

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

The importance and the challenge of being
Sanjay Gandhi NP 3

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Andhra Pradesh

Star tortoise smuggling racket busted; two arrested,
400 tortoises seized 3

Arunachal Pradesh

Pakke TR organises weapons training for forest staff 4

Assam

102 rhinos in Pobitora WLS 4
Eight elephant deaths due to poisoning in 2018 thus
far

Forest and wildlife staff get automatic firearms

Jammu & Kashmir

Hangul population decreases to 182 5
Snow leopard census in Ladakh in April

Karnataka

Tumakuru to get its own wildlife rescue team 6
Leopard electrocuted in Kollegal range of BRT TR;
farmer arrested

Karnataka/Kerala

Karnataka opposes Thalassery-Mysuru rail link via
Kodagu 6

Kerala

Campaign to prevent forest fires in, around Wayanad 7
Study reveals Pampadam Shola NP is a safe home
for Nilgiri Martens

Elephant dies after consuming plastic at Sabarimala
in Periyar TR

Maharashtra

Solar power fencing to curb animal deaths by
electrocution 8
Relocation of legal slums and adivasi enclaves from
SGNP to be delayed
Leopard numbers increase in SGNP; majority
photographed for the first time
FD approves car park inside SGNP

Two leopards killed every year on roads along SGNP
in the last decade

Infra projects around SGNP to get nod if they build
animal passageways

SGNP leopards prey on dogs, cut rabies risk among
people: Study

22 hectares destroyed by fire in SGNP

Odisha

Satkosia TR to get first tiger from MP in April 11
Over a million turtles nested on Odisha beaches this
season

Odisha to spend Rs 563 cr for wildlife and forest
development

159 forest officers recruited via special drive

Rajasthan

Centre approves land use change for shifting villages
from Mukundra Hills TR 12

Tamil Nadu

Grizzled giant squirrel sighted near Gingee,
Villupuram dist. 13

Telangana

51 poaching cases registered in Telangana in 2017 13

Uttar Pradesh

12 board exam centres deemed 'vulnerable to tiger
attacks' in Pilibhit 13

Uttarakhand

MoU signed for road through Corbett TR 14
Rajaji authorities seek HC help to remove
encroaching ashrams
Train kills elephant inside Rajaji TR
Only five Himalayan blue sheep infected in Gangotri
NP: Uttarakhand govt.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Centre releases new draft National Forest Policy 15

Major forest fires repeat every three years in the
Western Himalayas: Study

SC stay on law giving Centre control over NGT,
other tribunals

India may not meet Aichi target of identifying PAs

Prakriti Srivastava is new country director of WCS
Central Railway to train field staff in Central India to
deal with wildlife

SOUTH ASIA 17
Bangladesh

17 Gangetic dolphins found dead in Halda River in
four months; demand made to declare a dolphin
sanctuary here

Nepal
25 gharials released into Rapti River

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE 19

Haryana
Drone mapping of Sultanpur NP

Madhya Pradesh
MP to de-notify 86 sq km from GIB sanctuary at
Ghatigaon

Odisha
Government plans new lease policy for Chilika

Tamil Nadu
166 species of birds sighted in and around
Coimbatore

South Asia
South Asia vulture conservation priorities

SPECIAL SECTION 21

Protected Areas and the FRA

Chattisgarh

Move to relocate village from inside Barnawapara
WLS

Odisha

CFR claims of 43 villages within Similipal TR
recognised

National News

Centre issues guidelines to notify critical wildlife
habitats

No tribal to be evicted from tiger reserves: NCST

FROM THE ARCHIVES 23

PERSPECTIVE 24

Need to bridge the scientist-journalist trust deficit

Protected Area Update

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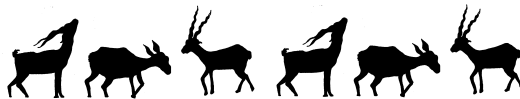
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EDITORIAL

The importance and the challenge of being Sanjay Gandhi NP

While each protected area admittedly has its own importance and its own specific opportunities and challenges, there can be no doubt that the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) takes it to another level. All one needs to be convinced, if that is indeed needed, is to look at the numbers and the diversity of SGNP related stories that appear in just this issue of the *PA Update*.

The PA continues to face various ‘development’ related pressures like making space for more cars and vehicles and the continuous demands for linear infrastructure through and around the park. This not only fragments the forest further, but also leads directly to more wild animal deaths in accidents. While the leopards might not be welcome in all eyes, an interesting study suggests that by preying on dogs these big cats of SGNP might actually be helping deal with the rabies risk in the city. It points indirectly to the huge stray dog problem in the city but that is another issue. There is also the challenge, as reported, of the relocation of long time residents of the national park and the opposition to it, and on a different axis, the fires that herald the coming every year of the dry season.

And then there are a number of other matters that have been reported in the recent past or are looming on the horizon – the issue of leopard attacks and the amazing efforts being made by civil society members, researchers and the forest department to deal with the challenges, the forever looming threat of encroachment and of the land mafia, a proposal to construct a road under the forests of the PA and the burgeoning demands on the park from visitors and from tourism interests.

There is perhaps no other PA that has to simultaneously grapple with so many diverse and diverging challenges and even this list is an

incomplete one. The volume of media reporting is a good indication and though there is no empirical evidence yet to prove it conclusively, there would be little doubt that Mumbai’s SGNP is among the most reported on if not *the* most reported on protected area in the country. The reason for this is also well understood – this patch of dense forest teeming with leopards and other biodiversity located in the midst of one of the world’s biggest, most densely populated and never-say-stop metropolises that is also the financial capital of one of the world’s largest countries.

Nothing could be more convincing than this in an argument that a PA is only partially defined by its ecological, forest or wildlife related context; each PA is indeed a specific, indeed unique, socio-economic-political construct and there can be no better example of this than the SGNP.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Star tortoise smuggling racket busted; two arrested, 400 tortoises seized

Officials of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Vijayawada Unit, recently busted an international Star tortoise smuggling racket by seizing 406 tortoises being exported to Bangladesh. Officials suspect that the tortoises were being exported through the Paradeep Port in Odisha.

On a tip-off that they were being transported in the Vivek Express, the DRI team headed by its deputy director and the Railway Protection Force conducted a search in the railway station and recovered the tortoises packed in sacks. They arrested two women who were carrying the four sacks. The forest department (FD) officials of the Eluru Wildlife Division confirmed that they were Indian Star tortoises.

The accused are natives of Chittoor district. The DRI is trying to find out how and from where they collected the tortoises, since how long the smuggling has been going on, locals involved in the racket, details of Bangladesh smugglers and other particulars.

The tortoises were handed over to forest officials who said they would eventually release them into the wild.

Source: Rajulapudi Srinivas. 'Star tortoises seized as smuggling racket is busted', *The Hindu*, 21/02/18.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Pakke TR organises weapons training for forest staff

The Pakke Tiger Reserve (TR) with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Trust recently organized its annual joint weapons training at Bhalukpong. 114 frontline staff from the Pakke TR, Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, Nameri National Park (Assam) and Sinchung-Bugun Community Reserve participated with personnel from 24 Assam Rifles as resource persons. The day-long programme included training on general upkeep and maintenance of weapons, various combat techniques, followed by a firing trial for the participants. Sankar Nayang, an elephant mahout, Borsing Kro and John Tana were the first three winners.

The World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, in association with the ICICI bank also gave a cheque of Rs 3 lakh on the occasion to widow of Rajen Naag, a beat guard who died while on duty in Pakke. An amount of Rs 96000, raised from the crowd funding through "Bit Giving", was also handed over to Rajen's son, Sanjay. The Wildlife Trust of India had also provided compensation to Rajen's family earlier this year.

Source: 'Pakke Tiger Reserve organizes weapons training', *The Arunachal Times*, 12/03/18.

ASSAM

102 rhinos in Pobitora WLS

A recent census carried out in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has counted 102 rhinos here. The last census here had been conducted six years ago. During this period the sanctuary lost a total of 26 rhinos – six were shot dead by poachers while the other 20 died of natural causes.

Source: '102 rhinos in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, census finds', *The Times of India*, 18/03/18.

