

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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Protected Area Update

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The linear intrusion nightmare

Of the many grave problems being faced by wildlife and conservation in India today, one of the most serious is the rapidly proliferating intrusion of linear infrastructure. High voltage electric lines, new rail lines through undisturbed forests, doubling of the rail tracks where lines already exist, more roads, wider roads, faster roads... animal electrocution, railway accidents, death after death in collisions with fast moving traffic across protected areas... these have now all become a regular feature of the conservation landscape and of wildlife reporting in the country.

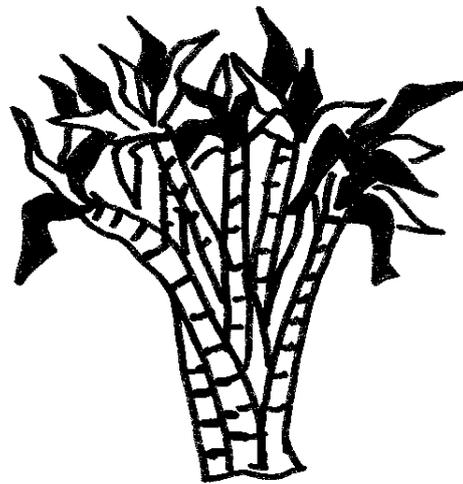
This issue of the *PA Update* itself presents a representative if chilling example of this rapidly escalating challenge. It is not only indiscriminately killing wildlife but is also rapidly fragmenting already threatened and fragmented habitats: monkeys electrocuted by high tension overhead lines in Karnala Bird Sanctuary in Maharashtra; at least two roads that will split Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park into even smaller compartments; a new railway line through the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh where big animals are regularly killed on the two that already exist; no mitigation efforts on a railway line that regularly kills gaur, elephants not to mention smaller wildlife as it links Goa to northern Karnataka, innumerable elephant deaths across Odisha, this time in the Jharsuguda district and a new road through the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand which is being called, well, a 'green road' because measures are being planned and incorporated from the very beginning to mitigate the negative impacts it will certainly have on the forests and wildlife here.

In an earlier phase, big dams, mining activities and industrial and infrastructure projects were at the heart of the conservation versus development debate. The linear intrusion

issue is pitched in very much the same frame even though linear infrastructure occupies a particular imagination within the development discourse – it seems incapable of causing the damage a big project can cause and a road, for instance, is seen to benefit everybody and is desirable by all. The problem is that it is much less visible than, say, a big dam or a mine and the scale and impact does not, therefore, seem so huge or devastating at first glance. It is here that it becomes far more insidious, even dangerous. It may not be the best analogy to use, but it is a little like termites gnawing slowly and un-noticed through the framework. By the time we see it; indeed, because we are able to see it, it is too late – the rot is too deep and permanent to allow a correction.

There is a further problem with linear infrastructure – we all want it and at the same time believe the problems it creates for wildlife and for wilderness can be mitigated. We want increased mobility, a deeper reach, quicker access and believe it can happen without causing changes and damage to what existed. Mitigation appears to offer a win-win situation, but it is more like applying band-aid for wounds that are deep and wide, even as they are being inflicted in increasing numbers with every passing day.

This is a situation that needs deep re-thinking and fundamental changes. The nightmare will only get worse otherwise.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Guards in Kaziranga NP manhandled for preventing illegal fishing

Forest guards were manhandled in the Sildubi area of the Kaziranga National Park (NP) recently for trying to prevent illegal fishing. The area falls under Sonitpur district on the northern banks of Brahmaputra. An FIR has been filed with the Jamuguri police station in the matter.

The guards were attacked during their routine patrolling around 11 am in the morning when they spotted three persons fishing inside the park. They are reported to have sustained injuries on their faces and hands.

Source: Naresh Mitra. 'Kaziranga guards manhandled for trying to prevent fishing illegally'
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
16/05/18.

NTCA asks for immediate ban on mining, quarrying and stone crushing in Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has written to the Assam government seeking an immediate ban on mining, quarrying and stone crushing in the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape, saying it was seriously affecting the wildlife here. It also annexed a report showing how mining was responsible for drying and siltation of several natural streams and rivulets that flow from the Karbi Anglong hills towards the Kaziranga forests.

The NTCA report was submitted to the state government in response to a complaint by a wildlife activist seeking action against illegal mining activities in the Karbi Anglong Hills adjoining the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (NP&TR). Suggesting a slew of measures, the NTCA has recommended

constitution of a committee by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to review all permissions and clearances given to all stone crushing, quarrying and mining units operating in the landscape. It also asked the Assam Forest Department to take necessary steps for preparation of a tiger conservation plan for the core, buffer and corridors and for notifying the eco-sensitive zone around the Kaziranga NP&TR. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1 and *PA Update* No. 27)

Source: Pawan Kumar Singh. 'NTCA asks Assam to ban mining, stone crushing in Kaziranga', www.indiatoday.in, 25/04/18.

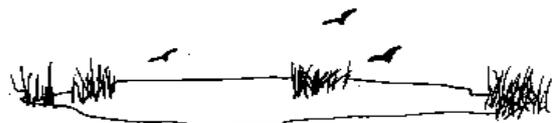
CHATTISGARH

Black panther camera-trapped in Udanti-Sitanadi TR

The Chhattisgarh Forest Department has confirmed the presence of a black panther in the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve. Visuals of the animal were obtained following the installation of over 200 cameras across the reserve for over 80 days from December 2016 to April 2017. The traps had been installed after a few guards reportedly caught sight of the animal while on duty.

Although a forest officer had reportedly spotted a black panther here 24 years ago, no scientific records were found to buttress his claim. Another officer too had glimpsed a female black panther and two cubs in the Achanakmaar jungles three years ago, but the authorities were unable to gather any scientific evidence in this regard either.

Source: Ritesh Mishra. 'Black panther spotted at Udanti-Sitanadi tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh', www.hindustantimes.com, 23/04/18.



DELHI

FD to import immunocontraception vaccines for use in Asola Bhatti WLS

The Delhi Forest Department (FD) has written to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to import special 'immunocontraception' vaccines for a trial run on monkeys at the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The move follows Delhi High Court's recent observation that the sanctuary has become extremely overpopulated. The sanctuary houses nearly 20,000 monkeys on account of the fact that the FD has been transferring the animals here for nearly a decade following high court orders. Supporting the monkeys is also expensive as they need nearly 2,500 kg of food every day.

Forest officials said that discussions were held recently to find an alternative site where the monkeys could be shifted. No such suitable place could, however, be identified and this has led to a discussion on other possible options, including of the use of the vaccines have been used abroad successfully.

The monkeys will be isolated in the testing phase and examined for a brief period to see how effective the technique can be.

Source: Jasjeev Gandhiok. 'Simian count at Asola Bhatti high, govt to use special vaccines to cap it', *The Times of India*, 04/04/18.

GUJARAT

Growth of lion population leads to challenges in the Greater Gir region

A tiny temple in Bherayi, a village in Amreli district, reflects the residents' concern over the well-being of the lion in the Gir National Park. The shrine, which doubles up as a memorial, was built recently to make locals and authorities aware of the need for safety of the lions following the death of two lionesses in what is now called Greater Gir. 40% of the current population of 523 lions now lives in Amreli, Bhavnagar, Gir, Somnath and Porbandar

districts in the Saurashtra region covering an area of 22,000 sq km.

Forest minister, Ganpat Vasava, said in the state assembly recently that Gir lost 184 lions in the past two years at an annual average of 92, compared to the yearly average of 62 deaths between 2010 and 2015. Around one-third of these deaths were "unnatural" — being run over by trains (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 4) along tracks running through the forest, drowning in wells left uncovered (*PA Updates* Vol. XIV, No. 2; Vol. XIII, Nos. 5 & 2, and Vol. XII, No. 6), and getting electrocuted by electric fences (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, Nos. 3 & 1 and Vol. XIII, No. 6).

