

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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EDITORIAL

Corbett, Uttarakhand, India...

It might be unfair to pick on one state, but it would be instructive to look at the five stories from Uttarakhand in this issue of the *PA Update* as a set. That four of them are about tiger reserves (Corbett and Rajaji) says as much about the priorities of media reporting as it should raise questions about the situation in the other PAs in the state. If this is the situation in these high-profile reserves, one can only imagine what it might be in the rest of the state.

Three of the five stories are related to judicial pronouncements – one, a high court (HC) order for the halting of mining activities in the Rajaji eco-sensitive zone, the second also from the HC, penalizing resorts and hotels for their encroachments in and around Corbett TR over the last decade or so and the third, for penalizing the relevant state authorities for non-removal of encroachments from Corbett - this one by the National Green Tribunal. The fourth is a story about the Kandi road through Corbett that many fear will seriously compromise the wildlife here and fifth, of the recent (June) meeting of the state board for wildlife – its first in 19 months.

Why is it that the courts have to intervene in matters that should have been routine? Mining has to be stopped because it was allowed in the first place. The matter with encroachments is more complicated, but in many cases it is quite the same. Why does this happen? Why are they allowed at all to begin with? What happens to the mechanisms and institutions of governance, which if operating well, would have prevented such a situation in the first place?

One clear reason is the absence of political will, evidence of which comes from the fact that the state board for wildlife met in June for its first meeting in 19 months. Why, one is forced to ask, this disregard for the procedures and concerns of wildlife and conservation?

These matters have generally been low in political priority; they seem to be hitting rock bottom now. Add to this a mindset that continues to be both, bureaucratic and also colonial and the continued unwillingness to involve local communities, and the picture becomes only more grim.

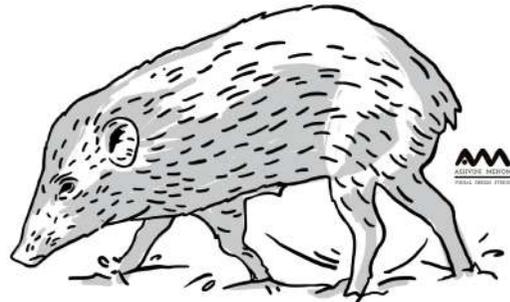
Uttarakhand, importantly, is not an exception. What we see here is the norm; situations like this are being repeated in landscape after landscape, state after state. Flamingoes and bustards continue to be electrocuted in Gujarat, elephants continue to be killed in train accidents, roads continue to be built through PAs... and this is all from only a handful of stories that find space in the *PA Update* every two months.

Look beyond and it's difficult not to feel a sense of gloom and doom!

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Six more Pygmy hogs released in Bornadi WLS



Six more Pygmy hogs were released recently in the Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), taking their total population there to 22 – 10 males and 12 females. Of the six that were released, three each were male and female. The released hogs will be monitored using field signs and camera traps.

The release was part of the ongoing Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme here (*PA Updates* Vol. XVII, No. 2 and Vol. XIV, No. 4),

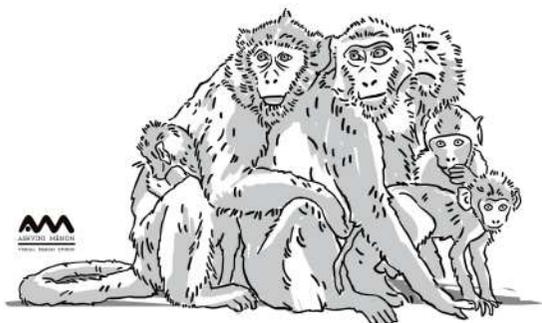
which is a collaborative effort of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, IUCN/SSC Wild Pig Specialist Group, Assam Forest Department and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with EcoSystems-India and Aaranyak as local partners.

Activities of this programme include conservation breeding and reintroduction of Pygmy hogs after habitat restoration. One of the key aims of the programme is to build a viable population of the animal in three places outside Manas National Park.

Source: 'Six pygmy hogs find home in Bornadi', www.telegraphindia.com, 03/06/18.

DELHI

Delhi government submits action plan with a timeline to curb monkey menace



The Delhi government has submitted to the Delhi High Court a year-long action plan along with a timeline to trap and sterilise monkeys in the national capital. The plan was placed before a bench of Acting Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice C Hari Shankar, who had directed the committee of nine members, formed by it on September 2017, to draw up a projection of the expenses involved in the sterilisation of around 25,000 monkeys and submit the estimate to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for approval.

The timeline was submitted in the context of the court's order.

The Wildlife Institute of India has also in the meanwhile applied for the requisite permission from authorities for testing the safety

and efficacy of the imported immuno-contraceptive vaccine on monkeys.

The court's direction and observation came in response to a PIL seeking directions to the authorities for dealing with the menace of monkeys and dogs (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3).

Source: 'Govt submits to HC its plan to sterilise monkeys', www.indianexpress.com, 01/06/18.

GOA

Census finds large number of tiger signs and tracks in Mhadei and Mollem

A recent month-long all India tiger estimation conducted across all PAs of Goa, has found substantial evidence of tiger presence. This includes pugmarks, scats and scratches in both, the Mhadei and Mollem Wildlife Sanctuaries.

The forest department (FD) is in the process of accumulating the data, which will be sent to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for whetting. Once WII approves the data, the same would be released publicly. The FD will also soon release a detailed map, zeroing upon the core areas in the Western Ghats region that could be declared a tiger reserve.

The FD had introduced the camera trap here in 2013 and a tigress was photographed in Mhadei in 2013. In 2017, the camera trap caught a tiger family - a male tiger, a tigress and three cubs.

Source: 'Tiger spotting boosts reserve status possibility for Mhadei, Mollem', www.heraldgoa.in, 03/06/18.

GUJARAT

Open wells in, around Gir to be all covered by end of 2019

In a fresh affidavit submitted to the Gujarat High Court (HC), the state government has said that there are over 50,000 open wells in the Gir region and nearly 18000 of them are not

protected with a parapet wall. The government has mentioned that the work is in progress and that all the wells will have enclosures by the end of 2019. The details were provided in response to a HC direction asking the state government to give specific details of the steps taken to stop the deaths of lions caused by open wells, electrocution and vehicular traffic among others.

The affidavit also assured the HC that the chain-fencing of 86.8 km railway track that passes through the lion habitat of Amreli district will be completed in six months. The court was informed that in addition to the nine deaths due to falling into open wells in the past two years, three lions were killed by electrocution, two by poisoning, two in rail accidents, two in road accidents, one due to trapping and two by drowning. The reasons in the case of two other deaths could not be ascertained.

With incidents of lions getting killed in the open wells becoming frequent, the government had increased the subsidy given to locals to cover these wells from Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 16,000 this year. (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XIV, No. 2; Vol. XIII, Nos. 5 & 2, and Vol. XII, No. 6)

There are 323 lions inside the Gir protected areas while around 200 are outside it. 184 lion deaths were reported in the region in the last two years — 2016 and 2017.

(For reports on lion electrocution by electric fences see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, Nos. 3 & 1 and Vol. XIII, No. 6).

Source: 'Lion deaths: Will cover all wells in Gir by next year, Gujarat government tells High Court', www.indianexpress.com, 30/06/18.

DCF who refused desilting inside Gir transferred

Deputy conservator of forests (DCF), Sasan Gir, Ram Ratan Nala, was transferred recently for refusing permission for desilting work at Singhoda dam, which is situated within the Gir Sanctuary. Nala had come under the scanner of the district administration twice earlier too. He had denied permission for a religious

programme in May 2018 at the Kankai Mata Temple, which is within the forest area; the programme was to be attended by the state chief minister. Recently the forest department (FD) had also stopped construction work on the Sasan Talala road as there was no permission taken from the state board for wildlife for the road widening.