Eight elephant deaths due to poisoning in 2018 thus far

Eight elephants have been killed by poisoning in Assam thus far in 2018. The information was provided in the state assembly in March by the State environment and forest minister, Pramila Rani Brahma. This is six more than the number of elephants killed in 2016-17.

While patches of paddy fields drenched with common pesticides had claimed 26 elephants in Sonitpur district in 2002, the new method being used now is to poison rice beer or fermented rice for producing liquor. While incidents of poisoning continue to be prominent in Sonitpur, incidents have been reported from elsewhere as well. Many villages in Assam use rice to make liquor, for which the state government has been seeking a geographical indication tag. Elephants that raid villages are known to develop a taste for this liquor.

Providing additional information, the minister said elephants had, since 2016, claimed 149 human lives, damaged 3,546 houses and destroyed crops on 1,880.7 hectares. Rs. 2.35-crore has been paid as compensation to the survivors of the victims. She did not, however, provide data on elephant casualty, which including train-hits, has been estimated to be at least 45 since April 2016.

Assam has an estimated elephant population of 5,700, the second highest in the country after Karnataka.

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Eight elephants died of poisoning in Assam in 2018: Forest Minister Pramila Rani Brahma', *The Hindu*, 15/03/18.

Forest and wildlife staff get automatic firearms

Rhino habitats and tiger reserves of the state, including the Kaziranga National Park (KNP), have received a fresh batch of automatic firearms in an effort to add more teeth to anti-poaching initiatives in the state. Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal handed over about 1,482 different calibers of automatic firearms to the forest department at a formal function in KNP's Kohora area recently. The firearms included 272 INSAS rifles, 954 self-loading rifles, 133 .12-bore pump action guns, 20 9-mm pistols and 91 Ghatak rifles.

These weapons were procured from the Rs. 10 crore allocated in the 2016-17 state budget for purchase of modern firearms for tiger reserves and rhino habitats. The state government has allocated another Rs. 10 crore in the 2017-18 budget for procuring more automatic firearms.

KNP alone has lost six rhinos to poachers this year so far, while at least 15 rhinos were poached last year. 197 poachers were arrested and eight were killed by security guards while as many as 59 poachers were convicted for their crimes against wildlife in the last two years.

The minister said that 10 wildlife fast-track courts were set up to exclusively deal with poaching and other crimes against wildlife. According to an estimate tabled in the state Assembly a total of 74 rhinos have been killed by poachers in Assam since 2015 and 316 poachers were arrested during 2015-17.

Source: 'Kaziranga gets additional firepower', *The Times of India*, 19/02/18.
'Forest guards in Assam get modern weapons to check rhino poaching', *Hindustan Times*, 18/02/18.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Hangul population decreases to 182

A census conducted in March 2017 has revealed that the current population of the hangul in the state of Jammu & Kashmir now stands at 182. This is marginally less than the figure of 186 that was reported in 2015.

There have been a number of initiatives for the conservation of the animal over the years but this has not had any significant impact on their population. The hangul census was started in 2009 and was followed by a Rs. 8.8 crore captive breeding plan. In a major move, the sheep-breeding farm was relocated from within Dachigam National Park recently, thereby restoring 250 acres of land back to the national park.

The state government is also considering a proposal to declare the Tral area in southern Pulwama district as a wildlife sanctuary for conservation of the hangul by way of conserving important corridors.

Source: 'J&K: Fall in hangul numbers worries animal lovers', *The Asian Age*, 05/02/18.

Snow leopard census in Ladakh in April

Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department (J&K FD) officials will begin an estimation of the snow leopard in Ladakh in April. The estimation, following protocols of the All India Tiger Estimation, will be done in the Hemis National Park and the Kargil area. It will be done by the J&K FD in association with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change with technical support from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

The study will cover an area of around 80,808 sq km comprising the trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh, which includes the western Tibetan Himalayas, and the Zaskar and Nubra region. The study will use a number of techniques including presence based on signs, scat analysis and the prey base among others. Camera traps would be installed for creating a database of the species. In addition, there is also

a plan to radio collar at least 10-12 snow leopards for further monitoring.

As per the WII there are about 750 snow leopards in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim. Uttarakhand had conducted a survey in 2015 in the trans-Himalayan region and could get 39 instances of evidence of the species. No actual figure for the cat's population could, however, be established.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'In a first, snow leopard count to be done in Ladakh', *Hindustan Times*, 12/02/18.

KARNATAKA

Tumakuru to get its own wildlife rescue team

Tumakuru may become the first district in Karnataka to have its own dedicated wildlife rescue team to address the frequent human-animal conflict situations. District forest officials have asked for an allocation of Rs. 35 lakh under the Smart City project for setting up the rescue team.

The team will be equipped with the latest equipment and a vehicle fitted with all the facilities for capture operations either in a crowded city area or a village. These include drones and a fridge to keep tranquilisation equipment. The cost of the vehicle is estimated to be Rs. 18 lakhs.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Tumakuru likely to get Karnataka's first district wildlife rescue team', *The New Indian Express*, 10/02/18.

Leopard electrocuted in Kollegal range of BRT TR; farmer arrested

A leopard was electrocuted recently in Thimmarajipur in the Kollegal Wildlife Range of the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve (TR), making it the first incidence of electrocution of a big carnivore in this range. A farmer was arrested for causing the death of the four-year-old leopard and cases were booked against him under the Wildlife Protection Act and the KPTCL Act.

The incident highlights the rising problem of electrocution deaths of big carnivores and herbivores in the region because of farmers illegally electrifying their farm fences. 13 leopards and elephants have been electrocuted in Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Chamrajanagar, Bengaluru rural and other districts here since January 2017.

A forest official said that the issue of sagging cables has been resolved to a large extent but the department is always on the lookout for electric fencing. Usually, fences are powered in the night and switched off in the morning and it becomes difficult to detect them.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Electrified fences of Karnataka farmers leave many animals dead', *The New Indian Express*, 20/02/18.

KARNATAKA/KERALA

Karnataka opposes Thalassery-Mysuru rail link via Kodagu

The Karnataka State Government has clarified that it has not approved the controversial rail link connecting Thalassery in Kerala with Mysuru in Karnataka via Kodagu. It clarified that it would not even allow preparation of the detailed project report for the proposed rail link as the project would jeopardise the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

The rail link spanning more than 200 km would pass through Wayanad in Kerala and enter Kodagu at Kutta to pass through thick forest regions like Balele-Nittor-Canoor and Thithimati to reach Mysuru. Perturbed that the new railway line with a project cost of Rs. 6,685 crores would result in clearing of about 40 per cent of Kodagu's forest, members of the Kodava community, including retired defence officials, planters, environmentalists and the public had staged massive protest rallies recently at Kutta and Madikeri. People from Kodagu, Mysuru and Bengaluru have launched a Save Kodagu and Cauvery campaign led by the Coorg Wildlife Society.

The BJP MLA from Virajpet alleged that both Karnataka and Kerala had already met

once and agreed to carry out survey for the proposed rail link amidst stiff opposition from the local population. According to the MLA, as per the Railway Minister's reply in the Lok Sabha in December 2017, a joint meeting between Kerala and Karnataka secretaries had resolved to take up a survey along the route only if the Kerala government submits a proposal to Karnataka provided it does not cause disturbance to wildlife areas.

The Karnataka Government acknowledged that a meeting between secretaries of the two states did indeed take place but also that the state government had not consented. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 4; Vol. XXII, Nos. 5 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 5 & 3).

Source: Niranjan Kaggere. 'Karnataka halts Kerala in its tracks, saves Kodagu', *Bangalore Mirror*, 08/02/18.

KERALA

Campaign to prevent forest fires in, around Wayanad WLS

The Kerala Forest Department (FD) along with the Wildlife Conservation Society – India Program recently carried out a campaign in villages on the forest fringes of Wayanad district to sensitise people about the need to prevent forest fires. As many as 125 nature enthusiasts from across southern India participated in a 100-km bicycle rally in the villages highlighting the message of conservation. The rally that was flagged off at the Tholpetty ecotourism centre by the North Wayanad forest divisional officer concluded at the Muthanga ecotourism centre.