The population spurt has forced the lions to migrate to newer areas where they face newer and larger challenges. These include negotiating the five state highways and railway lines cutting through the region, and ports, cement factories and limestone mines along the coastal corridor abutting the sanctuary. Around 23 shrines along highways through the jungle bring the lions in direct conflict with the people. A 30 km fence along the Rajula-Pipava railway tracks built in 2016, has also claimed 14 lions in the past two years.

Source: Hiral Dave. 'Population spurt, space crunch drive lions of Gir into death traps', *Hindustan Times*, 01/04/18.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Dog squad to help protection in GHNP

The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) has decided to acquire a dog squad to help in protection and in tracking wildlife crime here. The director of the park said that the squad that will comprise three German Shepherds will help track hunters and herb collectors. Dogs are being trained to sniff leopard skins, birds' plume and bear bile.

They and their handlers are being currently trained by the World Wide Fund for Nature - India at the National Training Centre of Dogs that is run by Border Security Force in Gwalior.

Two more dogs will be added to the squad in the second batch.

Source: Gaurav Bisht. 'HP's largest wildlife sanctuary to let dogs out to tackle staff shortage, wildlife crime', www.hindustantimes.com, 17/15/18.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Hirpora WLS declared no grazing zone

The Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has been declared a no-grazing zone following which authorities have undertaken anti-grazing drives here. Wildlife officials said that they received a formal order for the same in April. By May 6, 186 herds were vacated from the sanctuary area or were stopped from entering. The officials are even restricting traditional herds into the area claiming that once they allow traditional herds they bring in additional livestock of other herds.

There are four anti-grazing camps in the sanctuary - at Pir-ki-Gali, Dobijan, Hirpora and Sedow – all of which are entry points to the sanctuary. Officials said that they had seized tents, wood and other things of herders before forcing them to leave the sanctuary. They are of the opinion that large scale grazing within the sanctuary has led to the decline of wildlife here, many of which are endangered species.

The sanctuary has also seen large scale destruction over the last decade, because of the construction of Mughal Road – as contractors and executing agencies violated guidelines. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XIV, No. 5 and Vol. XIII, No. 5).

Source: Raashid Hassan. 'Hirpora sanctuary declared no grazing zone', www.kashmirreader.com, 16/05/18.

JHARKHAND

State government prepares draft plan for 'sustainable mining' in Saranda forests

The Jharkhand government's draft plan for 'sustainable mining' of iron ore in Saranda has proposed go and no-go zones and biodiversity hotspots to protect the rich Sal forest and over 200 elephants that are found here. The plan, if

finalised, will halt mining projects of the Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) and other private players such as Vedanta and JSW Steel Ltd. in the Ankua forest.

The plan was prepared in light of the findings of the Justice MB Shah inquiry commission report on illegal mining in Jharkhand and has been sent to the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan. The plan has proposed two mining zones, two conservation areas and three critical biodiversity hotspots for "sustainable mining" in the region. The mining zones are spread over 33 forest compartments across the Ghatkuri, Samta, Karampada, Tirilposi, Thalkobad and Kumdi ranges while 18 compartments fall in the no-go zone. All of them fall in the Ankua forest. The Karo-Karampada elephant corridor, providing connectivity to Odisha, falls in the mining zone of Karampada and Thalkobad range. The mining leases of SAIL and private sector giants fall in the Koina range, one of the biodiversity hotspots. In September 2016, both SAIL and the ministry of steel registered strong reservations against the plan.

In 2014, the centre had halted clearances for all fresh projects in Saranda region and had asked the Jharkhand government to assess the impact of mining here. In the same year, the centre also began the process of identifying inviolate areas and commissioned two studies, one to fix an annual mining cap and the other for a wildlife management plan. Based on these two expert reports of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) and of a multi-disciplinary expert committee that was examining the wildlife management plan, the ministry has prepared the mining plan.

The ICFRE had, in its report, recommended an annual mining cap of 64 million tonnes per annum (mtpa). Along with technological upgradation and mitigation measures, it recommended that it could be increased to 90 mtpa. ICFRE's report has also recommended that the Jharkhand government establish the West Singhbhum Integrated Environmental, Forest and Wildlife

Management Authority that would be headed by the chief secretary. It also suggested that a special fund be created under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 for conserving Saranda's biodiversity.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Mining plan to conserve sal forests, 200 elephants hits steel giants in Jharkhand', *DNA*, 09/04/18.

Jharkhand FD using FM radio to help deal with human-elephant conflict

The Jharkhand Forest Department (FD) has started a three-minute broadcast on an FM radio channel to help check growing human-elephant conflicts in the state. Listeners are sent information during the broadcast about where herds of elephants have been spotted and the direction in which they might be headed.

The bulletin is to be aired twice daily — at 8.30 am and 4.30 pm and divisional forest officers (DFOs) across the state have been asked to provide inputs on elephant movement in their zones for the purpose. The Ranchi DFO (wildlife) will then compile the information and pass it on to the radio channel.

Even though there exists a WhatsApp group and an elephant tracking system, the information doesn't reach remote villagers and this is why the link up with the radio channel is being attempted.

According to FD records 277 people were killed by elephants in Jharkhand in the past five years, including 56 in 2017. Casualties on the other side are rising too as 40 elephants have killed in five years, 13 of these being in 2017.

Source: Sanjoy Dey. 'Hamar Haathi, Hamar Saathi': Jharkhand starts elephant bulletin on radio to check man-animal conflict', *Hindustan times*, 01/04/18.

KARNATAKA

South Western Railways takes no mitigation measures; wildlife continues to suffer

Despite the Miraj-Londa and Hospet-Tinnaighat lines passing through forest areas and elephant corridors with a lot of wildlife movement, the South Western Railways has, till date, not initiated any mitigation measures. This has resulted in a number of wildlife deaths here, the most recent of which was of three gaurs in the Khanapur Range of Belgavi Division on the Miraj-Londa rail line.

In the last six years, 15 gaurs, two elephants, a sloth bear, a number of smaller mammals and reptiles including snakes have been mowed down by speeding trains on these lines, which connect Dharwar to Goa and Belgavi via Londa.

Four areas — Khanapur, Londa, Golihalli and Nagargali — witness maximum movement of elephant and gaur herds across the tracks. Forest officials said that measures like reduction in speed of trains in forest areas, setting up ramps, barricades, hiring track watchers, and sending information on movement of herds crossing tracks need to be implemented immediately. The South Western Railways has failed to take any mitigation measures and has instead sent a proposal to double the Hospet-Tinnaighat line, which has already seen the death of two elephants.

Railway sources in Hubballi said that they received a letter from the principal chief conservator of forest's office in February this year where they have been asked to construct a rail/road underpass and a two km railway barricade in the Londa section for elephants to pass. However, they are yet to identify the section within the Railways dealing with such issues to which they can forward the letter. Funds will also need to be sanctioned by the Railway Board for the same.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'South-Western Railway continues wildlife killings on Londa line', www.newindianexpress.com, 23/04/18.

Miners continue to operate in ESZ of Bannerghatta NP; interpret court order to their benefit

Even as environmentalists, activists and former judges have been critical of the continued mining operations in the eco sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Bannerghatta National Park (NP), mining companies say they are prepared to move out if their operations fall within the notified area. Mining companies have claimed that in view of the lapse in the ESZ notification, the state forest department (FD) has been wrongly interpreting the default area of 10 km to be the ESZ while the apex court clearly says there is no prohibition in mining activity within 10 km till the final notification is issued. Mining companies who have the licenses to operate say that they are operating legally and are based outside the ESZ.

It has been claimed that only 10-15 quarries are operating illegally and these are the ones that have created all the confusion and controversy. They too are prepared to shut operations if their activities fall within the ESZ once the final notification is approved by the Central government.

The FD has written a number of letters between 2015 and 2018 to the department of mines and geology to initiate action against illegal operators in the restricted zone. New operators have been allowed despite the letters, even as no action has been taken to stop the existing operations.

Citing Supreme Court orders dated November 11, 2013, a mining representative said that the apex court has not prohibited mining activities within 10 km from boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. It is for the state government to decide in what manner mining leases are to be granted in future but the legality can be examined by the court. So, with the draft notification of BNP ESZ having lapsed, mining companies say they have been abiding by the apex court's orders.

