Chairperson of the panel after Justice Swatanter Kumar demitted office in December 2017, is due to retire in February 2018 himself. Of late, the NGT's principal bench in Delhi is operating with less than one-third of its sanctioned strength of 20 officials.

The government had told the Lok Sabha in a written reply that it has set up a search-cum-selection committee for the vacant posts of the chairperson and judicial members and that for the expert members is under finalisation. Applications were invited for filling up the posts of judicial members and expert members in the NGT vide advertisement issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on March 1, 2017 and a subsequent advertisement issued on August 29, 2017. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6)

Source: '10 months after ads, vacancies in NGT yet to be filled', news.webindia123.com, 23/12/17.

### **Pangolin scales, leopard and tiger parts, rhino horn most traded wildlife products in India**

A study by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) has found that pangolin scales, skins and bones of the tiger and leopard, and rhino horns were the most traded illicit wildlife products in India in 2017.

There were 55 poaching cases involving leopards and 101 seizures of leopard skin and bone. There were 19 reported cases of poaching of tigers with 16 instances of seizures of tiger skins, bones and claws. 11 cases related to smuggling of pangolin and its scales were reported from six states, and there were 13 cases of rhino poaching from Assam and West Bengal.

Source: 'Pangolin, tiger, leopard and rhino were most poached animals in India in 2017', *Hindustan Times*, 24/12/17.



## **UP tops list of wildlife crimes in the country; Rajasthan 2nd**

A recent report of the National Crime Record Bureau has put Uttar Pradesh (UP) on top of the list for wildlife related crimes in the country. Rajasthan is number two in that list. Of the 852 cases registered in the country under the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) in 2016, 302 and 190 cases were registered respectively in UP and Rajasthan.

At least 1,722 people involved in wildlife crimes were arrested in 2016 in Rajasthan. While 214 of them were convicted, 110 acquitted and others were let off after being fined.

Western Rajasthan, where the majority of chinkara hunting cases take place, leads in registration of wildlife crimes in the state. People of the Bishnoi community, known for wildlife protection, lodge most of the cases. The registration of hunting cases in south-eastern part of Rajasthan, however, is very low despite the fact that particular communities in the area are known to hunt scheduled species.

Source: Dinesh Bothra. 'Rajasthan number 2 in wildlife crimes, experts anxious', *Hindustan Times*, 04/12/17.

## **95 tiger deaths in India in 2017; 25 in Madhya Pradesh: NTCA**

Figures from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), suggest that 95 tigers were killed across the country in 2017. The maximum number of 25 deaths— more than a quarter of the total number — were reported from Madhya Pradesh (MP). This is followed by 17 in Maharashtra and 15 each in Karnataka and Uttarakhand. With eight tiger deaths, Assam was next on the list followed by Uttar Pradesh with seven. Three deaths occurred in Tamil Nadu, two in Kerala and one each in Rajasthan, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

MP had recorded the maximum deaths in 2016 as well; 30 of the total of 97 were reported from here.

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'MP records one-fourth of tiger deaths in India in 2017, highest in country', *Hindustan Times*, 01/01/18.

## **Withdraw exemption in Section 40 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; protect elephants: NGO**

The NGO, World Animal Protection, has in a letter to Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and KJ Alphons, Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Tourism, urged the government to ban elephant rides in India and rehabilitate all the concerned animals.

The letter highlighted the fact that the exemption given to live elephants in Section 40 of The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 was being misused to drive the illegal trade of elephants and that the exemption should therefore be withdrawn.

Source: The letter to the environment minister can be accessed at [https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.in/sites/default/files/in\\_files/letter\\_to\\_dr\\_harshvardhan.pdf](https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.in/sites/default/files/in_files/letter_to_dr_harshvardhan.pdf)

## **New guidelines for railway projects in forest lands**

The Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has come out with clarifications and new guidelines for railways projects in forest lands. These will be applicable to new projects and also those for gauge conversion projects and will see application of both, the Forest (Conservation) Act, (FCA) 1980 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, (WPA) 1972 on forest lands falling in the Right of Way (RoW) of the Railways in the light of Railways Act, 1989.