The rally covered most villages on the fringes of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and the North Wayanad and South Wayanad forest divisions. Receptions were accorded to it at 11 centres in the district. 15,000 brochures on preventing forest fires and the significance of forest conservation were also distributed to the public during the campaign.

Source: EM Manoj. 'Pedalling hard to peddle the message of conservation', *The Hindu*, 18/02/18.

Study reveals Pampadum Shola NP is a safe home for Nilgiri Martens

The Pampadum Shola National Park located in the southern part of Western Ghats is a safe place for Nilgiri Marten and the proposed eco-tourism activities there require careful planning and regular review, say researchers who spent about three years studying the animal. The findings were published in the January 2018 issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*.

The researchers had a total of 42 independent sightings of the animal during their fieldwork and feel the area and its extended forest stretches in Kerala and Tamil Nadu constitute a good habitat for the animal, whose population is estimated to be below 1000 individuals.

Source: KA Shaji. 'Pampadum Shola has significant population of evasive Nilgiri Marten', *The Hindu*, 30/01/18.

Elephant dies after consuming plastic at Sabarimala in Periyar TR

On January 27, a week after the conclusion of the Makaravilakku festival at Sabarimala, a 20-year old female elephant was found dead near Valiyanavattom, hardly one km away from the sewage treatment plant at Pamba. The post-mortem examination of the carcass revealed that it died after large quantity of plastic blocked its alimentary canal, resulting in internal bleeding and failure of vital organs.

The forest officials have found that plastic is a key content in the dung of the animal all over the forest regions covering the hill shrine. The elephants are attracted by food waste, especially those with salt content like packed foods. They have been found to consume plastic even from inside the incinerator shed.

The forest department (FD) had in 2016 filed an affidavit before the high court (HC)

after a sambar died after consuming plastic. The court, in response, had imposed a total plastic ban in Sabarimala. Despite this, loads of plastic bottles and packets are still dumped in and around the shrine.

The Travancore Devaswom Board has blamed the FD for the elephant death. The board's president pointed out that in the case of the elephant that died, three-meter long plastic sheet used by shopkeepers at Valiyanavattom and Cheriyanavattom was found in its intestine. The shops are leased out by the FD and it was not doing anything to ensure the proper disposal of this plastic.

Source: KP Saikiran. 'Plastic waste kills elephant near Pamba', *The Times of India*, 27/01/18.

MAHARASHTRA

Solar power fencing to curb animal deaths by electrocution

As a solution to the problem of wild animal deaths because of contact with electric fences put up illegally by farmers (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, Nos. 6 & 3), the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) plans to supply low-intensity solar energy at night to 1000-odd villages near forest areas. The FD has consulted the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) and other utilities for powering electric fences at a relatively low power so that animal electrocution cases can be controlled.

In 2017, Maharashtra recorded 21 tiger deaths, its highest in a decade and the second highest in the country. Of these, six tigers were electrocuted either purposely or accidentally in cases that have been reported from Chandrapur, Nagpur, Wardha, and Brahmapuri.

The idea is to reduce the cost of solar fencing and it has also been decided that farmers will be able to acquire the basic technology at a low cost under the Central Government's Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission. Currently, electricity from the grid provides power through the night and sporadically during

the day. As a part of the new plan, MSEDCL plans to supply electricity in the day, and stored solar energy can be used for all other utilities throughout the night. MSEDCL officials said that they will begin the process with 300-odd villages close in Nagpur, Chandrapur and Ghadchiroli districts.

Wildlife conservationists have however criticised the idea and said that electric fences, which are illegal, should not be allowed at all. They said the FD needs to study and document the age-old traditional methods being used by farmers to stop the animals from entering their farms. These methods combined with latest technology can provide ready solutions to the problem.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Maharashtra considers solar power supply for electric fences to curb wildlife deaths', *Hindustan Times*, 06/02/18.

Relocation of legal slums and adivasi enclaves from SGNP to be delayed

The plan for the relocation of legal slums and adivasi enclaves from inside the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) may get delayed further because the proposed location in Chandivli is not suitable as it comes under the flying path of aircrafts.

The state government has formed a nine-member high-level committee under the additional chief secretary Pravin Pardesi to finalise the land for rehabilitation of the SGNP slum-dwellers. There are about over 500 tribal families in various adivasi enclaves that have been here since before independence. Another 10,000 families live in the slums in nine pockets such as those of Kokipada, Janupada, Damupada, Dharkaadi and Bhimnagar. These have been here since before January 1995. The development plan (DP) 2034 has also earmarked about 66 acres of land in Aarey Colony for rehabilitation of tribals from the SGNP.

The local Shiv Sena legislator has, however, strongly opposed the shift saying that these residents had the right to continue since they have been here for a very long time.

Source: Sujit Mahamulkar. 'Mumbai: Sanjay Gandhi National Park rehabilitation work may delay further', *The Times of India*, 20/02/18.

Leopard numbers increase in SGNP; majority photographed for the first time

The number of leopards camera-trapped in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Aarey Milk Colony has gone up from 35 in 2015 to 41 in 2017. Nikit Surve of the Wildlife Conservation Society-India, who carried out both the surveys has attributed the increase in numbers to a more intensive camera-trapping effort on account of the availability of substantially increased resources for the same. In 2015, 422 trap nights covering 31 camera-trap locations yielded 88 leopard photographs, whereas in 2017, the effort was more than doubled to 922 trap nights covering 49 camera-trap locations giving 235 images with leopards.

Of the 41 animals photographed in 2017, 15 were males and 23 were females. The sex of the remaining three could not be determined. Further, only 14 of these 41 were recorded in 2015 with the remaining 27 being new animals. Six leopards from 2017 matched with those in the 2011 camera-trapping database.

The other animals photographed during the exercise included the Jungle cat, Rusty spotted cat, Bonnet macaque, Rhesus macaque, Common langur, sambar, Spotted deer, Barking deer, Small Indian civet, Palm civet, Indian hare and mongoose.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'Leopard count at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) rises to 41 but 50 per cent of old ones missing', *Mid-Day*, 07/02/18.

FD approves car park inside SGNP

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has given a go ahead for a car park inside the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The 300-vehicle capacity car park will come up near the Krishnagiri Upvan office located at the entrance

of the national park, and buses will ferry people inside the park to places like the popular Kanheri caves. The space will be developed by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) which will also collect the toll and maintain it for 15 years. The MTDC has provided 13 battery-operated vehicles to ferry people around the park. The car park will be operational in less than a year.

Officials say this will restrict the entry of private vehicles into the park, which sees the movement of over 300 vehicles on an average every day. The numbers are much higher on weekends and holidays. According to estimates, the national park receives more than 12 lakh visitors every year.

The proposal for the parking lot was chalked out at least three years ago. The R-Central ward committee had given its approval for the parking lot in October last year, a move that was also endorsed by the civic general body. However, it was vehemently opposed by nature lovers as it involves cutting and felling of several trees. A significant portion of the Krishnagiri Upvan, a garden developed in 2014 at a cost of Rs.10 lakh, is likely to be utilised to construct the parking lot.

Environmentalists have pointed out that when the air quality of Mumbai is worsening, the green cover must be protected. Many other projects like the highway widening, the multi-modal corridor, Thane-Borivali cable car and the freight corridor, among others, are already demanding land from the national park. They have questioned the rationale behind developing the garden in the first place if the parking lot project was in the pipeline for many years anyway.

Morning and evening walkers, who frequent the Krishnagiri garden, have also criticised the move.

Source: Yogesh Naik. 'SGNP car park gets final state nod', *Mumbai Mirror*, 14/02/18. 'Forest land diverted to build 300-vehicle capacity car park at Sanjay Gandhi National Park', *Mid-Day*, 14/02/18.

Two leopards killed every year on roads along SGNP in the last decade

Data put together from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) and Mumbaikars for SGNP has revealed that 19 leopards have been killed around SGNP, most of them on the Western Express Highway from 2008 to 2018.