The FD has, however, interpreted the law in a different manner in view of the lapse of the draft notification. In view of the delay in final notification of the ESZ, the FD has

interpreted the central government's position as 10 km from the park boundary being the default distance for considering the ESZ.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Miners claim they are outside Bannerghatta Eco Sensitive Zone', *The New Indian Express*, 01/04/18.

KERALA

No wildlife compensation claims pending in Wayanad WLS

The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) has earned the unique distinction of having zero pending wildlife compensation claims amongst all the forest divisions and protected areas in the state. The government has paid compensation to 743 victims of wildlife conflicts during the previous fiscal, including all the applications received till date in the current fiscal, in a bid to assuage the rising temper among people living in the fringe areas of the sanctuary, which is a hotbed of wildlife conflict. The forest department paid Rs. 69 lakh as relief and the sanctuary is now left with a balance of over Rs. 16 lakh.

The 743 cases where compensation has been provided include 670 cases of crop damage, 54 cattle loss claims and 13 instances of damage to house and property among other losses. For the applications received after March 31, the department has been paying the revised compensation rates formulated by the government.

The Wayanad Prakrithi Samrakshana Samiti has said that apart from prompt payment of compensation the department should also expedite voluntary relocation of people from 14 settlements that are ready to move out of their forest homes using the Rs. 100-crore fund announced in the budget (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, Nos. 6 & 5; Vol. XVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XVII, No. 3).

Source: 'WWS a model for paying relief', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/05/18.

MADHYA PRADESH

NBWL gives go ahead to third railway line through Ratapani WLS

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared construction of a third railway line through the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) with several riders that include building of wildlife overpasses and underpasses. The project involves construction of a rail line, electrification, signaling and telecommunication between Barkhera and Budhni and will require diversion of 268.27 ha of forest.

This Bhopal-Itarsi route has frequently witnessed tigers and leopards getting killed by speeding trains. A 12 km section already passes through the sanctuary.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has recommended a slew of measures to protect wildlife in view of the permission for the rail line. It has asked for the construction of 21 underpasses, three overpasses, a chain link fencing at nine places and at least 30% of the proposed new line between Budhni and Barkhera to be equipped with infrastructure to protect wildlife.

An expert body comprising of an NTCA official, a Wildlife Institute of India scientist and a non-official member of NBWL had also inspected the site to recommend more measures to mitigate impact on wildlife. The expert body said that the Central India tiger landscape is going to witness expansion of rail lines and construction of highways that pose a serious threat to wildlife, including the tiger. In this backdrop, it has recommended that a comprehensive study should be carried out in the region to identify and track wildlife movement in order to make suitable passages.

In a meeting with the Railways last June, the NTCA had raised an alarm about the high frequency of tiger deaths on railway tracks while the environment ministry had also sent letters to the Railways flagging the issue. Madhya Pradesh has seen a significant concentration of wildlife mortality on rail tracks. More than five tigers have died in a specific section, between Budhni and Mid-Ghat

area of Sehore district, passing through the Ratapani WLS.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Wildlife body clears another rail line through Ratapani sanctuary', www.dnaindia.com, 24/04/18.

MAHARASHTRA

NGT stay on debris dumping, tree-cutting in Aarey Colony till July 10

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has restrained the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. (MMRCL) from carrying out any debris dumping, reclamation of land and felling of trees at the area allotted for the Metro-3 car shed in the Aarey Milk Colony (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Vol. XXI, No. 5) adjoining the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, till July 10. At a hearing held in New Delhi recently, the NGT upheld the order issued by the tribunal's Pune bench in August 2015. While activists have welcomed the tribunal's decision, MMRCL has argued that the order does not amount to a stay on the work it is carrying out.

Aarey Milk Colony is one of the last remaining green lungs in the city of Mumbai. A 30-hectare patch has been allocated to build a car-shed for the Metro-3 line (Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ). NGOs Vanashakti and the Aarey Conservation Group, had filed a petition with NGT's Pune bench in June 2015 challenging this allotment. They sought long-term protection for the area and asked that it be categorised as a forest for its protection.

In August 2015, NGT's Pune bench passed a status quo order restraining any construction activity inside Aarey Milk Colony and directed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and the forest department to not issue further no-objection certificates for construction. The NGT in New Delhi has now reiterated this order.

The MMRCL has claimed that it was anyway not carrying out any of these activities (debris dumping, cutting down trees and land reclamation), and it has also submitted an affidavit denying the charges that it had cut

down trees or dumped debris in the disputed area since July 2017. MMRCL also stated that the status quo order from August 2015 had no directions against MMRCL and under authority of the state and various laws, it could continue with the construction work. It also denied that the area was a forest. The affidavit will be discussed on July 10.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Green tribunal halts debris dumping, cutting of trees in Mumbai's Aarey Colony for Metro' www.hindustantimes.com, 15/05/18.

Thane forest division to study leopards outside SGNP

The mystery over the identity of two leopards, which were recently found in Mulund and Ulhasnagar, has led the Thane territorial division of the forest department (FD) to initiate a camera trapping exercise for studying and identifying leopards outside the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP).

Deputy conservator of forests, Thane, said that the two leopards could not be identified despite having a database of 97 leopard images which were camera trapped during the several studies at SGNP. It indicates that there might be leopards living outside and were not photographed by these camera traps at all.

The study is being done along with independent researchers and wildlife enthusiasts who have been working in collaboration with the FD. Camera trapping will be carried out in areas like Ghodbunder Road, Aarey, Mulund, Bhandup, Ulhasnagar as well as Murbad where frequent leopard sightings are reported. 25 camera traps have been deployed for the study.

Source: Virat A Singh. 'Unidentified leopards lead to camera study in Mumbai', www.dnaindia.com, 24/04/18.

Green clearance not needed for tunnel under SGNP: BMC

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has said that it doesn't need to submit its proposal for the Goregaon-Mulund Link Road

(GMLR), part of which is a tunnel under the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for approval. The proposed 13.7 km road, 4.7 km of which will be through the park will cut down peak-hour travel time between the city's western and eastern suburbs from over two hours to just 15 minutes.

An MoEFCC clearance was always considered the toughest among the four main permissions required for the Rs. 4,000 crore project, the others being wildlife, forest and eco-sensitive zone clearances. The BMC expects these to be granted on the grounds that GMLR's section through the SGNP is to be a tunnel through a hill and as such will have no impact on the forest. Construction of the tunnel alone is expected to cost Rs. 3,000 crore.

On why the MoEFCC clearance won't be required, additional municipal commissioner (projects) Sanjay Mukherjee said that, "GMLR will be a Development Plan road and is neither a national nor a state highway in need of expansion. Also, it does not connect the Eastern and Western Express Highways directly. The BMC has written recently to the MoEFCC's expert appraisal committee (EAC), seeking permission for withdrawing its request for environmental clearance for the project as per the Environment (Protection) Rules, 2006. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 2).

Source: Clara Lewis. 'Green clearance is no longer needed for SGNP tunnel: BMC', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/05/18.

Approval for road bisecting SGNP

Despite repeated objections from environmentalists and the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD), the new Development Plan (DP) for the city of Mumbai has retained the proposal for a controversial road connecting the city's western and eastern suburbs, cutting across the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP).

The 120-ft-wide eight-lane road, north of the Mulund-Goregaon Link Road, will connect Maharashtra Nagar in Borivali to

Nahur. The road was originally proposed in 1991's DP and cuts the SGNP right in the middle.

Nitin Kareer, principal secretary urban development department of the state government has said that neither the FD nor any NGO approached them to delete the road while the DP was being finalized. Prepared by the BMC, the DP was opened up for objections from various state and non-government organisations and then passed by a general body before being approved and published by the state government on May 10, 2018.

The director, SGNP has noted meanwhile that the FD had raised 28 objections while the BMC was preparing the DP.

Source: Makarand Gadgil. 'Development Plan shocker: Road to bisect Sanjay Gandhi National Park', www.mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com, 16/05/18.