The Railways has been insisting thus far that forest and wildlife laws are not applicable to forest lands falling in the RoW and that they have the power to acquire and divert forest lands under Section 11 (a) of the Railway Act - 1989. The MoEFCC has, on other hand, repeatedly clarified that both the acts are

applicable for diversion of forest lands for non-forestry purposes irrespective of their ownership and that forest land cannot be acquired and transferred to the Railways under Section 11 (a) of the Railway Act without following the provisions of FCA and WPA. The law ministry too has opined that though the railway department can construct and maintain a railway line on any land, use of forest land will attract provisions of the FCA. Also relevant is the definition of 'forest land' by the Supreme Court where it has been stated that as per Section 2 of the FCA, the word 'forest land' will not only include forest as understood in its dictionary sense but also any area recorded as forest in government records irrespective of ownership or classification.

However, railway projects passing through notified ecologically sensitive zone or located within 10 km of wildlife sanctuary/national parks/tiger reserves are not required to obtain wildlife clearances from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) as these do not need any environmental clearance. It has been said further that projects passing through the areas linking one PA with another cannot be allowed for ecologically unsustainable use, except in public interest with approval of NBWL on the advice of National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Ministry of Environment and Forests issues new guidelines for railway projects in forest lands', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 19/12/17.

### **No forest clearance needed for projects within 16 km of international border with Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal**

The Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has decided to do away with forest clearance for all major border infrastructure projects within 16 km from the three international border. The directive issued by the MoEFCC says that the Minister of Home Affairs raised the matter of general approval under Section 2 of Forest Conservation Act 1980 and it may be granted to projects involving

forest land along Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bhutan borders upto 16 km and upto 15 km along Indo-Nepal border. The earlier limit was 5 km. According to ministry sources, the decision was to simplify the process as approval under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, is a lengthy process. The ministry has decided to grant general approval to projects of paramilitary forces. However, state government shall accord approval to the proposal.

The approval covers border security related infrastructure such as border roads, fencing, border outposts, floodlights, surveillance infrastructure, and power infrastructure by agencies like Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Road Organisation (BRO). The general approval is also granted to projects being executed by other central government agencies and public sector undertakings such as National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) involved in the implementation of such infrastructural projects related to national security from funds provided by the Ministry of Home affairs.

In September 2017, the ministry had decided to give general approval for projects by the defence ministry within the 100 km of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The decision was taken after the Doklam standoff with China.

Source: Richa Sharma. 'Forest clearance not needed till 16 km', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 27/12/17.



# *Important Bird Areas Update*

## ASSAM

### **Restrictions for picnicking around Deepor Beel WLS**

The Guwahati city police has issued prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC to protect the ecology and ecosystem of the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary from picnickers who flock to the place during the winter months. More than five persons cannot now gather in and around the sanctuary on account of the order, which will remain in force till March 31, 2018.

Source: 'Restrictions around Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/12/17.

## KERALA

### **Cinereous vulture sighted in Wayanad WLS**

A Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) also known as the Eurasian black vulture has been sighted in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) for the first time. The large broad-winged vulture is very rarely seen the south of the Vindhyas. The bird was found in the Tholpetty forest range near the carcass of a wild gaur. It was a sub-adult bird, estimated to be around two years of age.

The WWS is the only area in Kerala with a breeding population of two critically-endangered vulture species. A survey held in 2015-16 had recorded 12 red-headed vultures (*Sarcogyps calvus*) and over 50 white-rumped vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*).

The forest department is implementing a Rs. 58 lakh project using central funds for the conservation of the vulture population in Wayanad.

Source: K R Rajeev, 'Sighting of rare vulture confirmed in Wayanad', *The Times of India*, 24/12/17.

## MANIPUR

### **Black-headed bunting sighted in Manipur for the first time**

The black-headed bunting – a migratory bird – has been sighted for the first time in Manipur. A single individual was sighted recently during a study of birds in the Thongjaorok river near Loktak lake that was being carried out by the Centre for Conservation of Nature and Cultivation of Science, Manipur, and the Indian Bird Conservation Network in the first week of November.