The Singhoda desilting issue led to a dispute between the FD and the district administration. The FD opposed the desilting because the rules stipulate that permission from the national board for wildlife has to be sought, while the administration wanted the desilting to go ahead, ostensibly to please the government. The issue reached the Gujarat High Court, which directed the state government and FD to report whether the desilting would affect the forest and wildlife in the Gir National Park.

Forest officials claimed that the issue was taken up before the additional chief secretary, forest and environment, wherein it was alleged that Nala had refused to give permission for desilting work despite several requests from the district administration.

Forest minister Ganpat Vasava, however, said that this was a routine transfer and had nothing to do with the denial of permission for desilting of the Singhoda dam.

Source: 'DCF who refused dam desilting shunted', timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 31/05/18.

HARYANA

FIR against three students who set fires in Khol Hi-Raitan WLS

Three engineering students of Chandigarh University, Kharar, who recently set fire to dry bushes in at least 15 different locations along a 10-km stretch of the Khol Hi-Raitan Wildlife Sanctuary on the Panchkula-Morni road, were arrested by forest staff following a tip off by villagers. The students were reported to have set the fires to make videos of the journey they were undertaking.

A first information report (FIR) was registered against the students under Section

435 (mischief by fire with intent to cause damage) of the Indian Penal Code, sections 32, 37 of the Indian Forest Act and Section 3 of Public Property Damage Act. A case was registered at Chandimandir police station.

The police also seized the two cellphones with which the students made videos, a gas lighter, and a car belonging to them.

Source: Saurabh Prashar. 'Panchkula: FIR against three students for setting afire dry bushes in wildlife sanctuary', www.indianexpress.com, 01/06/18.

KARNATAKA

FD issues notice to Kuvempu University for carrying out illegal constructions inside Bhadra TR

The state forest department (FD) has stopped the ongoing civil works in Singhanamane forest and sent a notice to the Kuvempu University for carrying out construction activities within the Bhadra Tiger Reserve (TR) without necessary permissions. In another incident, the FD booked a case against the university for felling teak and other trees for building a ladies' hostel. According to the FD, two-three acres in survey number 119 of forest were destroyed for constructing an additional building for a degree college.

Officials said that 400 acres of forest land was granted on lease to the university more than three decades ago on the condition that no construction activity will be taken up without permission from the FD and the national board for wildlife. The university has, however, been regularly clearing patches of the forest, particularly in the Singhanamane area.

According to university officials, however, the lands that were granted on lease have been de-notified and the forest clearance is therefore not needed.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Forest violations continue in Bhadra', www.newindianexpress.com, 30/06/18.

SHPs negatively impact numbers and diversity of native, specialist fish species in Western Ghats: study

A study in the upper reaches of the Nethravathi River by scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) – India Program, National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), University of Florida, the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), and Foundation for Ecological Research Advocacy and Learning (FERAL) has concluded that small hydropower projects (SHPs) in the Western Ghats have not only altered the composition of freshwater fish communities but also reduced the number of such species.

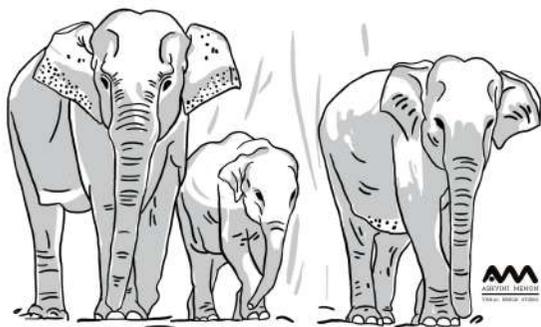
The study conducted on two dammed and one undammed tributary of the west-flowing Nethravathi showed that SHPs reduced the water flow immediately downstream of the dam and caused flow fluctuation when water is released back into the river after power generation. Both of these situations impact fish assemblages. Dammed streams were found to have altered fish composition and also exhibited a lesser number of species. The scientists found further that dammed streams had more generalist species of fish compared to specialist species. Numbers of the migratory mahseer were found to have reduced and native species were strongly affected, also driving them to possible extinction.

The study shows that SHPs have also caused a new problem: a surge in human-elephant conflict situations. The number of claims filed for elephant conflict compensation increased by 173% compared to the year prior to which the SHP was commissioned. Apart from the dam, the construction of associated structures such as large pipes, canals and transmission lines hinders the movement of elephants, forcing them to find new routes, increasing the incidence of conflict.

The study has also expressed concern over the increasing number of SHPs being built across rivers in Western Ghats and elsewhere. It cited the example of the 108-km-long Nethravathi, where 10 SHPs currently exist and

44 more have been proposed. The study added that despite mounting evidence, the ministry of new and renewable energy has plans to build about 6,500 additional SHPs without any environmental and social regulations. Most of them are located within biodiversity hotspots of the Western Ghats and the Himalayas.

Source: Rohith BR. 'Small hydel projects reducing fish numbers, diversity: Study', timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/06/18.



10 mining companies near Bannerghatta NP issued closure notices

The Karnataka Mines and Geology Department (MGD) issued closure notices to 10 companies located in the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Bannerghatta National Park (NP) at Thammanaikanahalli. They are also being charged with penalties of up to Rs. 80 crores. Earlier in April, the MGD had issued closure notices to five other companies located in Shivanahalli (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 3), though the penalties to be levied on the companies have not yet been determined.

The issue of mining in Thammanaikanahalli had been raised in the month of May by environmental activists. The MGD had then commissioned a joint survey report (JSR) with the forest department (FD), for the violations at both Shivanahalli and Thammanaikanahalli. The surveys aimed at checking three major aspects – whether the companies had indulged in excessive mining within the ESZ, the volume of minerals mined, and the environmental violations.

The JSR found that the 10 companies in Thammanaikanahalli had not maintained boundary stones and were quarrying stones within the ESZ. Further, the companies had not adhered to the norms of the limit of stones that could be mined. The activities were also found to have increased the level of air pollution in the area. The JSR also revealed that roads were built in the elephant corridor and that garbage was being dumped within the ESZ.

Dr. TV Ramachandra of the Indian Institute of Science, who submitted the report on the ecological damage, said that the mining activities had caused severe fragmentation in the animal habitat of the protected area. (Also see accompanying story).

Source: Theja Ram. 'Officials order closure of 10 companies near Bannerghatta after illegal mining exposed', www.thenewsminute.com, 12/06/18.

Animal movements observed after suspension of mining leases in Bannerghatta NP

Wild animal movement has been observed again on the Ragihalli main road in the Bannerghatta National Park following a decline in road traffic resulting from the suspension of mining licences here by the mines and geology department (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 3). Chital, sambar, nightjars and even an elephant and a calf were seen on the road after a long time.

The villagers who stay near the forest area said that the gates are partially shut to prevent lorries from entering the area. They also credit the 'Save Bannerghatta Campaign', which relentlessly campaigned against mining in the eco-sensitive zone.

In the latest development in the matter, however, the HC, in an order passed in the last week of July, has allowed 15 companies to resume their operations in the area. According to mining officials, their quarrying and stone crushing operations have been allowed till the end of July as the mining companies had raised the question of livelihood of 400 workers in the court. The mining companies will also have to submit

their respective statement of objections to the earlier mining ban within two weeks.

Source: 'With mining halted, the jumbos are back in Bannerghatta eco-zone', *Deccan Chronicle*, 02/06/18.

Meera Bhardwaj. 'In a big blow to conservation, 15 mining companies, whose operations were suspended in the vicinity of Bannerghatta National Park (BNP), can re-start their operations now', *The New Indian Express*, 26/07/18.