SGNP to assess ecosystem services of the park

Authorities at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) have started a study to assess how much the park contributes to the ecosystem of Mumbai and the well-being of its residents. The aim of the study is to place a monetary value on the different services of the park, which include cleaning the air, absorbing carbon dioxide and providing water to the city.

SGNP has roped in IIT-Bombay and the Wildlife and We Protection Foundation, an NGO, to conduct the study. The study will consider three important aspects — the assessment of ecosystem services that provide well-being to humans and their evaluation to give them a monetary value, to develop a revenue generation model for these services, a catchment treatment plan and a carbon sequestration plan.

Source: Benita Chacko. 'Study by IIT-Bombay, NGO Sanjay Gandhi park to gauge its contribution to Mumbai's ecosystem', www.indianexpress.com, 23/04/18.

Training programme conducted for guides in Tipeswar WLS

32 guides in the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) were recently imparted training in wildlife related matters including those of human-animal conflict. The two-day training programme that was conducted jointly by the Maharashtra Forest Department, Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund, and the Wildlife Trust of India, was held in Tipeswar on March 26-27.

The sessions were conducted by Yavatmal honorary district wildlife warden Ramzan Virani. Sanjay Karkare, assistant director of the Bombay Natural History Society, was invited as the main resource person to address the participants on the role of nature guides in ecotourism, handling guests and keeping them engaged during safaris, and also the ecology of Tipeswar.

Special kits were given away on the occasion to the 32 trainees from two rehabilitated villages - Tipeswar and Rajegaon, and also to the staff working at park's Sunna and Mathni gates.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Tipeswar sanctuary guides get tourism, wildlife training', *The Times of India*, 02/04/18.

NTCA constitutes team for tiger recovery, restocking in Sahyadri TR

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has constituted a team to suggest measures for tiger recovery in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (TR). The team includes officials from the NTCA, Wildlife Institute of India and Maharashtra Forest Department (FD). It will evaluate the feasibility of ecologically unsustainable projects in the landscape like mining and windmills, which affect the movement of carnivores from source populations down south and suggest measures for strengthening tiger corridors. Tigers may also be relocated later this year from Vidarbha, where conflict is increasing due to habitat pressures and rising tiger numbers.

The STR covers the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Chandoli National Park (NP), including a core and buffer in Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Ratnagiri districts. The 2014 tiger census recorded the presence of five to seven tigers here. An estimation this year has only found indirect evidence like scats.

Part of the restocking plan includes the release of two pairs of tigers at Koyna and Chandoli. Healthy ungulates from the Sagarshwar WLS, Sanjay Gandhi NP and the Kattraj Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, Pune, may also be released grid-wise to enhance herbivore numbers.

Source: Dhaval Kulkarni. 'Sahyadri Tiger Reserve may have the big cats again', *DNA*, 09/04/18.

Maharashtra launches new helpline to report fires, poaching

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has set up a new helpline number which citizens can use to report forest fires. The new number 1958 is in addition to the earlier toll free number, 1926, that had been launched to lodge complaints or to get information about a variety of issues related to forests and wildlife in the state.

The new number will be responded to from the FD's command centre at Van Bhavan in Nagpur. The centre has a video wall consisting of nine LED monitors, relaying images and information to forest officials. The idea is to reduce the time lag in communication during emergencies, such as forest fires and poaching. The state forest minister said that most forest fires were seen where the forest area intersects private lands. The FD faces a staff shortage and only one forest guard keeps a watch on 1,000 hectares of forest. It is hoped that the new number will help get reports from citizens and this will help in dealing with the situation more effectively.

Source: 'Dial 1958 for state forest department to report fires, poaching', www.nagpurtoday.in, 18/05/18.

MEGHALAYA

Nearly 10,000 cases of human-elephant conflict in five years in Meghalaya

A report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India that was recently tabled in the Meghalaya assembly has documented 9,622 cases of conflict between humans and elephants in the past five years in the state. The incidents resulted in the death of 25 people, injury to 22 persons and damage to crops in a little over 4000 hectares.

The report, covering the period between 2012 and 2017, stated that over 6,500 cases were registered in the Garo Hills region, including the Balpakram National Park. Another approximately 2,500 cases were reported from the Khasi Hills region. An amount of Rs. 4.41 crore was paid as ex-gratia payment to villagers for loss of life, damage to property and to agricultural crops.

The CAG has also rapped the Meghalaya government for "destruction" of wildlife habitats in the Shallang region, an area frequented by elephants. Construction activities, heaps of coal stocks, and deforestation could be noticed all along the area, the report has noted.

Source: 'Man-Elephant Conflicts in Meghalaya Claimed 25 Lives in 5 Years', www.northeasttoday.in, 26/04/18.

ODISHA

Ban on use of mobile phones at Olive Ridley mass nesting site at Rushikulya river mouth

The Odisha Forest Department (FD) imposed a ban on the use of mobile phones at the site of the hatching of Olive ridley sea turtles near the Rushikulya river mouth in the month of April. A restriction was imposed on carrying mobile phones for taking selfies and even on visitors going right up to the hatchlings. Six flex boards bearing the legal provisions were displayed near the mass nesting site and those violating the instructions were to be prosecuted according to

the relevant provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

Visitors were allowed to watch the hatchlings emerging from the eggs from inside an enclosure made near the hatching site. The FD also requested several authorities to put off street lights for the period to ensure the hatchlings were not dis-oriented by the lights. Local volunteers and fishermen were roped in to help the forest staff to protect the turtles.

The entire five-km stretch from Podampet to Bateswar was fenced to prevent predators like wild dogs, fox and jackals from entering the hatching site.

Source: 'Ban on visitors and phones near hatching site of turtles', *India Today*, 12/04/18.

Four elephants mowed down by train in Bagadihi Forest Range; case filed against Railways

Four elephants – two males and two females - were killed after being run over by a train near a level crossing under the Bagadihi Forest Range in Jharsuguda district. The accident took place when the animals were crossing the railway track on the Howrah-Mumbai line near Teladihi in the early hours of the morning. Forest officials said that the herd was probably coming from the Bamra Wildlife Division, a part of the Sambalpur Elephant Reserve.

Wildlife experts and activists have expressed concern over the incident and said that the Railways must take steps to control train speeds in identified crossing zones to prevent such incidents. A case has been lodged against the South Eastern Railways in the matter and forest officials have also written to the Railways asking it to reduce the train speed to 30 km per hour on the route, particularly on the stretch between Jharsuguda and Bamra wildlife divisions. The chief public relation officer, South Eastern Railways, has said, however, that the forest officials did not inform railway authorities about the movement of the elephants in the area beforehand.

The place where the latest mishap took place is known to be a vulnerable spot for

elephants. Last September, a four-month-old calf that had entered Teladihi village in search of food died after falling into a railway trench. A month later, a 15-year-old female elephant was electrocuted by a stray live wire while trying to rescue her calf that had fallen into another trench. The calf died too.

In December 2012, the Coromandel Express had knocked down six elephants in the Rambha area of Ganjam district. In the aftermath of this incident in Ganjam, a committee set up by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests had advised speed restrictions on identified vulnerable tracks in Odisha as is done in Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand.

In last nine years, 589 elephants have died in Odisha, 205 of which were due to unnatural causes. While poaching (95) and electrocution (87) were main reasons for these unnatural deaths, death on train tracks was the third biggest cause. In the last eight years, 22 elephants in the state have been killed on rail tracks. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 6 and Vol. XXII, No. 1).

Source: Debabrata Mohanty. '4 elephants killed as train rams into herd in Odisha; forest dept files case against Railways', *Hindustan Times*, 16/04/18.

'Four elephants die after being hit by train in Odisha', *India Today*, 16/04/08.