It was also photographed by wildlife photographer E. Premjit.

Source: Khelen Thokchom, 'Rare migratory bird in Loktak - First time in Manipur', *The Telegraph*, 27/11/17.

## RAJASTHAN

### **GIB dies after hitting high tension wire in Pokhran**

A Great India Bustard (GIB) was killed after hitting a 220 KW high tension wire at the Pokhran field firing range in the Khetolai area in the month of December. It was the third such incident of the death of a GIB in 2017 because of a high tension wire. One GIB had died in Kanoi area in May and another in the Mokla area in early December.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had distributed bird diverters free-of-cost to the companies operating windmills here nine months back. These were to be installed on trial basis within three months, but this has not been done. Notices have been issued to windmill units in the matter.

Source: 'GIB dies after hitting high tension wire in Pokhran', *The Times of India*, 29/12/17.

## SPECIAL SECTION

### Protected Areas and the FRA

#### National

##### *Tiger Reserves*

The National Council for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) called for a meeting with officials of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) on the 2nd of January 2018 to discuss issues arising out of a circular issued by the NTCA on March 28, 2017, in which it ordered that no rights under the FRA would be conferred in Critical Tiger Habitats of tiger reserves, since no guidelines on declaration of Critical Wildlife Habitats (under the FRA) had been issued.

In the meeting, the NCST advised the MoEFCC to:

- Utilize CAMPA funds for relocation from Critical Tiger Habitats, suggesting that the package for relocation should be increased to Rs. 20 lakh instead of Rs. 10 lakh and to include land in the compensation package
- That no tribal person should be evicted from tiger reserves without his/her explicit consent, and till the compensation package is fully provided to them.
- Carry out the entire process of relocation within a period of 3 years, and failing to do so, immediately confer forest rights.

Source: 'NCST to examine freezing of Tribal Rights in Tiger Reserves, compensation, with MoEF', DNA, 27/12/17.  
Minutes of the Meeting under Chairmanship of Shri Nand Kumar Sai, Chairperson (NCST); F.No. PC/1/2017/MENV1/SEOTH/RU-IV)



#### Madhya Pradesh

##### *Panna Tiger Reserve*

*Jan Sunwais* were held in the villages of Umrahan and Jalarlying in the core and buffer area of Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) to discuss relocation from the tiger reserve. The meeting was attended by the SDM, the Collector and Director, PTR. The meeting dealt with issues that families who opted to be relocated are facing with the packages as well as the rights to access land that have been recognized under FRA which lies in the buffer area of PTR.

Source: 'Muafza nahi mita sakta vishthapan ka dard', *Paresh Today*, N.D

#### Odisha

##### *Similipal Tiger Reserve*

Despite being approved by the District Level Committee (DLC), the title to the habitat rights of the Mankadia community from Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve has not been given to the community. The title has been held up because the forest department is of the opinion that the risk of contact with elephants and tigers inside the core could pose a safety issue for the tribals, and thus rights cannot be granted over the core area.

The FRA however specifies that the PVTG community can claim habitat rights under Sec 2 (h) of the Forest Rights Act, over '...the area comprising the customary habitat and other such habitats in reserved forest and protected forests...' The DLC organised a consultation with the Mankidia traditional leaders, at the behest of the forest department to restrict habitat rights to the buffer zone of the TR, which was refused by the leaders.