FD rejects NHAI road in Bannerghatta NP

Bannerghatta National Park (NP) officials have rejected the National Highway Authority of India's (NHAI) elevated road project over the park saying the forest is already under pressure. Following a recent visit by officials from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Karnataka Forest Department and NHAI to the park, the FD has offered to help the road authority to help find an alternative route for the corridor to connect Bannerghatta with Kanakapura via Anekal and Harohalli.

NHAI officials were, however, not convinced with the offer. Under the Bharat Mala project, the NHAI has proposed to provide seamless connectivity from Doddaballapur to Magadi Road via Devanahalli, Hoskotte, Anekal, Kanakapura and Magadi. They need the forest patch connecting Anekal to Harohalli for the project, where they proposed to build an elevated corridor on the existing 4.67 kms road passing through BNP. The NHAI has also asked the forest department to give 1km of forest land on either side of the existing road to erect pillars for the 10-lane road.

Forest officials claimed that the NHAI had not approached them for any clarifications regarding the national park even though they claimed they had clearances for the elevated road. They have refused to even share maps with the FD.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Forest dept rejects NHAI road in Bannerghatta', *Deccan Herald*, 25/07/18.

Two elephant calves mowed down by train in Sakleshpur, Hassan

Two elephant calves – one six-months old and the other a year-old – were killed when they were hit by a goods train while crossing the railway tracks in Sakleshpur, in Hassan district. The carcasses were found 14 km from Yedakumari railway station. The train was heading towards Bengaluru from Kukke Subramanya when it hit the animals.

A railway official, who has been in the area for two decades, said this was the first accident of its kind he had seen on the tracks of the Western Ghats.

A first information report (FIR) has been filed against the railways in the matter.

Source: MB Girish. 'Tragedy on tracks! Jumbo calves run over', *Deccan Chronicle*, 05/06/18.

KERALA

Families from Chettiyalathur, the largest settlement inside Wayanad WLS, to move out

In a move that will accelerate the relocation of the largest settlement inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), the state government handed over cheques to 56 families from village Chettiyalathur, located deep inside the sanctuary. The relocation will help add over 200 acres to core area of the sanctuary. The cheques, each of a value of Rs. Six lakh were part of the first installment of the money paid to the families who have agreed to relocate. The remaining 88 applicants were expected to receive their cheques soon.

In a study conducted by the Kerala Forest Research Institute in 2009, Chettiyalathur (with 234 families) was the largest settlement in WWS identified for relocation. So far, the forest department has received applications from 148 families to move out.

The centrally-sponsored project to relocate 800 families from 14 forest settlements inside Wayanad had hit a hurdle with the state government taking back the Rs. 18 crore central

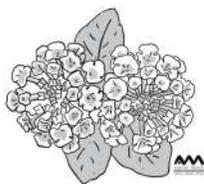
fund allotted to the relocation project early this year as part of financial streamlining moves. With the state government then returning the Rs. 13.5 crore it had taken from the relocation fund, it was possible to pay the 56 eligible families. Families who got their money will dismantle their homes and handover the land to forest department within 30 days.

Environmentalists are now hoping that a couple of landlords who have not signed up for the relocation programme will agree once majority of the residents leave.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, Nos. 6 & 5; Vol. XVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XVII, No. 3).

Source: 'Villagers of largest settlement to move out', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 28/06/18.

Invasive plant species to be cleared over 10 ha in Wayanad WLS



Agami, a collective of paddy farmers, along with environmental groups and forest officials hope to clear 10 ha of land in the Wayanad area that has been infested by *Lantana camara*, an invasive species. This is in addition to the 50,000 plants spread across four ha of two forest stretches that they have already cleared from the Tholpetty range of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and in South Wayanad division.

The weed is estimated to have infested around 40% of the 344 sq km sanctuary.

Source: K R Rajeev. 'Invasive plant species spread over 10 hectares to be cleared', timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 04/06/18.

MAHARASHTRA

Court issues notices in case of railway line conversion inside Melghat TR

A Nagpur citizen has filed a petition against the 18 June 2018 decision of the Union Ministry of

Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to convert the Akola-Khandwa railway line from metre to broad-gauge. A 39 km section of the 176 km railway line passes through the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) in Amravati district. The petitioner has contended that the tiger reserve provides crucial connectivity with other tiger habitats and conversion to broad-gauge will increase the risk of animals being run over by trains. There is also a chance that poachers may use the railway line to smuggle wildlife parts. He has contended that the converted railway line would also be a violation of the Forest Conservation Act and Wild Life Protection Act.

In fact, a report submitted in January by the National Tiger Conservation Authority had advised against the conversion and stated that an alternative route should be explored. However, transport minister Nitin Gadkari and railways minister Piyush Goyal bypassed the report and approved the project.

In response to the petition, the court has issued notices to the MoEFCC, the secretary of the railways ministry, South Central Railway's general manager, and the Maharashtra revenue secretary, asking for a reply within two weeks.

Source: 'Railway gauge conversion threatens Maharashtra's Melghat Tiger Reserve', www.downtoearth.org.in, 29/06/18.

Restructuring of Melghat TR under active consideration

The proposed restructuring of the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) will make it the country's fourth biggest reserve with an area of 2,768 sq. km. It will include the existing area of 2,029 sq. km and an additional buffer of 739 sq. km. The principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), Maharashtra, has sent a proposal to this effect to the state government.

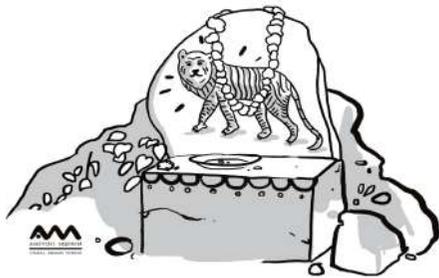
Melghat TR has three divisions — Akot (550 sq. km), Sipna (839 sq. km) and Gugamal (640 sq. km). While no change has been proposed in the areas of Sipna and Gugamal, Akot will be increased to 822 sq. km. There will also be an addition of 42 sq. km of forest area in

Buldhana, Akola, and Yavatmal and another 229 sq. km of non-forest area. As per the revised plan, a new 467 sq km buffer wildlife division will be created with an area of 396 sq. km forest area and 71 sq. km non-forest land. The new buffer division with headquarters in Paratwada will be carved out from East and West Melghat divisions under Amravati circle. Gugamal division's headquarters will also be shifted to nearby Chikhaldara from Paratwada for better management.

The additional principal chief conservator of forests (APCCF) for wildlife (East), said that there will be 118 villages in the buffer zone and these will now be benefited by way of funds and various works through eco-development committees.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Melghat to be 4th largest tiger reserve in country', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/06/18.

Study identifies 33 jungle shrines in Maharashtra and Goa dedicated to big cats



A recent study titled 'Monsters or Gods? Narratives of large cat worship in western India' has documented 33 shrines, made of wood, stones or mud, across Maharashtra and Goa that are dedicated to big cats. 20 of these shrines were found in various parts of Mumbai.

The study, which was published in a newsletter of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, describes the belief in 'Waghoba', representing the tiger or the leopard, as geographically widespread in western India. It states that for worshippers, the forests are an important resource that provide food and firewood. They believe that the forest,

however, is the realm of the 'Wagh' and appease the deity with sacrificial offerings so that they do not attack humans and do not enter the villages.

In Mumbai, these shrines are mostly spread across areas populated by the Warli and Mahadeo communities in and around Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the Tungareashwar Wildlife Sanctuary and Vasai.

The lead author of the study was wildlife biologist, Vidya Athreya.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Big cats are worshipped in 20 shrines in Mumbai forests', www.hindustantimes.com, 14/06/18.

FD contemplating captive breeding to increase prey-base in tiger reserves

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has proposed the captive breeding of sambar with an intention to release them in the protected areas where prey density is comparatively less. It is hoped that the move would help prevent big cats from straying towards human settlements and thus reducing man-animal conflict. The project is being planned for the Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR) and the Umred-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary (UKWS). There has been a number of cases of cattle kills in the villages just outside UKWS.