PUNJAB

Molasses release kills fish in River Beas, impact feared on dolphins, gharials in Harike WLS

A large scale of release of molasses from the Chadha Sugar Industries Pvt. Ltd. at Kiri Afgana near Sri Hargobindpur town in Gurdaspur district led to large-scale death of fish in the River Beas in the month of May. The sugar mill is located a kilometre from the Beas and its effluents drain into the river through a nullah. The fisheries department said that the dead fish include Common Carp, Rohu, Catla, Mrigol, Cat Fish, Singari, Gosh, Bam, Chital,

Bata and Sol. They died with the oxygen level plummeting in the river on account of the molasses in the water. The mill has been sealed and a fine of Rs. 25 lakh was also imposed by the government.

Serious concerns have been expressed on the impact this will have on endangered species like the gharial and the Gangetic dolphin in the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary about 100 km downstream of the site. Forest officials said that 47 gharial that are reported from the river are all safe though there is little information of the impact on the dolphins.

Source: Surjit Singh. 'Dead fish in Beas river: Dolphins not sighted after killer spill, gharials safe', www.hindustantimes.com, 19/05/18.

RAJASTHAN

Leopard count in Jhalana forest up by 31.5%

A recent waterhole census conducted in the Jhalana forest area of Jaipur has shown that the number of leopards here has gone up over 31% - from 19 in 2017, to 25 in 2018. The forest department (FD) monitors 30 water bodies of Jhalana and Galta forest block for 24 hours as part of the census exercise that is conducted every Buddha Purnima.

The FD figures indicate that the leopard count here is showing an increase every year. It has gone up from eight in 2014 to 13 in 2015 to 25 this year. The number of langurs too have gone up - from 445 in 2017 to 465 this year. Other species covered as part of the census such as the jackal, hyena and porcupine, however, reported a decline in their numbers.

While some forest officials noted that the reduction in biotic pressure by constructing a wall and ensuring effective monitoring had helped in the leopard numbers, others pointed out that such methods were not always accurate and should only be used to get trends and rough estimates.

Source: 'Leopard count in Jhalana up by 31.5%'. www.hindustantimes.com, 14/05/18.

Rajasthan contemplates enhancement in compensation for relocation from TRs

The Rajasthan government is contemplating enhancing the compensation for relocation of villages from the core and buffer area of tiger reserves (TRs) in the state. A committee of officials comprising the additional chief secretary (forest and environment), principal secretaries of water resources and the public works department and additional principal chief conservator of forest has been constituted to decide on the compensation package for relocation.

The state government had revived the efforts to relocate the villages in the aftermath of the Sariska tiger, ST-11, falling prey to poaching recently. Besides, it is feared, the plan for more tiger relocations to Sariska and the likely increase in its population, might escalate the human-animal conflict in future.

More than 247 families continue to live inside the Sariska Tiger Reserve. They are unwilling to leave and claim that the compensation package is inadequate. The central government had announced a package of Rs. 10 lakh for each adult member of a family or six bighas of agricultural land, a residential plot and Rs. 2.5 lakh as compensation to the families to settle them outside the reserve. However, it has failed to attract these villagers. Till now, only three of the total 29 villages located within the critical tiger habitat have shifted out fully. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII, No. 2; Vol. XXI, Nos. 4 & 3; Vol. XVIII, No. 5 and Vol. XVII, No. 5).

Source: Joychen Joseph. 'Rajasthan government mulls to hike compensation for shifting villages from tiger reserves', *The Times of India*, 15/04/18.

TAMIL NADU

SC urged to issue directions to restore identified elephant corridors in the Nilgiris

The *amicus curiae* has requested the Supreme Court (SC) to consider issuing seven directions

to restore the identified elephant corridors in the Nilgiris. These include the Moyar-Avarahalla, Masinagudi-Singara, Singara-Bokapuram, Kallhatti-Sigur (at Gencorin) and the Mavanalla–Chemmanatham corridors. The note was submitted to the court in the matter of A. Rangarajan and others vs Union of India and others, raising the important issue of protecting elephants and their corridors to reduce human-elephant conflict.

The *amicus* examined the legal implications of several enactments before suggesting to the SC to consider demolishing all illegal hotels, lodges, resorts and buildings engaged in commercial activities in the notified elephant corridor. He pointed out that all hotels, lodges and resorts were operating after amalgamation of plots that were 250 sq m or slightly less in area to circumvent the TN Panchayat Building Rules 1997. Commercial buildings exceeding a plinth area of 250 sq m have to be approved after obtaining permission of the Committee for Architectural and Aesthetic Aspects. Therefore, any commercial building with a built-up area in excess of 250 sq m should be treated as violation.

The directions requested for include the following:

- All hotels, lodges, resorts built on forestland by cutting and felling trees should be sealed forthwith and the state must order demolishing all such illegal structures constructed in the notified private forest area included in the elephant corridor and in violation of the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and SC order of December 12, 1996.
- Electricity and water connections should be cut off forthwith to all commercial buildings, hotels, lodges and resorts built in violation of applicable laws.
- The state government should be directed to cancel all transactions of sale, purchase, mortgage, lease or otherwise alienation of all lands with or without buildings of hotels, lodges or resorts carrying out commercial activity in contravention of the provisions of the TN Preservation of Private Forest Act and TN Hill Areas

Preservation Act, 1949 and without the permission of the district committee headed by the district collector.

- All commercial buildings without licence as per the provisions of the Tamil Nadu Public Building (Licensing) Act, 1965 be sealed first and then demolished.
- The forest department should be directed to prosecute hotels and resorts in the corridor area for installing electric/solar fences as it amounts to “hunting” as per the law.

Time line for the issue:

2008: G Rajendran files a writ petition to keep elephant corridors in the Nilgiris district free of encroachment
 Feb 2009: Madras HC directs district collector to file a status report
 Oct. 2009: Expert committee constituted by HC submits its report
 Dec 2009: HC passes an interim order giving a set of directions to the state government; SLPs are filed against the HC order in the SC
 Jan 2010: Government issues public notice on the proposed elephant corridors along with maps and circulates this in villages
 Aug 2010: Government order (GO) finalizing the elephant corridors issued after hearing objections; resort owners file writ petitions against the GO
 2011: Madras HC disposes off the writ petition; SLPs filed against the HC judgment and the final order

Source: ‘SC urged to issue directions to protect elephant corridor’, *The Hindu*, 08/04/18.

UTTAR PRADESH

NGT seeks Centre, UP govt response on petition alleging illegal sand mining in Ken, Betwa rivers

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought responses from the Centre and the state government over a plea alleging illegal sand mining in the Ken and Betwa rivers in four districts of Uttar Pradesh. A bench, headed by acting NGT Chairperson Justice Jawad Rahim,

issued notices to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the UP government, the state pollution control board, the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority and others while seeking their replies in two weeks.

The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by Hamirpur resident Prem Singh Yadav alleging large scale unscientific sand mining in Ken and Betwa rivers in the districts of Banda, Hamirpur, Jalaun and Jhansi in violation of the conditions prescribed in the environmental clearance (EC) as well as the mining lease deed. The plea contended that although the people involved in sand mining have started obtaining permissions, the situation on the ground has not changed as the project proponents are not complying with the conditions of the EC and the concerned authorities were not taking any action against any of the violators.

Yadav, in his plea filed through advocates Rahul Choudhary and Meera Gopal, has sought directions to the UP State Environment Impact Assessment Authority to withdraw the EC granted to the private parties, named in the petition, for failure to comply with the EC conditions. He also asked for the imposition of heavy fines under the polluter pays principle and as per Section 15 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

Source: 'NGT seeks Centre, UP govt response on petition alleging Illegal sand mining in Ken, Betwa rivers', www.business-standard.com, 08/05/18.

WTI supported rapid response team for Pilibhit TR

A Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) supported rapid rescue team (RRT) comprising a biologist, a sociologist, a veterinary surgeon and a field assistant apart from a rapid response vehicle and equipment to conduct rescue operations has recently been constituted in the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR). The step is part of an effort by forest officials to mitigate human-tiger conflict in Pilibhit that has so far claimed 24 lives of villagers over an 18-month period (*PA Updates*

Vol. XXIV, No. 2; Vol. XXIII, Nos. 5, 4 and Vol. XXI, No. 6). Prior to this, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India had coordinated with the reserve authorities for a van mitra programme to assist the forest officials in their mission.