Accidents were reported on the National Highway (NH) 8 (Mumbai-Ahmedabad highway); Mauje-Chena (West); Mumbai-Thane Ghodbunder highway; Bhandup-NITIE Road, adjacent to IIT Road; on the Thane-Ghodbunder Road, near Ghodbunder village; Vasai and Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS), which is forested on either side, and even on arterial roads of Film City and Aarey Colony, Goregaon. A study conducted under the 'Mumbaikars for SGNP' initiative in 2013 revealed that 40 leopards died in road accidents along the periphery of SGNP from 1994 to 2012.

Apart from leopards, other animals killed in road accidents include macaques, wild boars, civets, mongoose, snakes and deer. A decision has been taken now to construct seven animal passageways along peripheral areas of the park, especially between TWS and SGNP to prevent further fatalities (see adjoining story).

Source: '2 leopards killed every year on roads along Mumbai's national park in past decade', *Hindustan Times*, 14/03/18.

Infra projects around SGNP to get nod if they build animal passageways

Indian Railways will build one animal overpass and one underpass in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in return for the approval they received to construct a railway line in the area. One overpass will come up near Shilottar village while the underpass has been planned near Nagla village, two km between SGNP and the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS).

Two other underpasses have been planned on the Western Express Highway (WEH), which connects the National Highway

(NH) 8 near Kolhi village on the boundary of TWS and the Thane territorial forest. Another underpass will be constructed near Chinchoti village further down the same highway, where the forest department has recorded animal road kills. The plan at all these locations, is to convert existing culverts or nullahs, which have dried up, into underpasses. The final overpass will be developed 1.5 km away from Sativali village along NH8 between two hills.

The forest department has said that a decision has been made that projects around SGNP will henceforth be approved only on the condition of constructing animal passageways to prevent animal fatalities.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Infra projects around Mumbai's national park to get nod if they build animal passageways', *Hindustan Times*, 14/03/18.

SGNP leopards prey on dogs, cut rabies risk among people: Study

A study, which is a meta-analysis of leopard related research done over the past 15 years in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) has suggested that leopards here may be helping reduce dog-bite incidents, risk of rabies transmission to humans and costs associated with dog sterilization and management because they regularly prey on dogs.

The research team with Alexander Braczkowski, a National Geographic explorer as the lead author, notes that under one set of assumptions, the presence of leopards in this highly urbanized area could save several human lives per year. This the study does by estimating the ecosystem service value of the 35 leopards that live in SGNP and the adjoining Aarey Milk Colony that feed on stray dogs. At present, around 3.5 lakh people are estimated to live within 500m of the park borders and in and around Aarey.

The study states that dogs have been the primary prey source for leopards in SGNP over the past 15 years - approximately 42% of the diet of a leopard inhabiting this area consists of dogs. Assuming a leopard's daily food intake of

five kg, the 35 leopards kill about 1,500 dogs per year in and around the national park. If the total number of dogs that leopards consume in this system (1,500 dogs) is multiplied by the cost (around Rs. 770) of sterilizing each dog, then about Rs. 11.6 lakh is saved towards the sterilization programme.

Another positive about leopards preying on dogs is curbing rabies cases. On an average 74,603 dog-bite cases have been reported per year from the 2.1 crore Mumbaikars. The study estimates people living adjacent to the park experience about 10 times fewer bite incidents than in the rest of the city.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'SGNP leopards prey on strays, cut rabies risk among people', *The Times of India*, 15/03/18.

22 hectares destroyed by fire in SGNP

An estimated 22 hectares of forests in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) were burnt in the middle of March in fires at six areas of the park. About 150 people, including forest officers and NGOs like the Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare (RAWW) and Plants and Animals Welfare Society (PAWS) - Mumbai came together to ensure that the fires were doused out.

Forest officers said the fires were reported from two different patches of the Yogi hills in Mulund, Nahur, two from near the Wagle Estate in Yeoor and two large fires were seen at Tulsi range and Chenna village near Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Area equivalent to 15 Wankhede stadiums lost in fire at Mumbai's SGNP', *Hindustan Times*, 15/02/18.

ODISHA

Over a million turtles nested on Odisha beaches this season

Over a million Olive ridley turtles are estimated to have nested this season at the mass nesting

sites of Rushikulya and Gahirmatha on the Odisha coast. This includes 6.64 lakh that laid their eggs from March 8 to 12 on Nasi- 1 and Nasi- 2 islands within the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. This number is much higher than the 6.04 lakh that had nested the previous year and is believed to be only second to the 7.1 lakh nesting turtles that were estimated to have nested here in the year 2000.

To protect the turtle eggs from dogs, jackals, wild boars and other predators, the forest department has cordoned off the nesting beaches with fences. Forest guards have also been deployed to prevent entry of any predators to the nesting sites.

Source: 'Olive Ridelys break nesting record at Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary', *The New Indian Express*, 14/03/18.

Odisha to spend Rs 563 cr for wildlife and forest development

The Odisha government has approved an annual plan budget of Rs. 563 crore for execution of several programmes for wildlife conservation and forest development in the state. The money has been sanctioned under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) fund.

The annual budget as well as action plan was discussed at a meeting held recently under the chairmanship of chief secretary, AP Padhi. Forest and environment secretary, Suresh Chandra Mohapatra, and chief wildlife warden, Sandeep Tripathy, also attended the meeting.

Source: 'Odisha to spend Rs 563 cr for wildlife and forest development', www.odishatv.in, 25/02/18.

159 forest officers recruited via special drive

A total of 159 forest officers - 48 assistant conservators of forests and 111 range officers - were recruited recently to the Odisha Forest Department at a state-level function on 'Human Resource Development and Capacity Building in Forest and Environment Department' that

was presided over by the Chief Minister, Mr Naveen Patnaik.

The candidates have been selected by Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC) through what was a first of its kind special drive for direct recruitment. The move is expected to help bridge the gap in vacancies at the level of executing and supervising officers in the state.

Source: 'Govt steps led to rise in forest cover: Naveen', *The New Indian Express*, 04/03/18.

Satkosia TR to get first tiger from MP in April

The Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR) is to get its first tiger from Madhya Pradesh in the month of April as part of the Odisha government's program to re-introduce tigers here. A high-level team of state's wildlife wing, comprising chief wildlife warden, Sandeep Tripathi and field director of Satkosia, Sudarshan Panda, visited Bhopal recently to discuss the modalities of the translocation with top officers of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, which had given its consent for sharing six tigers with Odisha. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), which has been roped in by the Odisha Government for technical support had also sent in a team for the discussion. An official of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was also present during the exercise, which involved visits to the three tiger reserves.

It has been decided that Odisha would get three pairs of tigers in different phases. A male tiger, either from Kanha or the Bandhavgarh TR is likely to be shifted in the 2nd half of April as part of the first phase of translocations. The animals will be about four years of age or below to ensure the building up of a successful breeding population in Satkosia.

Although air-lifting of the tiger was being considered, road-transportation has been decided for the purpose of the translocation. For the soft release, the wildlife wing is building an enclosure where the big cat would be monitored for first few weeks. This is the first instance of inter-state translocation of tigers and MP has

also offered support to Odisha staff for training and for monitoring.

Currently, Satkosia has two tigers but both are old and beyond the breeding age. Odisha officials have claimed that strong protection measures have ensured that prey population has increased here substantially. In December last year, the Satkosia TR authorities had relocated 78 families from Raigoda village located in the core of the tiger habitat. The Government has also redrawn the boundary of the tiger reserve and added more area to the habitat (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 1 and Vol. XXII, No. 6).

Source: 'Modalities over, first tiger from Madhya Pradesh next month', *The New Indian Express*, 19/03/18.

RAJASTHAN

Centre approves land use change for shifting villages from Mukundra Hills TR

The Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) has got an in-principle approval from the Centre for land use change of 100 hectares near Kota to relocate villagers from the Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve (MHTR). The forest advisory committee (FAC) of the Centre has given the approval for land use change of the 100 hectares of forestland in Lakhawa region for the purpose.

An FAC team had visited Lakhawa in January earlier this year after the FD submitted a proposal for relocation of the villages here. Following that wildlife officials of the state, including the chief wildlife warden gave a presentation on the proposed rehabilitation. The relocation of villages was proposed after the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) approved shifting of three tigers – two females and a male - from Ranthambore National Park to MHTR.