The additional principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), East Region, Nagpur, informed that the authorities from the Pench and Panna Tiger Reserves in Madhya Pradesh had been successful in their captive breeding experiment and this was sought to be replicated in Maharashtra. At the same time, the FD intends to concentrate on habitat improvement in NNTR, UKWS, Melghat Tiger Reserve and other protected jungle areas, especially in the rehabilitated villages.

A Rs. 14 crore project of the International Union for Conservation of Nature 'Integrated Habitat Conservation & Eco-development in Vidarbha Tiger Landscape' is also being implemented in the Melghat, Pench, Bor and Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve and the surrounding villages.

Source: Ramesh Marulkar. 'Captive breeding in parks soon to strengthen prey-base for carnivores', www.thehitavada.com, 02/06/18.

NAGALAND

Wildlife crime investigation training for Nagaland forest officials

45 forest officials from the Nagaland Forest Department (FD) attended a two-day wildlife crime investigation and law enforcement training workshop in Dimapur in the month of June. The workshop was organized by the FD and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, and was supported by TRAFFIC.

The training programme covered various aspects of wildlife crime investigation and law enforcement, including an overview of key endangered species in illegal trade, a focus on the primary drivers of wildlife trade, illegal trade routes, hubs and modus operandi of traffickers.

Other topics discussed included wildlife forensics and the importance of DNA sampling in forensic investigation, methods of intelligence gathering, cyber-crime, digital intelligence and use of information technology as well as overview of relevant legislation. Sessions were led by experts from various wildlife specialist organisations and were conducted through discussions and field exercises.

Source: 'Community based wildlife protection initiatives key to curbing wildlife crime in Nagaland', <http://www.traffic.org/home>, 05/07/18.

ODISHA

NTCA asks Odisha to notify Sunabeda TR at the earliest

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has requested the Odisha Government to notify the Sunabeda Tiger Reserve (TR), which was granted in-principle approval ten years ago. The centre had accorded in-principle approval to the TR on August 21, 2008 and

sought a final proposal for the project. The forest and environment department had constituted an expert committee in 2010 but the panel was formally notified only four years later. The wildlife wing completed the task in 2016 and submitted the proposal to the state government where it continues to be pending. The region is supposed to be good tiger habitat given its contiguity to the Udanti-Sitanadi TR. Besides, it also connects to the Central India Tiger Landscape. The last census had found four tigers and 20 leopards in Sunabeda.

The proposal submitted by wildlife wing had put the total notified area of the TR at 1,083.098 sq. km. It comprises Sunabeda Wildlife Division and Khariar Forest Division. Its core area is pegged at 510.461 sq. km with the rest comprising the buffer. The core area of the proposed TR has no revenue village but nine 'other settlements' as defined by the Forest Rights Act. The buffer zone has 32 revenue villages, 22 hamlets and 26 other settlements.

Maoists' anti-government propaganda and resistance from NGOs led by local political leaders, besides, now, with the elections drawing close, the government, it has been suggested, may be weighing its options regarding declaration of the TR.

Source: 'National Tiger Conservation Authority asks Odisha to notify Sunabeda Tiger Reserve at the earliest', www.newindianexpress.com, 17/06/18.

Safari in Chandaka WLS to start in August

A forest safari is proposed to be started in the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary as a component of the Bhubaneswar smart city project. Tourists will be taken around the forest in eight and 12-seated buses, the fees for which will be nominal. The forest department (FD) has been in touch with two central public-sector units to provide the buses. Around 50,000 tourists visit the sanctuary annually.

Earlier, the FD had also proposed to merge around 600 ha belonging to the sanctuary with the Nandankanan Zoological Park to set up various animal safaris.

Source: Lelin Mallick. 'Plan to start safari in Chandaka sanctuary', www.telegraphindia.com, 01/06/18.

101 crocodile nesting sites in Bhitarkanika NP this year

101 crocodile nesting sites were spotted in Bhitarkanika National Park during a recent count. This is substantially higher than the 80 nests that were recorded last year. According to the latest census, the current population of these reptiles 1,698. It was reported as 1,682 last year.

Source: 'More croc nests spotted', www.telegraphindia.com, 30/06/18.
'Record number of crocodile nesting sites found In Bhitarkanika', www.indiatoday.in, 30/06/18.

RAJASTHAN

34 leopard deaths every year in Rajasthan: WPSI

Data gathered by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) suggests that a total of 238 leopards were killed in Rajasthan between 2012 and 2018. This makes it an average of 34 deaths per year for this six-year period.

52 of these animals were killed in road/train accidents, 31 died due to infighting, 24 in poaching, 19 were killed by villagers, 14 by tiger or other animals whereas electrocution and rescue operations caused seven deaths each.

Source: '34 leopards die each year in Rajasthan, says wildlife report', www.thehindu.com, 31/05/18.

TAMIL NADU

NTCA to audit security of TRs in Tamil Nadu

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is to soon commence a security audit of four tiger reserves (TRs) in Tamil Nadu. The task has been assigned to the Global Tiger Forum (GTF). The audit method that is used in most South-East Asian tiger range countries,

will be used here as well. It was developed in collaboration with the GTF and the World Wildlife Fund.

SP Yadav, a former deputy inspector-general of NTCA and also ex-assistant secretary-general of GTF, who has been instrumental in formulating the protocol for this audit said that the audit is a three-tier exercise to assess the threat levels to a TR and current strategies available to address those threats. It consists of threat assessment, protection assessment and conservation-oriented patrol standards. The audit provides an overview of the gaps in the provision of protection and enforcement services, allowing the TR management to redress these shortfalls and thereby improve protection.

A senior official in Tamil Nadu Forest Department said that the audit would complement the management effectiveness evaluation (MEE), which is done once every four years. The 2014 MEE had categorized three TRs in Tamil Nadu as 'very good' and Sathyamangalam was given a 'good' status.

The audit has already been conducted in 25 TRs in the northern states under phase-1; the phase-2 audit will cover Tamil Nadu. The population of tigers has tripled in Tamil Nadu in eight years – from 76 tigers in 2006, to 229 in 2014.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'NTCA likely to commence first-ever security audit of tiger reserves in Tamil Nadu', www.newindianexpress.com, 28/06/18.

Major role for local communities envisaged in Tamil Nadu's ecotourism policy

The Tamil Nadu government recently released its Ecotourism Policy 2017, where it has proposed a major role for local communities. Community based ecotourism, where the emphasis will be on the active involvement of local communities for their empowerment and socio-economic upliftment, is one of the 'guiding principles' on which the development of ecotourism in the state will be based, the policy document states.

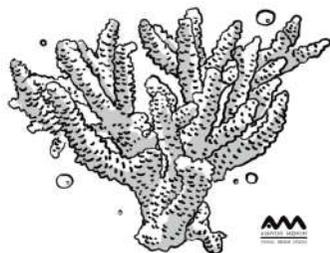
It also states that ecotourism sites will have their uniqueness and value in terms of aesthetic, natural, cultural and landscape characteristics identified and developed. The initiatives proposed as part of the policy include hiking, trekking, wildlife sighting, bird watching trails, boating, photography, visit to medicinal plants conservation area, craft making, local handicraft, promoting local festivals, and adventure sports.

The forest department will be the nodal agency for implementing the policy, which will be reviewed after five years.

Source: 'TN govt releases Ecotourism policy 2017', www.business-standard.com, 28/06/18.

Corals in Gulf of Mannar suffered heavily on account of bleaching in 2016

According to a research study published recently, the corals in the Gulf of Mannar suffered severe losses during the global coral bleaching event that occurred between March and October 2016. The study was conducted by a joint team of researchers from the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI), Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park and Department of Environment of Tamil Nadu. It was published recently in journal *Current Science*.