The WTI supported unit is made up of a rapid response vehicle, one highly sensitive quadcopter equipped with a remote sensing system and high quality camera, one advanced tranquilizing gun, darts, three flashlight-free camera traps, one weighing machine and apparatus and tools for shifting of a tiger to a rescue centre. The funding for the team has come from the US Fish and Wildlife Service

Part of the effort of the RRT will include convincing the villagers in Pilibhit to shift away from sugarcane to prevent tigers moving to the fields from the forest areas as this has been a major source of conflict.

Source: Keshav Agrawal. 'Rapid response team to help PTR resolve man-animal conflict', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/05/18.

Second rhino rehabilitation programme at Dudhwa

34 years after successful rehabilitation of the rhinos in the Dudhwa National Park (NP), the park authorities are now ready for the 2nd round. The first rehabilitation was carried out with five rhinos from Assam while the current one will be from Dudhwa's own rhino herd. Four rhinos from the existing 33-member Dudhwa rhino family in Sonaripur range would be shifted to Bhadi Tal area in two phases.

The Bhadi Tal area is identical to Sonaripur Rhino Rehabilitation Area (RRA) in terms of rhino habitat with adequate grassland and water bodies. The authorities have developed the 13.5 sq km area by fencing it and erecting requisite infrastructure. The area was ready to receive its new entrants a few years back but the program had to be postponed for one reason or the other.

The need for an alternate home for Dudhwa's rhinos was felt ever since their

population has grown in the specially fenced 27 sq km area in Sonaripur, which often resulted in infighting among the inmates. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 1).

Source: Deo Kant Pandey. 'Dudhwa to begin second rhino rehabilitation programme tomorrow', *Hindustan Times*, 09/04/18.

UTTARAKHAND

Ramnagar-Kotdwar 'green' road through Corbett TR to have wildlife mitigation measures

The 90 km Ramnagar-Kotdwar road (Kandi Marg) (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 2), 50 km of which will pass through the Corbett Tiger Reserve is being called a 'green' road by project proponents and parts of the wildlife conservation community. This is on account of the fact that the mostly elevated construction will have a number of mitigation measures to deal with the problems the road might cause to wildlife here.

The proposal for metalling of this road was envisaged by the public works department way back in 1976. Two patches, one from Kotdwar to Gujjarshrot and the other from Laldhang village to Ramnagar, were even metaled at that time. However, construction activity had to be stopped following enactment of the Forest Conservation Act 1980. After the formation of Uttarakhand in 2000, the demand for a proper Ramnagar-Kotdwar road once again gained momentum. The road will reduce the travel distance between Ramnagar and Kotdwar by 82 km.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ecotourism Development Corporation of Uttarakhand Ltd. and the National Building Construction Corporation Ltd. (NBCCL) for the project in March earlier this year. NBCCL will construct the road with a project cost of Rs. 2,000 crore. The entire construction activity has to be carried out under the guidance of the Wildlife Institute of India. NBCCL's feasibility report will have to get clearances from the State Wildlife Board, the

National Tiger Conservation Authority and finally, the National Board for Wildlife.

Source: Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Now, a wildlife-friendly 'green road' through Corbett', www.tribuneindia.com, 23/04/18.

Bharal safe in Gangotri NP: WII to NGT

The Blue sheep or Bharal is safe in the Gangotri National Park, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has said in an affidavit submitted recently to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Delhi.

Earlier, the NGT had roped in the Uttarakhand government, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the National and State biodiversity boards, and the WII to prepare an action plan to address a mysterious eye infection reported in the sheep at the national park (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, Nos. 2 & 1).

The affidavit submitted said that despite rigorous checks the forest department staff and experts of the institute found no trace of such an infection in the sheep till date. To ascertain this, they are conducting an extensive survey that began in April and will end in June. The report of the survey will be presented to the tribunal during the next hearing. A second survey is to be then conducted between September and November.

Mountaineer and assistant commandant in the Border Security Force, Loveraj Singh Dharmshaktu, had reported the eye infection in Bharals in September last year. He reported that eyeballs of the animals had popped out leading to excessive bleeding and that the infected animals were unable to walk either.

Source: Nihari Sharma. 'Bharals safe in Uttarakhand's Gangotri National Park: WII to NGT', www.hindustantimes.com, 16/05/18.

Poaching, skinning and drying tiger parts carried out in daytime at Corbett TR in 2016: NTCA

Exposing security lapses in border areas of the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR), a report of the

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) said poachers moved freely during daytime and killed tigers in the year 2016 (*PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 6) without any fear of detection. Five tiger skins and 125 kg of tiger bones had been seized on March 14, 2016 by the Uttarakhand police special task force in Haridwar. One person named Ramchander from Bhatinda in Punjab was also arrested in the matter. The NTCA report was submitted to the Uttarakhand High Court (HC) in a case where a former wildlife warden of the Rajaji TR had filed a petition in the HC demanding an investigation into the poaching cases in Corbett.

The report noted that a nearly eight km stretch between Kalagarh and Lansdowne on the western side of Corbett is unmanned, and there are no watchtowers, no camps and no surveillance to check intrusion. The report pointed out that as per the version of the person arrested, they used to move in the forest, fix traps, kill the trapped tigers and skin them, all during day hours and then dry the skins and bones inside the forest itself.

The report notes that the Kalagarh and Lansdowne divisions could have pooled resources for better protection of the areas. It has also suggested that an integrated security review plan be chalked out for securing the Corbett boundary and a special operation group be deployed for intelligence gathering that should also include sniffer dogs for tracking offenders.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'Poachers killed, skinned Corbett tigers in daytime: NTCA report', *Hindustan Times*, 21/04/18.

WEST BENGAL

Radio collared tigress in Sundarbans travels 100 km to the sea and back

A tigress captured from a human habitation and released outside the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in early 2017 traveled a distance of 100 km to the sea and back before establishing her territory over an area of 43 sq kms in the northern part of the island of Ajmalmari. The tigress named

Sundari was one of six that had been radio-collared in the area before being released into the wild.

In four months—from January 25, 2017 when she was collared and May 30 when her last location was received—Sundari moved across the four islands of Ajmalmari, Dhulibasani, Kalash and Bulcherry covering a range of 173 sq kms. She visited the Bay of Bengal before returning to settle down in Ajmalmari near where she was released.

She was recorded to have crossed several channels, some over 5 km wide though tigers here have been found to be reluctant to cross channels wider than 400 m. The Wildlife Institute of India team that radio-collared the animal and monitored her movement noted that her daily average movement ranged between a few 100 metres to 20km. The team has also refused to divulge the big cat's exact location of where she has finally established her territory.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee. 'Big cat's 100km walk to the sea & back', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/05/18.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

SC agrees to reconsider its 2013 order regarding re-introduction of cheetahs in India

The Supreme Court (SC) has agreed to reconsider its 2013 order that had quashed a decision of the then Ministry of Environment, and Forests (MoEF) to introduce African cheetahs to the Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh. The top court had then noted that no detailed study had been conducted before introducing a foreign species to India and that the designated expert body had also not been consulted. Agreeing to a rethink, however, a bench headed by Justice Madan B Lokur has now admitted a plea by the National Tiger

Conservation Authority (NTCA) for hearing the matter.

The court does not prevent the authorities from taking steps in conformity with the applicable law to re-introduce cheetahs from Africa to suitable sites in India identified by the Wildlife Institute of India based on a detailed site-specific action plan, the bench noted, as it sought replies from the *amicus curiae* and others in the matter.

The NTCA has argued that the reintroduction of the cheetahs would help conservation of grasslands and open forests in the manner tiger conservation did for other ecosystems. It has also cited historical accounts from the Mughal Empire and stated that the cheetah is not a foreign species. The government's application has also tried to answer the apex court's concerns by assuring that reintroduction of cheetahs shall not be done at the cost of Asiatic lions or of tiger conservation. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 2 and Vol. XV, No. 5).