Source: 'Habitat rights of Odisha's tribal group denied; their livelihood also at stake.'  
*Down to Earth*, 3/1/18

## Meeting on status of FRAs in PAs

### A report

A meeting on the status of implementation of Forest Rights Act (FRA) in protected areas (PAs) was held in New Delhi on 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2017. The meeting that was organised by All India Forum for Forest Movements (AIFFM), Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Kalpavriksh and Vasundhara was attended by over 70 participants representing local community members from over 32 PAs, civil society actors and researchers covering over 13 states. The main agenda of the meeting was to share the findings of a report that analyses the present status of implementation of FRA within these PAs. It was further substantiated by the testimonies of community members who attended the meeting

Some of the findings of the reports are:

- FRA implementation is almost non-existent in most PAs and claims that have been filed as long back as 2009 still lie pending.
- The NTCA order in March 2017, created further impediment in the execution of the FRA in PAs.
- Despite amendments in the Wild Life Protection Act of India in 2006 emphasizing co-existence practice in the TRs and FRA providing provisions and opportunities to do so, such efforts were found only in three out of 30 PAs. Even here it was mostly the effort of the local people and civil society organizations without support from the forest department.
- Communities are being stopped from exercising their rights by PA authorities in places where FRA claims have been filed.
- On the issue of relocation, there are several testimonies and substantial documentation on forced or induced relocation where people are deprived of basic amenities to opt to move.
- These relocations violate the right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and

Resettlement Act (LARR 2013), as compensation for the vested forest rights under FRA is not being given to the tribals and forest dwellers.

- There are several cases of gross human rights violation that communities continue to face especially after new rounds of evictions are taking place post the NTCA order.

The meeting also had zone-wise sharing of the present status of communities who are living in PAs or have been relocated. There are almost no efforts towards co-existence and collaboration with local people in conservation governance despite FRA and WLPA providing for the same. This leads to a conclusion that there is a dire need to raise concern over the human rights violations as well as violations under FRA, WLPA and LARR. These need to be brought under the attention of various committees like NCHR, NCW and NCST as well as MoEFCC and MoTA.

Subsequently after the meeting, there was a petition drafted to the NCHR which detailed the violations taking place in PAs post the NTCA order asking direct intervention from MoTA as well as the withdrawal of the order immediately which were endorsed by several of those who participated in the meeting.

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## Readers Write Inaccurate reporting

This is with reference to the story 'Tracking animals by signs more cost-effective than camera traps: Study' (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6, December 2017). This newspaper report, I do not think, gives a proper understanding or interpretation of the study it talks about. The author does not seem to have really understood the issue. When you read it, it could be read as saying that the old pugmark method is as good as camera trapping which is not what it is about. Clearly the issue of occupancy etc. has not been understood.

I also think that the *PA Update* has a duty to present the story with more accuracy since one knows where to go for confirmation

and more details. Just repeating misleading or inaccurate newspaper reports is pointless. I know there are time constraints but I think it may be better not to include the story at all rather than repeat misleading stuff like this. Even if there is no time to go through the actual paper, it should not take long to find the source of the news, in this case the following link: <https://newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/10532/Study-Wildlife-Sign-Surveys-Up-To-The-Task.aspx>. This could then have been edited for the *PA Update*. At least there would be better understanding for the rest of us.

- a reader

### 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@yahooogroups.com](mailto:paupdate@yahooogroups.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.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

**10 years ago**

*PA Update 71, February 2008*

### **Andhra Pradesh**

#### **Area of Nagarjunasagar – Srisailem TR reduced by over 1000 sq. kms**

The area of the Nagarjunasagar – Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR) has been reduced by over a 1000 sq. kms. The reserve that was spread over 3568 sq kms in the districts of Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Prakasam, Kurnool and Guntur is now 2527 sq. kms.

The move was initiated following a directive of the Central Government to form an expert committee and delineate the Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH) as per the 2006 amendments made to the Wildlife Protection Act. An expert committee that went into the matter suggested the change including the removal of all area from Nalgonda district.

It has been pointed out that lot of these areas had already been denotified for mining, irrigation and other such projects. The prominent example is that of uranium mining (*PA Update 45*) and work on the irrigation project that have already been going on in within the NSTR in Nalgonda district.

The notification was issued in the last week of December 2007.

Source: Mir Ayood Ali Khan. 'Tiger reserve shrinks', <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com> 07/01/08.