The study reported 24% coral bleaching with 16% mortality and live coral cover decrease to 23% during for the period March - June 2016. The water temperature was recorded between 31.2 to 32.6 degree Celsius, which started decreasing in July 2016 to reach around 27 degree Celsius in October 2016.

The rate of mortality varied with coral species. Fast-growing species such as *Acropora*, *Montipora* and *Pocillopora* showed severe mortality, while massive and slow growing

species of corals, like *Porites*, *Favia* and *Favites* were seen to be resistant to the bleaching.

Source: Ravi Mishra. 'Coral bleaching of 2016 caused severe mortality in Gulf of Mannar: study', www.downtoearth.org, 23/06/18.

TELANGANA

Stringent action against trash throwing inside Amrabad TR

Beginning June 1, anyone throwing trash on the forest road passing through the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR) in Nagarkurnool district will be penalized with fines. The authorities have been circulating information via pamphlets on dos and don'ts while driving through the reserve. The pamphlets provide information on locations of the designated picnicking spots along the 60 km stretch of the road through the forest. The reserve management has provided some seating for people to rest or have their meals or breaks at these spots. Waste bins have also been provided here. Stopping anywhere else to have food is now prohibited.

The 60 km stretch of national highway 765 that passes through the core area of TR is used by a few hundred vehicles each day including buses and lorries. On weekends, the traffic doubles or triples, and on days leading up to festivals such as Maha-Shivaratri, a thousand or more vehicles use the road that leads to the temple town of Srisailem.

The problem of trash by the roadside has reached serious proportions and wild animals have been seen feeding on used plastic-lined paper plates. Six persons have been tasked with the job of picking trash and one auto trolley has also been arranged for the same. In addition to the trash pickers, the FD's uniformed staff is expected to increase patrolling to catch violators.

Source: Balu Pulipaka. 'You'll be fined for throwing litter in Amrabad Tiger Reserve', www.telanganatoday.com, 31/05/18.

UTTAR PRADESH

Pilibhit TR to amend its tiger conservation plan

Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities have started taking steps to introduce crucial amendments to its tiger conservation plan (TCP) including for the finalisation of its eco-sensitive zone. This follows a warning from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) that funds will be cut under the annual plan of operation for the year 2018-19 if the TCP is not submitted soon.

The warning letter was sent on May 30 to the chief wildlife wardens of a number of states - Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

One of the crucial changes in the Pilibhit TR TCP is the complete restriction of tourists' stay at Chuka, which is situated in the core area of the reserve. The second amendment is related to the construction of an eight-foot-high chain-link fence around the inner circle of PTR that adjoins the 148 km-long farmlands that will cost Rs. 51.80 crore.

Pilibhit was notified a tiger reserve in June 2014 but the TCP has still not been submitted to the NTCA.

Source: 'PTR to amend TCP, steps initiated for eco sensitive zone',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
13/06/18.

Tranquiliser 'overdose' kills elephant in Dudhwa NP

A 20-year-old male elephant in the Dudhwa National Park died after it was allegedly tranquilised thrice while it was in musth. The incident happened during a joint operation by forest officials and the Wildlife Trust of India.

The pachyderm called Battalik was given sedatives in excess along with other medicines, which were believed to have caused adverse reactions. The divisional forest officer said that according to the department's medical

experts, the elephant was suffering from metabolic complications.

Source: "Tranquiliser overdose' killed 20-year-old Dudhwa elephant',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
16/06/18.

UTTARAKHAND

State board for wildlife meeting held after 19 months; several significant decisions taken

The Uttarakhand State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has approved a plan to declare two more areas — Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Nainital district, which stretches till the Nepal border, and the Surai range bordering Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh — as tiger reserves (TRs) (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 2). The forest department (FD) will send detailed proposals in this regard to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Like the Amangarh range of Uttar Pradesh, which falls in the buffer zone of the Corbett TR, has been notified a TR, declaration of Surai range as a TR will act as a buffer for the Pilibhit TR. According to officials, Nandhaur has more than 40 tigers while the Surai range has about a dozen tigers. The NTCA had earlier this year given in-principle approval for the proposal of conserving tigers in these two areas.

The board also decided to increase the ex-gratia amount for kin of those killed in human-wildlife conflict to Rs. five lakh. In case of severe injury, a victim will now get a compensation of Rs. two lakh. According to the FD, Rs. 96 lakh were paid to the families of those who lost their lives in conflict in 2014-15 while this figure was over Rs. one crore for 2017-18. The hike in compensation amount comes at a time when there has been growing resentment among the general public, particularly in rural areas, over rising wildlife attacks in the state. More than 400 persons have been killed in the state in wildlife attacks in the last 15 years.

The board also granted an in-principle approval for a proposal to grant land ownership rights to those who have been shifted elsewhere after being moved from national parks. The decision came after the issue of rehabilitating nearly 200 families of Sunderkhal bordering Corbett TR was discussed (*PA Update* Vol. XVII, No. 3).

Other important decisions taken in the meeting include the starting of an elephant safari in the buffer zone of Corbett TR, the agreement that the entire revenue generated by national parks and sanctuaries of the state will be used for development and management of respective entities and grant to 47 proposals related to developmental work in the eco-sensitive zones of PAs in the state. It was also decided that the FD will share details of the trekkers seeking permission for mountaineering in various parts of the state. This will help the police and state disaster response force during times of emergency.

The meeting also saw a presentation by the Wildlife Institute of India on the green road that has been proposed through the Corbett TR.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'Plan to declare Nandhaur sanctuary, Surai range as tiger reserves gets nod', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/06/18.

Nihi Sharma. 'Wildlife board agrees to hike compensation to conflict victims', www.hindustantimes.com, 15/06/18.

'Ex gratia for wildlife attack victims up', www.tribuneindia.com, 15/06/18.

Nihi Sharma. 'Uttarakhand to have two new tiger reserves soon', www.hindustantimes.com, 15/06/18.

HC orders stay on mining within 10 km of NPs

The Uttarakhand High Court (HC) has ordered a stay on mining in areas within 10 km of national parks (NPs) in the state. The decision was taken on a public interest litigation, which had stated that mining in the Motichur Range of the Rajaji NP had disrupted wildlife movement and

increased the risk of human-wildlife conflict in the region. The court noted that the government will have to get the clearance of the wildlife board in case it wants to allow mining in the said areas.

Source: 'HC orders stop on mining within 10 kms of national parks', www.dailypioneer.com, 14/06/18.

NGT fines Uttarakhand for not demolishing illegal structures in Corbett TR

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttarakhand government to pay a fine of Rs. three lakh for not demolishing illegal structures inside the core area of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. A Bench headed by NGT Acting Chairperson, Jawad Rahim, pulled up the state government for not filing reports pertaining to the demolition in Kalagarh and directed the authorities to submit an affidavit as well as pay the compensation amount within one week.

The state government had in September 2017 informed the NGT that the structures would be removed within a year and that authorities will file status-cum-compliance reports every three months.

Source: 'NGT fines Uttarakhand govt. over not demolishing illegal structures in Corbett reserve', www.thehindu.com, 31/05/18.

WII to submit feasibility report on proposed Kandi road in Corbett TR

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is to soon submit a 'feasibility' report on the Kandi Road that is proposed to pass through Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3 & 2). VB Mathur, director, WII made a presentation on the progress of the project during the recent meeting of the Uttarakhand State Board for Wildlife (see accompanying story). A survey on the ground is already on and a patch of nearly 50 km inside the TR is being studied intensively.

The road that will reduce the distance between the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of

the state by at least 82 km is reported to have heavy tiger and elephant activity.