Source: Utkarsh Anand. 'SC Shows Glimmer of Hope for Cheetah Reintroduction Plan in India', <https://www.news18.com>, 14/04/18.

Indo-German project to curb human-wildlife conflict

The Centre and West Bengal government have planned to set up a human-wildlife conflict (HWC) mitigation project in the Gorumara Wildlife Division under a joint Indo-German project. The idea is to develop a model which can be replicated elsewhere in the country to prevent human-animal conflicts, said an official of the environment ministry. A similar state-level plan has been finalised for Karnataka, where the Kodagu Forest Circle has been identified as the pilot site for implementing the project activities over the next four years.

The agreement on technical cooperation for this purpose between India and Germany was signed in October last year. It was then decided to apply innovative instruments of

HWC mitigation in select areas for developing effective and sustainable solutions.

This move is in addition to what the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change had approved in January earlier this year for employing the 'immuno-contraceptive' method for management of wildlife conflict in the country. The ministry had sanctioned over Rs. 10 crores for immuno-contraception of wild boars, nilgais, monkeys and elephants.

Source: Vishwa Mohan. 'West Bengal, Karnataka to have Indo-German pilot project to reduce man-animal conflict', *The Times of India*, 08/04/18.

SOUTH ASIA

South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network holds first meeting

The South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), an inter-governmental wildlife law enforcement agency, in its first ever meeting in India, adopted many resolutions to curb wildlife crime in the region. At the two-day conference held in Kolkata from May 8-10, representatives of seven of the eight countries (Pakistan was not represented) participated, and the members agreed on having an operational framework for strengthening the regional body to combat wildlife crime. Six proposals, including tracking of wildlife smuggling routes, review of existing laws and a structure for the organisation were tabled during the meeting.

SAWEN was launched in Bhutan in 2011.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'Wildlife network of South Asian countries to get more teeth', www.thehindu.com, 13/05/18.



Important Bird Areas Update

ASSAM

Ten Himalayan griffons released back in Laokhowa WLS

Ten Himalayan griffons, which recovered from poisoning in the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in March, were successfully released back in their home range. The release was carried out by the sanctuary management along with a team of the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) of Wildlife Trust of India – International Fund for Animal Welfare

Fourteen of a flock of 26 birds had been found dead inside the sanctuary on March 25. Two of the 12 rescued died soon, but the remaining 10 were saved by the CWRC team of veterinarians. Since they had become fit to be released, the birds were freed in their home range through a joint awareness meeting with the local village community.

The vultures had become sick due to carcass poisoning inside the protected area. People intentionally bait carcass to kill dogs and other carnivores often affecting vultures.

Source: '10 Himalayan Griffon Vultures released in Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Sentinel*, 06/04/18.

GUJARAT

Land allotted for GIB sanctuary in Abdasa remains neglected

3,700 hectares of land allotted at Abdasa in Kutch, in March 2017, for development of a sanctuary for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) are facing neglect due to lack of development for the past one year. Environmentalists have raised concern over the delay claiming that it takes four years to develop habitat for the GIB and considering the number of birds that exist, this delay may pose further problems. This is in addition to the fact that the area is surrounded

by windmills and power lines that can prove detrimental to the species.

The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) was allotted the 3,700 ha of land around the existing sanctuary in two separate pieces at Abdasa after a lot of efforts and persistent follow ups last year. However, hardly any efforts have been made to develop the land and neither has a survey been carried out to ascertain the existence of carnivores and dogs here. The FD has claimed that it has already started work on developing the newly allotted land and indicated that getting grants sanctioned for the same was proving to be a challenge.

Source: Alok Brahmabhatt. 'Land allotted but bustard sanctuary still a dream', *Ahmedabad Mirror*, 23/04/18.

HARYANA

Three-year project on waterfowl in Sultanpur and Bhindawas to study emergence of respiratory diseases in poultry

Experts from the Lala Lajpat Rai University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (LUVAS), Hisar and University of Minnesota, USA, and Haryana Forest Department (FD) officials will soon begin collecting samples from resident and migratory birds at the Sultanpur National Park (NP) for a three-year project that seeks to research the emergence and recurrence of respiratory diseases in poultry that threaten animal and public health worldwide.

LUVAS had proposed a project, in collaboration with the University of Minnesota, in 2016 to survey migratory and resident birds for the Avian Influenza (AI) virus. The department of agricultural research and education, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, and the FD granted the requisite permissions in December 2017. A 12-day training programme was organised from

February 5 to February 16 this year, at Hisar, where the project was discussed.

The project was proposed to research the emergence and recurrence of respiratory diseases in poultry that threaten animal and public health worldwide, and is expected to be helpful in advancing science to reduce the challenges of countering emerging disease threats of considerable economic impact to the poultry industry in India as well.

The collection of samples from resident birds will be done at Sultanpur till August following which the migratory birds will be subjected to a sample collection process. Collection of samples from a second site, the Bhindawas Bird Sanctuary was done in February and March earlier this year.

The project has been initiated following the finding in late 2016, that a number of dead birds in Rajpura, Punjab, had tested positive for bird flu (H5N8 avian flu). Haryana's animal husbandry department had then carried out a massive culling of birds and banned visitors to Sultanpur NP. The state government had also issued an advisory to all district headquarters for preparedness, control, and containment of the disease.

Source: Leena Dhankhar. 'Gurgaon: Sampling for avian flu starts in Sultanpur National Park', *Hindustan Times*, 01/04/18.

MAHARASHTRA

Officials urge electricity company to realign transmission lines passing through Karnala Bird Sanctuary

Forest officials at the Karnala Bird Sanctuary have urged the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd. (MSEDCL) to realign all the high voltage power transmission lines passing through the forest into underground lines to ensure safety of wildlife.

The range forest official (RFO) at Karnala informed that it has been over three months since the park authorities have been requesting the Bhingari division of MSEDCL to take all the overhead live wires underground, as a number of monkeys have been injured or electrocuted following contact with the cables,

which are close to the treetops inside the forest. Nothing has been done in the matter thus far.

The RFO added that in the past two years at least 25 monkeys have died after coming in contact with these cables.

Source: Vijay Singh. 'Overhead wires risky for Karnala park animals', *The Times of India*, 08/04/18.

Less than eight GIBs left in Maharashtra: study

'Status of GIB and associated species in Maharashtra 2018' a survey report by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) suggests that there are less than eight Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) left in Maharashtra today. Their number a decade ago was estimated to be 35, with 10 in the Vidarbha region.

A landscape level study to ascertain the status of the GIBs and its potential habitat in Maharashtra was conducted from September 25 to 30, 2017 by the WII in collaboration with the Maharashtra Forest Department. Of the 1,401 respondents contacted for the study, 72 confirmed GIB presence in their area.

Since the present status of GIBs is not known beyond the designated bustard areas, a probability distribution map for the GIB covering an area of 55,000 sq km was developed using locations of three GIBs tagged by WII earlier. A systematic survey was conducted in 372 grids of 12km x 12km across the state. Vehicle based species and habitat survey was conducted by 31 teams.

To overcome the issue of low detection owing to very low population size and their ecology, a blind test using life-size GIB dummies was conducted to know the possibility of detection in sampling grids by the team. The dummies were placed in the sampling grids by a separate team. The sampling team was unaware of the location of dummy GIBs. Of the 30 GIB dummies placed, only four were detected by respective teams. Based on detection probability and occupancy of dummy life-size GIBs, it was concluded that there are likely to be only eight GIBs in Maharashtra. A questionnaire survey was conducted by opportunistically interviewing up to three residents per grid with a semi-

structured questionnaire. Respondents were asked if they knew or could identify the bird, and about sightings of GIBs in their vicinity.

The report, authored by principal investigator Dr. Bilal Habib, co-investigators Dr. Gautam Talukdar and Dr. R Suresh Kumar, also reveals that the population of associated species like black bucks in potential GIB habitat was 37,690 and that of chinkara 1,481.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'Less than 8 GIBs left in Maharashtra: WII', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 25/04/18.