The relocation, however, remains a thorny issue. Of the 14 villages slated for relocation from inside the reserve, only two — Lakshmipura and Kharli Baori — have moved so far. The remaining 12 villages will be shifted out in a phased manner. Two of the bigger

villages - Girdharpura and Damodarpura - will be relocated to the land at Lakhawa in the first phase where each of the villagers will be allotted around 200 square yards of land.

Residents of the 12 villages are not satisfied with the compensation offered. Based on the NTCA norms, the wildlife department had promised Rs. 10 lakh to every adult and compensation for land as per district-level committee (DLC) rates. The villagers want the compensation to be hiked four times. (Also See *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 1)

Source: Aabshar H Quazi. 'Centre approves land use change for shifting villages from Mukundra reserve in Rajasthan', *Hindustan Times*, 04/03/18.

TAMIL NADU

Grizzled giant squirrel sighted near Gingee, Villupuram dist.

A group of wildlife researchers recently sighted a Grizzled giant squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*) in a forest near Gingee in Villupuram district for the first time. A pair of the squirrels was seen on a tamarind tree on the way through a forest leading to the Durgai Amman shrine.

The squirrel is generally found in the foothills of the Western Ghats and a couple of areas in the Eastern Ghats. There has been no previous record of the arboreal animal near Gingee. The animal had also been sighted in Tiruvannamalai Forest Division a few years ago.

Researchers said that a detailed study of the area in different seasons is required to understand the squirrel's movement. The species is threatened by poachers and is also in demand in the pet trade. According to forest officials, a proposal to declare the area a sanctuary is being considered.

Source: P Oppili. 'Endangered squirrel spotted near Gingee for the first time', *The Times of India*, 01/02/18.

TELANGANA

51 poaching cases registered in Telangana in 2017

A reply by the Telangana Forest Department to a query filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act has revealed that 51 wildlife poaching cases were registered in the state in 2017. The highest number of 16 cases were reported from the Kawal Tiger Reserve. Most of these 51 cases were booked against local poachers who use traditional ways of poaching such as traps and snares.

Source: U Sudhakar Reddy. '51 poaching cases in state, but none from wetlands', *The Times of India*, 06/02/18.

UTTAR PRADESH

12 board exam centres deemed 'vulnerable to tiger attacks' in Pilibhit

Of the 64 board examination centres in Pilibhit district, as many as 12 centres have been deemed 'vulnerable to tiger attacks'. Both parents and students whose exam centres are among these 12 are more worried about being mauled on the way by a big cat than their exam.

A worried principal of the Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Higher Secondary School in Mala near Pilibhit Tiger Reserve said that 30 girls of Goel Colony village had been allotted this school as the exam centre. To reach the school, they have to use a road cutting through the Mala forest range, which has witnessed eight deaths in tiger attacks in the past 14 months.

On its part, the administration has made arrangements for field patrolling by police and forest forces to ensure the safety of students.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. 'Tigers on prowl in Pilibhit, 12 exam centres deemed 'vulnerable' to attacks', *The Times of India*, 06/02/18.

UTTARAKHAND

MoU signed for road through Corbett TR

An MoU was signed recently between the Uttarakhand Eco Tourism Development Corporation (UETDC) and National Buildings Construction Company (NBCC) to undertake construction of the Kandi Road which will pass through Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) and shorten the travel distance between Garhwal and Kumaon by two hours. Forest minister Harak Singh Rawat said that the Rs. 2,000 crore project would be ready in two years.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the NBCC will prepare a detailed project report of the 90 km road from Kotdwar to Ramnagar. Around 50 km of the road will pass through CTR and the minister said there was a plan to build a flyover to facilitate animal movement in the 17km stretch where Corbett shares a boundary with the Amangarh Tiger Reserve.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'MoU signed for Kandi Road', *The Times of India*, 19/03/18.

Rajaji authorities seek high court's help to remove encroaching ashrams

Rajaji Tiger Reserve (RTR) authorities have sought help of the Uttarakhand High Court (HC) after a Survey of India report revealed that 10 ha of forest land has been encroached upon by a few ashrams in Haridwar. A public interest litigation filed against the encroachments resulted in a HC direction to the Survey of India to conduct a mapping of the RTR to identify the encroachments. The report was submitted to the court in December.

According to the survey report, the ashrams guilty of encroachment include those of Sant Asaram and Baba Amir Giri and also the Adinath Singh Lok Ashram. Some private parties such as Tomar Apartments have also encroached on forest land. Most of these encroachments are in Haripur Kala and Dudhiya areas of the reserve.

The reserve authorities have now requested the court to order the erring parties to vacate the encroached land. Most of these ashrams were on lease and are not ready to vacate despite several warnings.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'Ashrams encroach 10 hectares of Rajaji reserve land', *Hindustan Times*, 14/02/18.

Train kills elephant inside Rajaji TR

An elephant was killed after being hit by a train inside the Rajaji Tiger Reserve. The animal, believed to be 8-10 years in age, was hit by the Delhi-Dehradun Nanda Devi Express at four in the morning while it was crossing the railway track in the Kansro beat of the reserve. This is the ninth incident of an elephant's death due to collision with a train.

This apart 58 elephants have died in accidents while 37 died after being electrocuted between 2001 and 2017. 19 elephants died in 2015, followed by 29 in 2016 and 34 in 2017. According to a recent survey report Uttarakhand has 1,839 elephants, which is a substantial increase from the number of 1,346 reported in 2012.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'Tusker killed in Uttarakhand after being hit by Nanda Devi Express', *Hindustan Times*, 17/02/18.

Only five Himalayan blue sheep infected in Gangotri NP: Uttarakhand govt.

The Uttarakhand Government has, in a reply to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), said that only five Himalayan blue sheep in the Gangotri National Park were found to have a mysterious eye infection (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 1). It also noted that the disease is not as wide spread as has been reported. The infection had come into focus after a Border Security Force expedition spotted infected sheep in the Bhujkharak area near Kedar Tal in September last year. The NGT had directed the Uttarakhand government to submit a reply by

December 21 following an appeal in the matter that was filed by a Delhi-based advocate.

The chief wildlife warden (CWLW) mentioned in his affidavit that of the 353 blue sheep in the park only five were found to have the eye infection as per an estimation of the Wildlife Institute of India. The affected sheep included two males, one female and two young ones. The other animals – 57 in Rudragaira Valley, 249 in Nelong Valley and 42 in Gaumukh that includes Tapovan – were reported to be healthy. The CWLW's note also said that 26 sheep in Srikanth and 30 in the Gidara meadows – both falling in the buffer area of the park – also did not show any symptoms of the disease.

In the affidavit, the CWLW also stated that two sheep, which were spotted with symptoms of eye infection near Kedar Tal could not be caught due to inaccessible terrain. Wildlife officials in the state had earlier claimed that a lamb was caught on September 16 but died before it could be sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bareilly for examination. They said later that the IVRI scientists who studied the samples had ruled out the presence of any such disease in the lamb. However, the IVRI scientists said that they were not sent any eye tissues because of which they could not check whether the lamb had the disease or not.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'Five blue sheep affected, no spread of eye infection, state tells NGT', Hindustan Times, 09/02/18.

Seema Sharma. 'Mysterious disease causing blindness in blue sheep, admits wildlife warden in NGT', *The Times of India*, 10/02/18.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Centre releases new draft National Forest Policy

Seeking to replace the country's 30-year-old national forest policy, the Centre has come out

with a new draft policy which calls for promoting urban greens, public private partnership models for afforestation, strengthening forest fire prevention measures and plantations in catchment areas to rejuvenate water bodies among many proposals to protect India's green cover. The draft National Forest Policy (NFP) 2018 was released in March by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and is open for comments from stakeholders for a month. The stated attempt is to sync the policy with the country's forestry-related 'Nationally Determined Contribution' targets under the Paris Agreement where India has promised to rapidly increase its forest cover so that an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent is created by the year 2030.