The National Green Tribunal has issued a show-cause notice to the government and others on their plan for the road. A few years ago, the alignment of the road was done twice by the public works department and in both the alignments the road was to pass from outside the TR. The Supreme Court too had approved such an alignment. The government had also signed a memorandum of understanding with National Building Construction Corporation for construction of the road.

Source: Nihi Sharma. 'WII to submit report on Kandi Road by September', www.hindustantimes.com, 15/06/18.

Corbett TR encroachment case: HC asks authorities to fix compensation amount based on the income of resort owners

The Uttarakhand High Court (HC) has asked the authorities concerned to fix the compensation/damages to be paid by hotel and resort owners for encroachments and unauthorised constructions on revenue and forest land around the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) in Nainital and Almora districts by taking into consideration the tariff charged by them from the date of such constructions till date according to their income tax returns. The court has also ruled that the cost of demolition of the unauthorised structures should be borne by the hotel and resort owners.

The directions were issued to the district magistrates of Nainital and Almora in a public interest litigation filed in 2012 where the petitioner had highlighted the issue of the construction by hotels and resorts around properties around the reserve (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 3).

During the hearings, a significant number of resort and hotel owners were not able to present sale deeds or other relevant documents related to the possession of land. Of the 44 resort owners around the reserve in Nainital and Almora districts, 30 were seen to have encroached upon revenue land while 14

had encroached on forest land, including the catchment of the Kosi River. The court directed the state government to remove the encroachments within 14 days.

The Corbett Hotels and Resorts Association has said that the authorities should first officially establish the extent of the Kosi River, which will make it clear to what extent encroachments have been made.

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'Corbett Tiger Reserve: Fix damages to be paid by hotel owners: HC', www.hindustantimes.com, 29/06/18.

WEST BENGAL

Protests against opening Chapramari WLS for tourism in monsoons

Protests erupted against the forest department (FD) at two places in the Dooars, one denouncing a move to open the jungles to visitors during the monsoon and the other accusing the officials of not doing enough to rein in a rampaging elephant.

Parts of the Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), which is closed for tourism between June 16 and September 15, has remained opened for tourists this year. Conservationists and nature lovers slammed the monsoon entry plan and stopped some tourists at the gates for about an hour in the month of June. An altercation ensued with the tourists, who later ignored protesters' requests and entered the sanctuary. Senior forest officials claimed that the main sanctuary area has been closed for tourists but some locations on the fringes have been kept open.

In Uttar Dhumpara village of Nagrakata, a group demonstrated against the FD after a wild elephant killed a 55 year old woman. Despite making repeated phone calls to the FD, foresters did not arrive in time. Had they arrived on time, the woman's life could have been saved, said a protester.

The protests were withdrawn after police officers intervened and promised compensation to the victim's family and increased vigilance.

Source: 'Protest against monsoon entry to reserve', www.telegraphindia.com, 17/06/18.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

BSF signs MoU with WCS to check wildlife smuggling

The Border Security Force (BSF) has signed a memorandum of understating (MoU) with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Bengaluru, to check trans-border smuggling of wildlife in the country.

WCS will help in capacity building of the troops deployed along the border and help them identify the wildlife that is smuggled. The NGO will also come up with a 24-hour helpline, which the forces can use to get more information about the wildlife parts seized.

The first capacity building programme will be held in Kolkata.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'BSF roped in to check wildlife smuggling', www.thehindu.com, 25/06/18.

Need to transition from tiger-centric tourism to ecotourism in India: study

A new study on ecotourism has called for it to be expanded in outlook and made less tiger-centric. Titled 'Trends and pathways for ecotourism research in India', it states that while wildlife tourism in India relies mostly on tigers and a few other charismatic fauna, there is a need to explore the potential around other less known wildlife sanctuaries and nature reserves. Studies need to focus on identification of means to transition from tiger-centric tourism to ecotourism.

Researchers Mahi Puri and Brijesh Thapa from the University of Florida and Krithi K Karanth from the Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS), Bengaluru, analyzed and reviewed 30 peer-reviewed studies on ecotourism published since 2005. Studies were categorized into three

broad themes — those that assessed the potential for ecotourism at specific sites, examined impacts of the existing tourism model, and those that evaluated ongoing ecotourism initiatives. They also identified prominent reasons to adopt ecotourism, evaluated whether principles of ecotourism had been incorporated in scientific research, and identified gaps in research. The study revealed that though India has seen remarkable growth in nature-based tourism, the current approach brought limited benefits to conservation, protected areas and local communities.

Puri, lead author of the study, said that compared to South Africa, Kenya and Costa Rica, India is not recognized as an ecotourism destination, and therefore misses out on a large share of international tourism. For India to gain a foothold in the global market, a huge shift towards responsible tourism models is required. Scientific research can provide the necessary impetus for policy legislation, consumer awareness, and avenues for financial investment, the author suggested.

Source: 'Look beyond tiger-centric ecotourism, say researchers', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 28/06/18.

Manual of guidelines for setting up zoos

The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Harsh Vardhan recently released a manual containing guidelines to be followed while setting up zoos in the country. These guidelines are jointly written by Rommel Mehta, an architect and Dr. DN Singh, member secretary of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA).

Source: 'Zoo manual released by Environment Minister', www.downtoearth.org.in, 28/06/18.

260 leopards killed in first six months of 2018

Data put together by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) shows that India lost 260 Leopards in the first six months of 2018.

Poaching accounted for 90 of these deaths. The data also suggests that 1,593 leopards were poached across India in the last decade.

The WPSI said that better policing could be a reason for more cases being reported, and that the seizure of body parts in large numbers was testimony to strong law enforcement in various parts of the country.

It has also been suggested that the figure of 90 leopard poaching cases is an underestimate as deaths due to electrocution and poisoning generally remain undetected.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'India lost 260 leopards already in 2018, 90 killed by poachers: Wildlife body', www.hindustantimes.com, 29/06/18.

NBWL recommendations to curb human-wildlife conflict

The government has finalized a set of measures to curb incidents of human-wildlife conflict and those of animal deaths due to electrocution. The move is an outcome of a Supreme Court directive issued to the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change and the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in January in response to a petition by wildlife biologist Vidya Athreya that had included a set of suggestions to improve the ground situation.

In February, NBWL formed a six-member expert panel to examine the suggestions on human-animal conflict, securing of elephant corridors to minimise conflict, wildlife deaths due to electrocution and recovery plans for the Great Indian Bustard. Based on the report of the expert panel, the NBWL made final recommendations. These include the following:

- the ministry must advise the state governments to secure elephant-corridors through land acquisition or by declaring such corridors as eco-sensitive zones;
- the ministry may consider constitution of a task force in collaboration with the power ministry, electricity companies and wildlife experts to deliberate on measures that will prevent electrocution of wildlife;

- the ministry will issue advisories to states on developing standard operating procedures for species other than the tiger and leopard that are at the centre of human-wildlife conflict;
- to reduce wildlife mortality on roads, infrastructure development agencies and concerned ministries must make necessary modifications in designs of existing roads.

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Centre plans task force, elephant corridors to check man-animal conflicts', www.dnaindia.com, 08/07/18.

Maharashtra, Telangana and Chhattisgarh come together to combat timber smuggling



The neighbouring states of Maharashtra, Telangana and Chhattisgarh have decided to launch a joint effort aimed at combating illegal timber and wildlife trade. In an inter-state meeting of forest officials from the three states held recently at Bhopalpatnam in Chhattisgarh, it was decided that intelligence sharing and establishing inter-state check-posts would help prevent smuggling via roads and the Indravati River. Though the Maharashtra Forest Department has camps on its side of the river, there were no such mechanisms in Telangana. This, it was pointed out, also impedes the way in which Maharashtra checks the trade.