**15 years ago**

*PA Update 41 & 42, April 2003*

### **Andhra Pradesh**

#### **National park status for Kambalakonda forest**

The Kambalakonda reserve forest which is spread over an area of 7000 hectares between

Vishakapatnam and Simhachalam is to be declared as a national park (See *PA Update 34*). A government order to this effect has been issued for gazette notification. An earlier proposal to develop the area as a botanical garden with an outlay of Rs. 30 crores had been rejected by the Central Government. The proposal for the national park was reportedly accepted after the Chief Minister of the state intervened in the matter.

Source: 'New sanctuary declared in Andhra Pradesh', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 09/12/02.

### **Assam**

#### **Proposal for a new 'Sankosh-Aie' Wildlife Sanctuary**

The Kokrajhar based NGO, Green Hearts Nature Club (GHNC) has proposed that a new 'Sankosh - Aie' Wildlife Sanctuary be declared that will include the forests of Ripu, Chirang and Manas. The area stretches from the River Sankosh to Manas through out the foothills of Bhutan and includes good forests contiguous with Manas National Park on the east and Buxa Tiger Reserve on the west. The forests belong to the Kachugaon, Haitugaon and Aie Valley Forest Divisions in the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts.

The region was once famous for its sal forests and patches of good Terai grasslands which support populations of endangered species like the Pygmy Hog, Hispid Hare, and the Bengal Florican. Other endangered species of fauna that are found here include the Golden Langur, tiger, clouded leopard, leopard, leopard cat, elephant, slow loris, and binturong.

This area has already been included under Project Tiger as a buffer zone for tigers from the Manas Tiger Reserve and more recently it was proposed by the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests to include it under Project Elephant (see *PA Update 39*).

GHNC has already submitted this proposal to the State Forest Minister.

Source: 'Demand for Sankosh-Aie wildlife sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/11/02.

## PERSPECTIVE

### **‘How to be a fig’?**

I am trained in the sciences and know only to make sense of scientifically verifiable information. Having spent most of my adult life in these academic settings, I have had many opportunities of interacting with and listening to people involved in ecological conversation. In the audience, have been people who are aware and interested, or the people who are doing the ‘hard’ work of fighting the conservation battles. Information, experience, observations and conclusions are, however, restricted to an interested audience, an audience that is willing to spend time watching documentaries or listening to hour long talks.

While interest is essential to be effective in conservation, it is awareness that will make the key difference. And it is here I believe that art-based communication is an apt medium to convey ideas to an audience that is not academically inclined. We are seeing a surge and a growth in popular culture media like graphic posters, photography, fiction, movies, and theatre performances that incorporate ecological issues as a part of the narrative. These experiences are thought provoking, intimate, and emotionally wrenching.

I had the opportunity of participating in one such effort when friends from Artecology, Abhisheka Krishna Gopal and Veena Basavarajaiah came up with the body movement project on fig ecology that we performed at the Student’s Conference on Conservation Science, in Bengaluru in September 2017. The piece was based on a book by ecologist Mike Shanahan, ‘Ladders to Heaven’ and was a great experience in movement and in learning. The choreographer, Veena first spent time understanding the science of the fig ecology. And there we were, a bunch of enthusiastic people in a room, practicing to embody the inconspicuous flowers of the fig ‘fruit’ after a wasp dancer laid her eggs inside the flowers, then emerging as female wasps discovering the joy of light and flight.

And when this sequence played in front of a diverse audience, it was interesting to see the

diversity of the responses that were generated. It was not just an informative experience for them, it was also an emotional one; it enabled, I believe, not just awareness, but also sensitization and in this it has a higher chance, perhaps, of provoking an audience member into action and be a part of the conservation movement. The deliberate asynchrony of two fig ‘fruits’ was perceived as a flaw by an audience member (different fig trees have asynchronous flowering, essential to fig-wasp interaction and the wasp life cycle). And accidental spatial asynchrony of emerging female wasps on stage was perceived as indicative of competition for resources to another member of the audience. This led me to the realization that intimate performance art strikes a chord with everyone, at different places in their thought bubbles.

I hope to see more and more explorations of different art medium in time to come, as a way to communicating science and sense.

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