Concerns have, however, been raised about the draft. These include the non-consideration of the competitive demands for forestlands and also a vagueness regarding rights for forest communities though it does propose a national community forest management mission for the community resource management under the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

Following is a listing of some of the salient features of the draft policy:

- Public-private participation for afforestation in degraded forest areas
- Promoting urban greens
- Measures to safeguard ecosystems from forest fire (map the vulnerable areas; develop and strengthen early warning systems)
- National Community Forest Management Mission for participatory forest management
- Afforestation in catchment areas for river rejuvenation and water recycling
- Economic valuation of forests
- Forest certification to provide premium on forest produce
- Integration of climate change concerns in forest management
- Promote agro-forestry and farm forestry
- Management of north-eastern forests

Source Vishwa Mohan. 'Centre drafts national forest policy; Focuses on urban greens, private participation and climate change mitigation', *The Times of India*, 16/03/18.

Major forest fires repeat every three years in the Western Himalayas: Study

New research on forest fire cycles conducted by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) has found that in the western Himalayas — which includes Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, the major fire cycle repeats itself every three years. The reason for this, the research says, is constant deposition of combustible material like dry and dead wood and pine leaves in addition to periodic droughts. The three-year-fire cycle theory is also illustrated with a count of forest fire incidents in the past nine years. While 2009 saw 46,152 fire incidents ravaging forests across the country, the number of such incidents was 40,528 in 2012 and 33,664 in 2016.

Carbon stock in the country for 2017 has been estimated to be 7,083 million tonnes, an increase of 39 million tonnes in last two years. Arunachal Pradesh has maximum stock of 994.5 million tonnes while Uttarakhand stands at seventh position with 284 million tonnes.

The director general, FSI said that the best way to prevent forest fires is by treating catchment areas. By conserving rain-water through various means ground water can be conserved, soil erosion contained and moisture levels maintained, thereby decreasing chances of fires being ignited.

The deputy director, FSI added that in order to deal with such fires, pre-alert systems, which was introduced in 2016 have now been improved. A faster and more intensive 'SNPP-VIIRS system' has already given 1,125 fire alerts to Uttarakhand since January this year in comparison to just 376 which were issued with slower sensors in the entire last year.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'Major forest fires repeat themselves every three years', *The Times of India*, 16/02/18.

SC stay on law giving Centre control over NGT, other tribunals

The Supreme Court (SC) has stayed a law that would have given the central government complete control over tribunals in the country, including the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The court order came in response to a host of petitions including one by Congress leader and former environment minister Jairam Ramesh, who had challenged the Finance Act the Centre had promulgated last year.

The court directed that the terms and conditions of service of members of the NGT shall be governed by the provisions of the NGT Act, 2010. The stayed rules, part of the Union budget presented in February 2017, gave the Centre powers to appoint and remove the NGT chairperson and other members and also fix their salaries and terms of service. The Act made it clear that the Centre would frame rules on these matters. It also said a retired administrator could head the body.

The new law had made the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change the de facto controlling authority of the NGT. The order has been welcomed by environmentalists and activists. Concern remains, however, about the fact that many vacancies of the NGT remained unfilled (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 1 and Vol. XXIII, Nos. 6 & 5).

Source: Jayanta Basu. 'SC breather for green tribunals', *The Telegraph*, 12/02/18.

India may not meet Aichi target of identifying PAs

India might not meet the international target of identifying wildlife and marine-protected areas (PAs) by 2020, the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) said in a meeting that took place on January 25.

According to the minutes of the 47th meeting of the NBWL, chaired by the Union environment minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, India has constituted only 4.9% of the total terrestrial

land and inland waters under the network of PAs, which is far below the Aichi target of 17% for terrestrial land by 2020. Where marine areas are concerned currently 0.3% of the exclusive economic zone is under marine PAs in India, against the Aichi target of 10%.

Under the International Convention on Biological Diversity a strategic plan for biodiversity conservation with five goals and 20 Aichi targets was put in place for the decade 2011-20 in the year 2010. Accordingly, India developed 12 national biodiversity targets, using Aichi targets as a framework to conserve its biodiversity.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'India may miss deadline to identify wildlife, marine protected areas by 2020: Environment board', *Hindustan Times*, 13/02/18.

Prakriti Srivastava is new country director of WCS

Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Prakriti Srivastava took over as country director of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) — India Programme from Ullas Karanth recently.

Srivastava has been an IFS officer for 27 years, serving on the Kerala cadre as well as in various other capacities in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

She is known for her unflinching support to wildlife and forest conservation, and her ability to catalyse a wide variety of conservation initiatives.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Srivastava takes charge of Wildlife Conservation Society India', *The Times of India*, 19/02/18.

Central Railway to train field staff in Central India to deal with wildlife

The Nagpur Division of Central Railway has initiated a project for capacity building of their field staff in dealing with wildlife and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has been recruited for the task. 61 employees were trained in the

first phase during a session at Dhondra Mohar Railway Station.

The move comes after an incident in November 2017 when two trackmen were nearly killed in a sloth bear attack near the Kesla Railway Station. The two were attacked by an infuriated bear when one of the trackmen hurled stones at the animal in an attempt to save the other. Had the trackmen been trained in handling such attacks, the situation could have been avoided.

The trackmen were provided guidance in the workshop on defensive techniques to deal with situations when they come across wild animals. The staff have been advised to wear long socks and boots to avoid snakebites and to use chilly spray or powder in case of danger.

The project is expected to eventually benefit over 1,500 staffers and supervisors. It is aimed at building confidence among trackmen who are vulnerable to wildlife attacks, especially in the hilly section between Amla and Itarsi. The area falls in Satpuda Tiger Reserve landscape and wild animal movement is regular seen along the tracks.

Officials said that the route has been operational since 1912, but incidents of wild animal attacks have been reported only recently. In 2009, one of the employees was mauled by a wild boar near the tracks in Warora.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Central Railway staff gets training in handling wildlife attacks', *The Times of India*, 06/02/18.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH

17 Gangetic dolphins found dead in Halda River in four months; demand made to declare a dolphin sanctuary here

A total of 17 Gangetic dolphins have been found dead in the Halda River between October 2017 and February 2018. The deaths are believed to have been caused by a combination of factors

that include rampant industrial pollution of the river, the use of dredgers for lifting river sand and growing traffic from mechanized boats. The river is believed to be home to about 200 of these dolphins.

The Halda River Research Laboratory, which is engaged in examining the cause of the deaths has found a number of injury marks on the bodies of the dead animals leading one official to suggest that dredgers and the propellers of boats were the most significant factors. Another expert from the Chittagong University's Institute of Marine Science and Fisheries suspects that pollution in the river is also responsible, while local people say the reasons for the dolphin deaths could include the use of various pesticides in tobacco farming, cutting the bend of the rivers and brick-making activities here.

A group of experts at the Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Chittagong University, recently collected a sample of water from the Halda River. Based on an analysis of the sample, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock has made some recommendations and formed an action plan to clean up the river. The principal secretary to the Prime Minister also chaired a meeting recently to review the action plan. He is reported to have asked respective departments to implement the plan.

The Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) said it intended to form an inter-departmental experts' committee to investigate the reasons behind the dolphin deaths. The deaths have also led experts and environmentalists to demand that the river be declared a sanctuary for freshwater dolphins as soon as possible.

Source: Banani Mallick. 'Dolphin deaths shine light on alarming state of Bangladesh rivers', www.thirdpole.net, 20/02/18.

NEPAL

25 gharials released into Rapti River

The National Trust for Nature Conservation, Chitwan and the Zoological Society of London in Nepal recently released 25 gharials into the Rapti River. The animals were sourced from the crocodile breeding centre in Chitwan National Park (CNP).

The local Bote, Majhi and Musahar communities were involved in their release. The animals were marked as per the three communities in a symbolic way to help preserve the endangered species. This new way of marking Gharials was carried out with the objective of increasing the awareness of the locals in the conservation and preservation of wildlife, the CNP protection officer said. The authorities plan to release around 100 more Gharials into their natural habitat this year.