The issue of illicit tree felling and smuggling in Gadchiroli district was taken up at the meeting. Between 2010 and 2017, the Sironcha division alone has seen 17,637 instances of illicit felling of teak trees, the value of which is estimated at Rs. 14,87,59,622. The

estimated value of Teak seizures between 2000 and 2016 is around Rs. 51,70,10,724.

Last year, the three states had also launched joint patrolling for forest staff and also shared information about the places of conflict like Pendalaya, Asarali (Sironcha division) and Matimarka in the Maded Buffer Range of the Indravati Tiger Reserve.

Source: Dhaval Kulkarni. 'Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telengana join hands to curb timber racket', www.dna.com, 05/06/18.

SOUTH ASIA

Bay of Bengal nations to get funds from GEF to tackle unsustainable fisheries

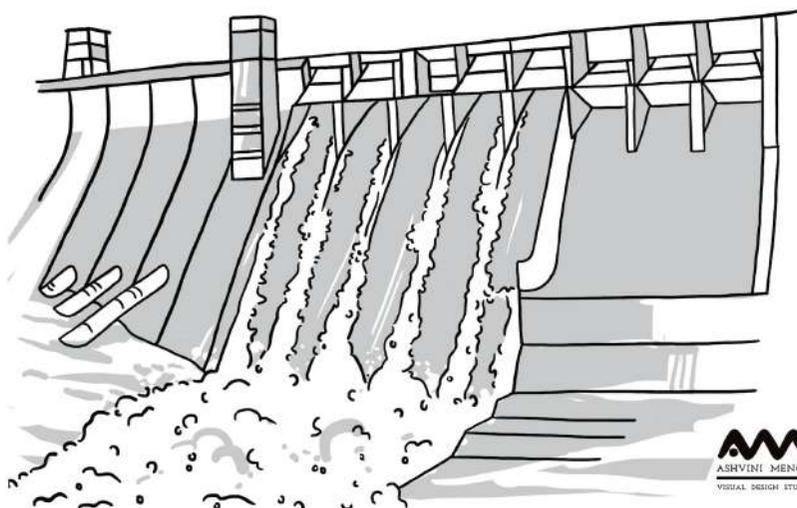
The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has brought together eight Bay of Bengal nations, including India, to develop a programme for ocean governance to tackle unsustainable fisheries. The countries that include India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar,

Maldives, Malaysia and Thailand will get funds to the tune of US \$179,266,055 for the programme.

The 'Sustainable Management of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Programme', with funding through the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Asian Development Bank will address the three major pressures facing shared ocean ecosystems - unsustainable fishing, pollution, and the destruction of habitat, while improving livelihoods and increasing resilience.

For small island developing states that often rely for freshwater on shallow coastal aquifers that are recharged by rainfall, but are vulnerable to the impacts of land use and climate change, a United Nations Development Programme/GEF project will improve their use, management and protection in Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, so as to increase water security.

Source: Vishal Gulati. 'India among eight nations gets funds for marine conservation', www.business-standard.com, 25/06/18.



How to Waste Time on an Exhibition

A tribute to Professor H. Y. Mohan Ram

The gods (or whoever) stopped making people like Professor H. Y. Mohan Ram a long time ago. An outstanding botanist, teacher extraordinaire, avid researcher, gifted writer and editor, institution builder, proficient photographer, music aficionado, cricket enthusiast—and much more—he was, above all, someone who intuitively believed in human values and dignity. The world, therefore, is a much poorer place for his passing away on 18 June 2018. Much recent information is available about him, his work and achievements (e.g., Shivanna K. R. 2018. *Current Science* 115: 168–171), and I do not propose to repeat it here. It's been my privilege to have known Professor Ram (fondly called “HYM”) for over 46 years, 30 of those very closely. Many memories of our association come to mind, but I would like to recall just one incident – the first time I worked with him closely.

The XV International Genetics Congress was a mega event held in Delhi during 12–21 December 1983, with over 2,000 delegates from across the world. Its sheer scale necessitated participation from multiple institutions, with preparations starting months ahead. Professor Ram's role, among other responsibilities, was to set up an exhibition on “Genetics in India” over an area of some 4000 sq ft in the National Museum of Natural History. The purpose was not only to showcase important genetics research from India but also India's vast genetic diversity.

HYM had already roped in Mr. Puri, a delightful and friendly soul, who had recently superannuated from the Department of Audio-visual Publicity, to assist him with the logistics. Now he needed a second-in-command with a background in Biology to help organize and set up the exhibition. Why he chose to ask me, I have no idea, but I remember to have accepted without a moment's delay. A small hurdle had to be overcome, however: my college refused to grant me academic leave. So, I applied for three months' earned leave, much to the shock of some of my colleagues and friends who thought

it was foolish to ‘waste’ my precious personal leave on a mere exhibition, when my wife and I were shortly expecting our first child! The next 12 weeks or so passed in a whirl: arriving daily in HYM's office by 8.30 am, and often not leaving before 9.30 or 10 pm. He set an example by being there himself to explain, advice, guide and share responsibilities.

Institutions from all over India had sent verbose technical write-ups on hundreds of exhibits. My immediate job was to condense and rewrite these – without sacrificing scientific accuracy – in jargon-free English. These were to be printed as one- or two-page pamphlets for distribution to visitors. By then I had been teaching undergraduates for some years and prided myself on my knowledge of English. “That should be simple enough”, I said to myself, but as it turned out, I had spoken too soon. I had yet to contend with Professor Ram's critical eye for precision and detail.

I wrote up the first pamphlet and took it to him with what must have been a smug expression on my face. He read through it and said it was well written, but that it should be shown to Mr. Puri. “If Puri Saab can understand what this is about,” he said, “you would have done well.” Mr. Puri took one look at the write-up and said, “Doctor Saab, yeh nahi chalega.” (“Sir, this will not do.”). The injury to my ego must have clearly mirrored on my face! I silently gathered the note and returned to my seat. Upon saner reflection, however, I could see the merit in the criticism as the write-up was still difficult to understand for non-scientists.

While not saying it in so many words, HYM had gently nudged me to do better. Putting myself in the position of a lay visitor to the exhibition, I made three- or four iterations of that write-up before showing it again to either of them. In due course, I got that first pamphlet right, winning both Mr. Puri's endorsement (we called it “Purification”) and HYM's final nod.

The days that followed were very hectic. The slightest doubt regarding the scientific correctness of each write-up had to be

verified from reference books or journals, or even experts in that field. HYM, a stickler for accuracy, devoted much time to this from his packed schedule. The net result was that my own knowledge was greatly enriched, on such diverse topics as problems of inbreeding among the Parsi community, drosophila genetics, the Kyasanur Forest disease, petro crops, diversity among Indian cattle, buffalo and goat breeds, the variation among silk worms and host plants, mutation breeding of ornamental flowers and so on.

When the actual exhibits – many live specimens, others photographs and charts – started arriving for display, I got a unique learning experience - studying, classifying and arranging them according to the scheme we had put in place. Over those ten days of the exhibition, I met so many experts — many of whom are now close associates. On those long evenings, HYM would add his own witty remarks to those of the experts, opening new lines of discussion, or lightening the burden of work. Needless to say, the exhibition went on to become a grand success, attracting delegates to

the Congress, as well as thousands of visitors from Delhi and neighbouring parts.

Thanks to HYM, the broad knowledge and experience I gathered during that period have repeatedly served me well in later life, especially when I moved to the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. The example that he set reinforced the value of dedication and leadership. My association with HYM from that long-ago moment has ensured that I am never able to walk away from any exhibition today without appreciating the hard work, planning and organization involved in making it successful. If the clock were to turn back to that time, would I once again ‘waste’ my personal leave on an exhibition? Oh, undoubtedly, if it had Professor Mohan Ram leading it!