RAJASTHAN

Monitoring would help further increase vulture population in Chambal Valley: conservationists

Researchers and bird watchers are pressing for conservation and monitoring of vultures in the Chambal River Valley of Kota. The valley has four resident vulture species — the King vulture, Long-billed vulture, White-backed vulture and Egyptian vulture along with three migratory species. There were around 50 to 60 Long-billed vulture pairs in the Chambal River valley in 2003-04, which has now gone up to 150 pairs. There are around 30 King vultures with a dozen nests on trees, 30 pairs of White-backed vultures and 600 Egyptian vultures in Kota region.

A vulture researcher at the Maharaja Ganga Singh University has said that the vulture population is growing by around 12% every year in the Chambal valley but it can be increased by another 2-4% if the injured vultures can be provided timely treatment. The researcher said that sometimes vultures' eggs and offspring fall from the nests and predators like foxes, jackals and dogs kill them. Such untimely loss can be averted through proper monitoring and conservation. Rescue centres should be set up for saving such vultures, particularly during the breeding season.

Source: Aabshar H Quazi. 'Researchers press for vulture conservation in Chambal valley', *Hindustan Times*, 09/04/18.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu sets up state wetland authority; steps to declare Panchanadikulam a Ramsar site

The Tamil Nadu government recently informed the Madras High Court (HC) that it has set up a state wetland authority under the chairmanship of the chief secretary. The authority would aid and advise the state government to formulate policies for the protection and preservation of wetlands in the state. This was in response to questions asked by the HC on various related issues, including conducting field research of vegetation, water birds and wildlife eco-development activities.

The HC had, in view of a Supreme Court order, initiated *suo motu* proceedings and directed the central and state governments to file reports regarding the identification and conservation of wetlands across the state. The state government filed a status report before the bench comprising Chief Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice A Selvam.

The report stated that the only water body in the state, which is covered under the Ramsar Convention, is the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). It noted further that Rs. 85.46 lakh had been spent here for the period 2003-04 to 2013-14 for the improvement of the habitat, raising of mangrove plantations, digging creeks, desilting animal water holes, and construction of bunds.

The government said it has also formed a conservation authority for the Pallikaranai marshland complex in the city and is taking steps to bring the Panchanadikulam wetland measuring 8,097 ha and un-surveyed 15.12 hectares of a salt swamp, located between Point Calimere WLS and the Muthupet mangroves, within the umbrella of the Ramsar Convention.

Source: 'Govt has set up wetland authority: TN to HC', *Business Standard*, 02/04/18.

'Tamil Nadu to bring Panchanadikulam wet land under Ramsar Convention', *The Times of India*, 03/04/18.

FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago

PA Update 73, June 2008

UTTARAKHAND

Bamboo cover being increased to reduce human-elephant conflict in Shivaliks

The Uttarakhand Forest Department has launched an initiative to increase the bamboo cover in the Shivalik Forest Circle to help reduce human-elephant conflict in the region. Called 'Operation Bamboo Culture,' the project covers 27,500 hectares out of the 43,500 hectares of forestland in the Shivalik division, and is being implemented in the Kotdwar, Duggada and Laldhang ranges.

The Shivalik forest circle has highest density of elephants Uttarakhand with 181 elephants recorded here. It is hoped that increasing the bamboo cover will help increase fodder availability for elephants and thereby reduce the animal's inclination to stray into agriculture fields and adjoining settlements.

Source: Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Operation Bamboo Culture helps curb man-elephant conflicts', *The Pioneer*, 01/05/08.

Fires affect Corbett TR, Rajaji NP

At least 58 hectares of forest in the Corbett Tiger Reserve were destroyed by fires that started in the last week of April 2008. The worst-affected areas included the Bijrani, Delta, Binsar, Adnala and Sarpaduli ranges. The fire is reported to have started along the northern boundary known as Durgadevi gate and spread across the Mandal Valley.

Around 120 firefighters were deployed on the Ramganga's banks between the northern part of the forest and the park to bring the fire under control. Forest Department officials however said that they faced a severe resource crunch and a lack of fire-fighting equipment to deal with the fire. Many tourists too were reported to have cut short their visit to the reserve on account of the fire.

The Forest Department has launched a campaign asking farmers not to burn crop

residue in harvested fields as this could further increase the intensity of the problem.

Other reports indicated that about 100 hectares of forest in the Rajaji National Park were also badly affected by fires. Nearly 1500 hectares of forest are said to have been affected all over the state with forests around Rudraprayag being amongst the worst hit.

Fires were also reported in the early part of April from forest areas in the forest divisions of Narendra Nagar, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Hardwar, Chakrata and Mussoorie in Garhwal; Almora, Bageshwar, Nainital in Kumaon. Parts of the Rajaji National Park and the Kedarnath WLS were also affected. These had however been controlled following rainfall experienced here.

Source: Tapas Chakraborty. 'Raging forest fire scorches Corbett core', *The Telegraph*, 04/05/08; Forest fires hit Uttarakhand, *The Hindu*, 06/05/08; Jotirmay Thapliyal. 'Rain quenches forest fires', *The Pioneer*, 05/04/08.

Delhi Dehradun highway through Rajaji NP to have six lanes

The Delhi-Dehradun stretch of National Highway (NH) 58 & 72 has been identified for 4/6-laning under the National Highway Development Project (NHDP) Phase III on Build, Operate & Transfer (BOT) mode. Four laning of the Delhi-Meerut section of NH-58 has already been completed and preparation for six-laning is in progress. Similarly the four-laning of the Meerut-Muzaffarnagar section of NH-58 on BOT basis is targeted for completion by March 2009.

A section of the Muzaffarnagar Haridwar part passes through the Rajaji National Park and special permissions are being sought for the same.

Source: 'Six Laning of Delhi-Dehradun Highway', *Travel Impact Newswire*, 23/04/08.

PERSPECTIVE

Ritualistic hunting when blind and corrupt

Location: Forests of South Bengal

Time: April-May 2018

Scene: A heap of pregnant water monitor lizards, families of squirrels along with babies, a whole flock of jungle babblers, dozens of jungle cats and jackals – many among them juveniles, baby water hens, jaccanas – all dead.

The men were all draped in jeans and had smart phones - as alien to the forests they were hunting in as me, the city dweller. They were nearly 15,000 people, all come from distant locations often by hiring cars and trucks to hunt in the bread-crumbs native forests of South Bengal. The scene was of their celebration, but also gruesome at the same time. It certainly did not embody the traditional spirit of sustenance that ecological living associated with traditional tribal communities.

An older person justified hunting practices of their times – “Hunting helps maintain the ecological balance of a place. We hunt out the old and diseased wildlife that are no longer fit for survival.” The picture on the ground showed a completely different reality; traditional rules do not allow for the hunting of pregnant females and babies, which is essential for replenishing populations and the ecosystems. How different is this then from the American hunter who went to Africa and killed Cecil, the lion?

Hunting in the past was restricted to two days a year – mostly falling in the summer months. But data we have collected shows that hunters are now active for almost 45 days a year. Other forms of corruption have also entered the scene with hunting now linked to illegal trade. Water monitor lizard skins are sold, for instance, at Rs. 5,000 per skin. A fresh skin fetches the best price and for that the lizard’s tail is forced into its nostrils so that its movement is restricted yet it can be kept alive till it reaches the market. Mongoose and squirrels escape this painful wait because the entire family generally is killed immediately.

They are wanted just for their hair – for brushes. Clearly most of this has nothing to do with traditional practices or ritual hunting.

We’ve faced considerable opposition as we sought to highlight these issues. The arguments are the well-known ones – they are tribals, they are poor, they are oppressed. Hunting is a part of their culture and anyway they are not responsible for the massive loss in wildlife in our rapidly developing country. Yes, we agree but there can be no justification for this kind of hunting of threatened wildlife that does not follow the traditional rules. One crime does not justify another.

We also fully agree that tribal communities are ecological allies of conservation but we leave it to the readers to judge whether the ones we described deserve that credit in any manner. On the other hand, conservationists should open discussions on this issue with tribal communities to bring together the best of both worlds.

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