Gharials are now only limited to Chitwan and Bardia in Nepal. Though over a 1000 gharials have been released into the wild in recent years, only few have survived. The number of gharials in rivers in Nepal has been estimated at 198 according to the latest census.

Source: 'Rapti River welcomes 25 Gharials', www.kathmandupost.com, 18/02/18.



Important Bird Areas Update

HARYANA

Drone mapping of Sultanpur NP

The Haryana Wildlife Department recently conducted an exercise for drone mapping of the Sultanpur National Park. A drone equipped with cameras hovered over the park for three hours and took images. A group of five wildlife staffers were involved in the exercise.

The department plans to analyse the results for more scientific management of the park. The mapping will be used to determine the status of the water body in the park and its catchment area. 180 acres of the 352 acre park is covered by the wetland. The topography and green cover would also be analysed and this is expected to help the department identify the steps needed for the better management of the park.

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Gurgaon: Wildlife dept maps Sultanpur park with drones for 'scientific upkeep'', *Hindustan Times*, 01/02/18.

MADHYA PRADESH

MP to de-notify 86 sq km from GIB sanctuary at Ghatigaon

The Madhya Pradesh government has decided to de-notify 86 sq km of 'Son Chiriya' (Great Indian Bustard - GIB) sanctuary at Ghatigaon in Gwalior district. This follows demands to this effect by local villagers and politicians - union minister, Narendra Singh Tomar, former union minister and MP from Guna-Shivpuri, Jyotiraditya Scindia and MP inister Yashodhara Raje. The bird has also not been seen here since 2011.

The sanctuary that is spread over 512 sq km was notified in 1981 and included both revenue and forest department land. As per the notification, people could not sell and purchase

the land, construct houses and roads, dig for borewells, erect poles for transmission of electricity or conduct business related work in the protected area. Consequently, farmers of 55 villages started facing several problems and have been demanding that the area be de-notified.

The denotification will pave the way for the removal of 25 villages from the PA.

Source: Satyaprakash Sharma. 'Madhya Pradesh to denotify 86 sq km of wildlife sanctuary', *The Statesman*, 16/02/18.

ODISHA

Government plans new lease policy for Chilika

The Odisha government is planning a new policy for regulating fishery leases in Chilika Lake. The government plans to prioritise primary fishermen cooperative societies during granting of lease of fishing areas inside the lake. It has also proposed to undertake a field survey to demarcate fishery areas by differential global positioning system to prevent encroachment.

In a recent eviction drive, around 150 sq km of the total 180 sq km of the encroached area of the lake has been cleared and this is reported to have improved the quality of ecosystem here, increased fish production by 20% and prawn catch by 500% in the last six months. It has also reduced siltation and has increased the spread of grass meadows.

Sponges too were reportedly sighted here for the first time since 1985.

Source: 'Odisha govt to introduce new lease policy for Chilika Lake', *The Times of India*, 10/02/18.

TAMIL NADU

166 species of birds sighted in and around Coimbatore

As many as 166 species of birds were sighted during the two-day state-wide synchronised wetland bird census conducted in Coimbatore.

The survey, jointly conducted by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD), the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature - India and Centre for Urban Biodiversity Conservation and Education covered 25 small and big ponds in Coimbatore, most of them part of Noyyal River system. More than 67 volunteers were involved in the survey. Nine civil society organisations and two academic institutions also took part in this exercise.

Of the 166 species recorded, 32 were migratory bird species. As many as 92 species were resident birds while 42 were resident-cum-migratory birds. FD officials said that a maximum of 89 bird species were recorded at Vellalore lake and surrounding areas. Around 1,604 individual birds were recorded at Ukkadam lake. Some of the species recorded during the survey were the Comb duck, Bar-headed goose, Black-tailed godwit, White wagtail and Western marsh harrier. Observers also sighted a group of around 150 Whiskered terns at Irugur lake.

Source: 'Wetland bird survey: 166 species recorded in Coimbatore', *The Hindu*, 11/02/18.

SOUTH ASIA

South Asia vulture conservation priorities

The 7th annual meeting of 'Save Asia's Vultures from Extinction' (SAVE) was held in Bangladesh in November 2017. Following is the list of priorities agreed to for vulture conservation in South Asia

- Veterinary licenses to be withdrawn for two drugs – ketoprofen and aceclofenac - based on the existing evidence that they are unsafe for vultures,

- An effective system of regulation of veterinary drugs, based upon safety-testing on vultures to be continued for all current painkillers (NSAIDs) and for all potential new ones entering veterinary practice,
- Evaluate safety to vultures of Nimesulide as a priority,
- Identify additional vulture safe NSAIDs (alternative for vets),
- Defend and communicate the 2015 multi-dose ban of human diclofenac formulations to relevant authorities & stakeholders, particularly in India,
- Initiate major efforts within South Asia to address the immediate and increasing gap in funding for vulture conservation,
- Promote the network and the approach of 'Vulture Safe Zones' across South Asia with expansion to include trans-boundary cooperative efforts,
- Maintain and support the existing vulture conservation breeding programmes throughout South Asia,
- Create a safe environment for further soft releases of captive vultures at identified sites (100km radius) in Nepal and first soft releases in India in 2018, requiring satellite monitoring of the released birds,
- Improve availability of well-formulated meloxicam products thereby facilitating their popularity with veterinary practitioners,
- Use the Convention of Migratory Species' Vulture Multi-species Action Plan as a tool to promote SAVE priority actions and engage with governments,
- Support National Vulture Recovery Committees and the Regional Steering Committee in order to facilitate the urgent implementation of the 2012 Delhi Regional Agreement and SAVE priorities.

Contact: Chris Bowden, Globally Threatened Species Officer & SAVE Programme Manager. Email: chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk

SPECIAL SECTION

Protected Areas and the FRA

CHATTISGARH

Move to relocate village from inside Barnawapara WLS

In an incident that occurred on January 15, 2018, forest officials allegedly assaulted members of tribal families in Rampur Forest Village and destroyed a sacred site located inside the Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary as part of a drive to relocate the village. The village has filed its community forest rights (CFR) claims and some families have received individual forest rights titles as well. A local villager was taken into police custody, and the local police station refused to file an FIR registering the assault on the villagers.

Source: Devendra Baghel, Dalit Adivasi Manch. Email communication on Community Forest Right-Learning and Advocacy Email Group).

ODISHA

CFR claims of 43 villages within Similipal TR recognised

Community rights (CR) and community forest rights (CFR) claims of 43 villages in four tehsils of Mayurbhanj district within the Similipal Sanctuary have been approved by district level committee (DLC). Some of these were claims over areas falling within the core of the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) as well. These are in addition to the 43 CFR and CR claims recognized by the DLC in 2015.

The forest department (FD) had, citing the recent NTCA order (see accompanying report) refrained from recognising rights in tiger reserves. It has also asked that the titles be modified by excluding the core areas of STR. After a meeting was called by the Collector to address these issues, the DFOs have signed all the pending titles and withdrawn the objections over previously recognized CR and CFR

rights. The habitat rights of the Mankirdia community, however, are yet to be recognized in their entirety even though they have been approved by the DLC with the exclusion of core areas. The FD has objected to the granting of these rights.

Source: **Bibhore Deo**, Vasundhara and **Pravat Kumar Mishra**, RCDC. Email communication on Community Forest Right-Learning and Advocacy email group.

NATIONAL

Centre issues guidelines to notify critical wildlife habitats

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has sent state governments the guidelines for notification of critical wildlife habitats (CWH) within national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, kicking-off the process of creating inviolate spaces for wildlife conservation by modifying and resettling rights of lakhs of adivasis and other forest dwellers outside CWHs. Delayed by seven years, the guidelines lay down a process comprising physical identification of CWH, holding consultations with tribal and forest dwelling communities and its eventual final notification by MoEF&CC. The development comes at a time when a National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) advisory, issued in March 2017 and supported by the tribal affairs ministry, asked states to not settle rights of tribals and forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, in critical tiger habitats since the CWH guidelines were not formulated (see accompanying story, also *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 1).