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Important Bird Areas Update

GUJARAT

27 Lesser flamingos electrocuted near Bhavnagar city; third consecutive year of such incidents



27 Lesser flamingos were electrocuted in two different incidents of collision with a high-tension power transmission line in Kumbharwada area near Nari crossroads on the outskirts of Bhavnagar city. The two incidents

occurred at the same place soon after dusk, 24 hours apart. 20 birds were electrocuted in the first incident and seven in the 2nd one. This is a third consecutive year when Lesser flamingos have been killed in the same area, after hitting the power line.

The forest department (FD) had written to the Gujarat Energy Transmission Corporation in 2016 and 2017 after birds were electrocuted. It was told, however, that the power line was out of use. The FD plans to write again to the concerned authorities asking them to fix reflectors on the power transmission line to prevent such collisions. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 4)

Source: ‘Gujarat: 27 flamingos electrocuted after hitting power transmission line in Bhavnagar’, www.indianexpress.com, 13/06/18.

Hunting in Pakistan; loss of habitat in India threatens GIB population in Gujarat: IUCN report

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has raised an alarm about rampant poaching of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in Pakistan, saying this can lead to the extinction of the GIB from western India. 49 of the 63 birds that were sighted in Pakistan over a period of four years are reported to have been hunted. Studies have revealed that the GIBs cross over into Pakistan from Kutch.

According to the IUCN, the current threats in India come mostly from habitat loss and degradation caused by widespread agricultural expansion and mechanization of farming, infrastructural development such as irrigation, roads, electricity pylons, wind turbines and constructions, mining and industrialization. With increased availability of water due to government irrigation policies, agriculture has also spread over the vast arid-semiarid grasslands, resulting in loss of habitat. It has noted further that due to ill-defined land distribution policies and ambiguity arising from segregated land ownership between private owners, community and government bodies, encroachment is a major problem in many bustard areas, especially in and around the bustard sanctuaries of Maharashtra, Kutch and Rajasthan.

The report also noted that the efforts in Gujarat to remove the invasive *Prosopis* sp. from grasslands in Kutch have proved successful, as GIBs were observed in cleared areas within seven days.

In the meanwhile, deputy director of Kutch Ecological Research Centre and a member of the State Bustard Conservation Committee informed that recently, two GIBs died from electrocution. The Gujarat government has formed a committee to examine the possibility of taking high-tension lines underground, but the committee does not have an expert on it.

The last bustard census in Gujarat was conducted in 2016 and the figures revealed that they numbered only 25. More recent reports have suggested that there is only male visible in

the area leading to fears that the GIB will go extinct in Gujarat very soon. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, Nos. 4, & 3; and Vol. XXII, No. 6).

Source: 'Hunting in Pakistan could cause GIB extinction in Gujarat: IUCN', timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 04/06/18. Smitha R. 'With just one male, Great Indian Bustard perilously close to extinction in Gujarat', *DNA*, 07/07/18

New google-group for the *PA Update*

The *PA Update* now has a new google-group. The creation was necessitated on account of the de-activation of the existing yahoogroup due to unavoidable reasons. The egroup will not be a discussion platform, but only for the mailing of the newsletter for those interested. Only one email a month on an average will be sent on the group. Readers who were on the earlier group or would like to receive the *PA Update* as a soft copy are requested to subscribe to this mailing list by visiting:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/paupdate>

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FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago

PA Update 74, August 2008

KERALA

Newsletter on Vembanad

The Vembanad Team of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) has initiated a newsletter 'Vembanad' that will be dedicated to various issues concerning the Vembanad Lake, one of the important Ramsar sites in Kerala.

Malabar WLS proposed in Kozhikode

The Kerala government has decided to create the Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary at Kakkayam in Kozhikode. The announcement was made by State Forest Minister Benoy Viswom in Thiruvananthapuram recently.

The Minister also announced the formation of a Forest Housing Development Corporation for employees of the forest department.

Source: 'Viswom: wildlife sanctuary in a year,' *The Hindu*, 23/03/08

Diphtheria reported in Kani settlements in Peppara WLS

A seven year-old girl from a Kani settlement inside the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary was reported to have died of diphtheria in the first week of May.

A team of doctors immediately visited the 60-odd houses in the five Kani settlements inside the sanctuary to look for traces of the supposedly eradicated disease among other tribal children. Over 30 children in these settlements were tested and their throat swabs were taken for culture. None of them, however, showed any symptoms of the disease.

The team of doctors was told that the children here had all been immunized, and that even the expired child had been inoculated. It has however been pointed out

that neither the SAT nor the nearest hospital, KIMS, had stock of the vaccine Diphtheria Immunoglobulin when the girl was admitted. She is reported to have died before the medicine could be purchased.

Source: 'Docs visit Kani settlements, find no trace of diphtheria', *The New Indian Express*, 08/05/08.

FD to set up three biodiversity parks

The Forest Department has proposed to set up three biodiversity parks in the state in the next three years at Chaliyam in Kozhikode, Nedumbassery in Kochi and Munnar in Kottayam and at the Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary at Kakkayam in Kozhikode.

The decision was announced in the last week of May by Forest Minister Binoy Viswam, who revealed that the first phase of the discussion on the biodiversity park in Nedumbassery has already been completed. The park is sited on the land the Forest Department had received as compensation for land used for the Nedumbassery International Airport.

At Kozhikode, the historical Chaliyam Timber Depot it is to be renovated into a biodiversity park, while the park at Munnar is to 'add value' to the popular tourist area.

Source: 'Forest Dept. to set up three biodiversity parks', *The New Indian Express*, 31/05/08.



PERSPECTIVE

Learning to live with leopards in Uttarakhand...can humans change their spots?

A unique initiative is being rolled out in Tehri and Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand where an average of over 60 injuries or deaths have been reported annually over the last 15 years in leopard attacks on humans. A social survey conducted between 2014 and 2016 by the Titli Trust in collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-India and the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD), provided interesting insights into the issue in the state. This was followed by an exposure visit to Maharashtra where the FD has done ground breaking work in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in the matter.

A long-term research project by Dr. Vidya Athreya, WCS-India, revealed that the practice (actually followed throughout the country), of capturing and relocating 'problem' leopards, only exacerbated the conflict. The reason problem appears in quotes is because most of the time it is only a problem because the leopard has been *seen* and not because it has caused any harm to humans.

In many cases, leopard attacks increased near the release sites and in some cases leopards were documented returning to their home territory, travelling long distances in human-use landscapes. As translocation increased the conflict, Maharashtra FD decided to follow what their own experience and research was indicating - to reduce the capture of leopards from around the park. In the last five years, leopard conflict in SGNP has reduced significantly.

However, the crux of the problem was public and political pressure to trap the leopards. This had to be addressed and an awareness and sensitization program titled 'Living with Leopards' was initiated for all stakeholders - citizens and residents around SGNP, media, police, state administration, and FD staff amongst others.

The Uttarakhand FD, following an exposure visit to SGNP, decided to adopt some of the best practices from Maharashtra. With Tehri and Pauri Garhwal as pilot locations, rapid

response teams (RRTs) were created amongst the FD staff. These were properly equipped and then trained by a Maharashtra FD team. A year into the program, and the RRTs are already a role model for other forest divisions in Uttarakhand! Another lesson learnt from Maharashtra is the importance of awareness and communication amongst stakeholders. A children's ambassador program has been rolled out and media workshops at Tehri, Pauri and Dehradun have been conducted.

Some of the measures are already bearing fruit, specifically the rapid response teams' ability to deal with conflict better. A booklet titled 'Busting myths about leopards...and learning to live with them', has been produced in Hindi and English, and is helping change attitudes amongst stakeholders.

While it is still early days in this program, amongst the most heartening insights from this initiative is the collaboration amongst FDs across states, using inputs from scientific research for on-the-ground-decision making for conservation and the involvement of many stakeholders in attempting to make humans change their spots!

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