According to the guidelines each state has to constitute a seven-member expert committee, chaired by a chief conservator of forest in-charge of a national park or sanctuary for identifying CWHs. Using a scientific and

objective criteria, the committee has to physically identify the CWH and also conduct a public consultation with the affected forest dwelling communities, informing them of the details of the CWH, including its extent. Once the consultations are over, a proposal has to be sent to Centre through the state wildlife board.

Broadly, a three-step public consultation process has been laid down in the guidelines. Once the expert committee identifies the CWH, an open public consultation has to be carried out with tribal communities and a public notice has to be issued 15 days in advance. The notice has to contain details of CWH boundaries, criteria adopted to identify it, its implication on rights of communities affected, options of resettlement and rehabilitation, issues of human-wildlife conflict, if they exist, and details of time, date and venue of the consultation. The public notice is to be also circulated in all offices of the tribal department, local bodies, district collector, taluka office and the forest offices. The communities affected have to be provided transportation to reach the public meeting with a quorum of 75 per cent. After explaining the CWH proposal in the local language, their views and objections have to be duly recorded. The guidelines, though, are silent on any revision based on objections of affected communities. Neither does it say that the public notice has to be published and distributed in the local language.

(Ed's note: There is some disagreement on whether these are final or draft guidelines, and this matter has not been settled yet)

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. 'Centre sends guidelines to notify critical wildlife habitats to states', *DNA*, 19/02/18.

No tribal to be evicted from tiger reserves: NCST

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has asked for a temporary stay on the displacement of tribals from forest areas and critical tiger habitats. It has also asked the Central government to revisit its rehabilitation

policy to ensure tiger conservation does not infringe on tribal rights.

The move follows a circular issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in March 2017, which said forest dwelling tribals did not have any rights on their land in critical tiger habitats. This is being seen by the NCST as an infringement of tribals' rights as spelt out under the Forest Rights Act. In a letter to secretary (environment) CK Mishra, NCST secretary Raghav Chandra said that the circular cannot override the Act, which safeguards the rights of forest dwelling tribals.

The NCST has asked the environment ministry to ensure that the present compensation amount of Rs 10 lakh per family is increased to Rs 20 lakh, that four hectares of land should necessarily be given to displaced family, no tribal should be evicted from forest area until alternate land is provided and the entire rehabilitation and relocation exercise should be completed within three years.

The NCST has also formed a three-member committee to address the issue. The committee is headed by additional chief secretary (forest and environment department) of the Odisha government and has as its members Madhya Pradesh government's Tribal Area Development Department director and NTCA DIG Nishant Verma. The committee will study the issue of transfer or settlement of forest rights and the modalities of compensation to be given to scheduled tribes during voluntary relocation from tiger reserves. The NCST will also be sending teams for field visits to the Similipal, Melghat, Satpura and Bor Tiger Reserves to assess the programmes being implemented by the NTCA and the concerned state governments for rehabilitation of scheduled tribes. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 1)

Source: Nidhi Sharma. 'No tribal to be evicted from tiger reserves: Panel', *Economic Times*, 22/02/18.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

10 years ago

PA Update 72, April 2008

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Hangul census in Dachigam NP

A three-day census of Hangul in the Dachigam National Park (DNP) was conducted in the 2nd week of March by the Forest Department (FD) in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). Others who constituted the census teams included some NGO activists, and volunteers from the Kashmir University and Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural science Kashmir (SQUAST).

The areas to be covered included the Dachigam National Park and the adjoining reserves of Nishat, Bren, Chesmashahi, Dara, Khrew, and Khanmoh. The reserves of Tral in Pulwama, Overa in Pahalgam and Sarphrao, Akhal, forest areas of Sindh division and Wangat reserve were also to be included.

A census carried out by the FD in March 2006 had put the Hangul population between 117 and 197 individuals (*PA Update* Vol. XIII, No. 6) with the female fawn ratio at 20 per 100 males, a negative trend as compared to the 2004 census when it stood at 23 per 100 males. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol XIII, No. 1, Vol XI, No. 4 and No. 47).

Source: 'Wildlife Department embarks on Hangul population census', *Greater Kashmir*, 08/03/08.

15 years ago

PA Update 41 & 42, April 2003

MAHARASHTRA

NHSS takes up rehabilitation of those displaced by Sanjay Gandhi NP

The Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti (NHSS) has decided to take on the responsibility for the housing construction project for the rehabilitation of those recently evicted from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai. The project will come up at Chandivli on land that belongs to Sumer Corporation. Earlier there were reports that NHSS

and the Sumer Corporation were to jointly undertake this project (see *PA Update* 39).

As per the latest details, as many as 16500 families will be accommodated in a township to be developed on 1.89 lakh sq. metres of land. The Sumer Corporation had reportedly approached the NHSS with this offer from a total land of about 3.6 lakh sq. metres that is in their possession. The balance cannot be used as it is in the no-development zone.

The Corporation, will in return, get transfer of development rights (TDR) which it could sell in the open market. There were some questions about the legality of the TDR, but the NHSS has also said that the TDR was being given as per government policy and there is no illegality involved.

Source: 'Shabana's NGO takes up resettlement plan', *The Times of India*, 07/02/03.

NEPAL

10 rhinos to be translocated from Chitwan to Bardia

10 rhinos were to be translocated from the Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) to the Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP) in western Nepal in the month of March. This is part of the rhino translocation programme that was initiated in Nepal in 1986. 77 rhinos have already been moved from Chitwan as part of this programme, 73 to Bardia and four to Sukhlaphanta.

The translocation is being carried out by the Department of National Park and Wildlife (DNPWC) with technical assistance from the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) and financial assistance from WWF-Nepal.

The population of the rhinos in Bardia will reach 100 now. The total population of rhinos in Nepal now stands at 612, with 544 in RCNP alone. This compares very favourably with a number of less than a 100, just about 40 years ago.

Source: '10 more rhinos to be translocated', *The Himalayan Times*, 20/01/03.
'More rhinos to be moved to Bardia', *The Kathmandu Post*, 18/02/03.

PERSPECTIVE

Need to bridge the scientist-journalist trust deficit

"Climate change has destroyed 93% of the Great Barrier Reef", cried a recent article on a popular science and technology web-portal. "Coral are bleaching along the entire Great Barrier Reef", screamed another reporting the same phenomenon. A closer look at the data reveals, however, that this is not entirely true as the press release from James Cook University, that the news reports were based on, said something else. It was titled "Only 7% of the Great Barrier Reef has avoided coral bleaching", which is not the same as the 93% or 100% destruction claimed by the said articles. A later analysis suggested, in fact, that of the 911 reefs surveyed, 45% had 30% or less bleaching. Although coral bleaching is evidently a major problem for the Great Barrier Reefs, it is clear that the journalists had over-stated their cases by quite some margin.

The above incidence illustrates a fundamental tussle of the present times. On one side are the producers of knowledge - scientists and others - who are gathering the hard 'data'. On the other side are the journalists, whose job is to tell the 'non-scientific' masses about the latest scientific / technological advances and their varied implications. No democratic society can function properly without either and yet, in India, the relationship between the two seems to be plagued by a sense of mutual distrust.

Many scientists feel that journalists try to sensationalize stories by exaggerating the findings. Most of them insist, therefore, on communicating only through emails and on looking at a draft of the story before it is published. Most journalists on the other hand complain that scientists have no ideas about how to explain things to non-specialists and their interventions (read interferences) are almost always counter-productive. Moreover, they cite journalistic ethics to argue that showing a quote or a draft to a scientist is a strict no-no. Many of these issues were recently highlighted in an online discussion between

scientists and science journalists of India on an online web-forum called Confluence (<http://confluence.ias.ac.in>).

Society needs both scientists and science journalists and the two in-turn need each other. Therefore, it is critical that both sides develop an appreciation for each other's concerns and constraints. For that, it is essential for both parties to engage with each other and develop mutual trust and respect. This might take the form of meetings, workshops, articles on various forums, old-fashioned chats over cups of coffee and tea or their modern counterparts like Facebook and Twitter. Obviously, this process is neither simple nor quick and there will be many false-starts and dead-ends. However, given the importance of science and technology in the society, it is high time that both scientists and science journalists take some active interest in breaching the existing trust-deficit between the two communities.

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