

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXIV, No. 5

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Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

***PA* news in *Update* sized chunks and questions about the *PA Update*'s future**

The *Protected Area Update* will soon be entering the 25th year of its publication and it might just be the right time to do some thinking and some reflection. Every two months for a quarter of a century now, the newsletter has compiled this little package of information for a readership specifically interested in wildlife and PAs. It has been a very productive exercise for the small team that has been putting it together, and from the regular trickle of feedback that we continue to receive, it appears to be have been useful for the readers as well. It is perhaps the only vehicle of its kind that provides a consolidated, though limited, picture of our PAs and of issues around wildlife conservation.

A mention above of the 'limitedness' of the *PA Update* is both purposive and important because it would be central to understanding how, if at all, the newsletter continues to be relevant and what the future should be. There are various arguments that can be made for continuation of the newsletter, but the more important questions would be those that challenge relevance.

One of the biggest changes that has taken place in recent years has been in the media landscape of the country. The scale and access of media and media content has seen a paradigm shift and this is reflected both in the volume of news and information available and in the various ways in which news is being consumed. The news industry as we have known it is reaching an inflexion point and much will change in the years that wait around the corner.

The biggest challenge before the *PA Update* now is one of too much choice. There is so much news available about PAs, wildlife and the environment in general that 24 pages every two months are simply unable to do justice to the volume and diversity available. There is also

the constant struggle to raise resources to meet even the relatively small sized budget for the *PA Update*'s production and there is also the question of whether we are able to reach out widely and deeply enough. When media is so wide-spread, huge volumes of information so already available, and the speed of information reaching out so rapid, a question might well (should!) be asked about the *PA Update*.

Lest this note send alarm bells ringing amongst *PA Update* supporters and loyalists, we'd like to emphasise that there is no plan to shut shop just yet. The idea is to start a conversation, and we'd look forward to hearing from you with your feedback and comments.

The very interesting thing here, both in contrast but also complimentary to the points made above on the volume of news and information, is the nature of issues that our PAs and conservation have to grapple with. The news reportage in the *PA Update* often provides a convenient thread of tracing the history of the PAs and and this perhaps is the biggest strength of this newsletter. Following from the news in this issue on the Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary (see the Important Bird Areas section), we pulled together all the reports that have been carried on Kolleru since 1998 in the *PA Update*. There are a total of 16 stories (surely a limited set), but reading them through does give a broad sense of what has been happening here. The more things change, the more remains the same and affirming this reality might well be the biggest contribution of PA news that has been appearing in *Update* sized chunks since 1994!

PS: Pls send an email to the editor if you would like to get the above-mentioned full set of stories from the Kolleru WLS as a single file!



ASSAM

74% reduction in human-elephant conflict in four tea estates in Sonitpur district

A three-year project implemented by the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature – India and Apeejay Tea (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 5 and Vol. XXI, No. 3) has resulted in a 74% reduction in losses due to human-elephant conflict in four tea estates (TE) in the Sonitpur region. The project that was carried out at the Borjuli, Sessa, Ghoirallie and Dhulapadung TEs saw losses come down to Rs. seven lakh a year from about Rs. 29 lakh annually three years ago due to the conflict. There was only one human death during the project period in the four TEs owned by the company and there was injury to none. In the district itself, the number of deaths in elephant-human conflict decreased to three elephant- and 11 human-deaths in 2017 as compared to eight and 16 respectively in 2013.

The project involved the installation of low cost solar power fences and scalable bio fences of a length of 12.5 km using thorny bamboos to prevent wild elephants from entering the estates. Regular village-level interactions were organised and anti-depredation squad orientations and street plays were conducted as important components to create awareness. Seven early warning systems were installed in the Dhulapadung and Sessa TEs and another active infra-red system was installed at Sessa. Solar street lights were installed at 28 vulnerable locations and field training on human-elephant conflict management was provided to more than 1,000 frontline staff and others in Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Nagaon districts on the fringes of the Kaziranga National Park.

Source: ‘74 % decrease in losses due to man-animal conflict: Apeejay’, www.business-standard.com, 24/08/18.

Kaziranga NP to get a new set of drones for protection monitoring



Kaziranga National Park (KNP) is all set to get a new set of drones for capturing video footage of parts of the jungle not accessible on foot. The new drones that will overcome the time and maximum height limitation that the earlier ones had are being customised at the Wildlife Institute of India for the purpose. Work is also being done to enhance the flight duration and longevity of their usage. The first attempt to use drones in Kaziranga was in 2013 (*PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 6; Vol. XIX, No. 5 and Vol. XVIII, No. 6), but the project for aerial surveying and monitoring received the centre’s green signal only in early 2017.

According to the KNP authorities, they have three drones now: one with forest personnel and two with the police. Officials said the drones have been ‘helpful’, including during last year’s massive floods, but have limitations — they flew at a stretch for only 25-30 minutes and were not customised for wildlife usage.

Source: Abhishek Saha. ‘Kaziranga to get drones that will stay up for five hours’, www.indianexpress.com, 03/09/18.

Yamin Hazarika Woman of Substance Award-2018 to Purnima Devi Barman

Purnima Devi Barman has been chosen for the Yamin Hazarika Woman of Substance Award - 2018 for her exemplary contribution to the conservation of the Greater adjutant stork. Barman has been working in Dadara, Pachariya and Singimari villages in Kamrup district to save the endangered species for years.

The award commemorating the life of iconic police officer from Assam, the late Yamin Hazarika, honours women who have done notable work in different fields, and contributed to the larger good of society and inspired young girls.

Yamin Hazarika, born in Guwahati, was a 1977-batch police officer. As a deputy commissioner of police (crime against women), Delhi Police, she was known for her impeccable track record in the force. She died on July 24, 1999, at the young age of 43.

Source: 'Yamin Hazarika Award 2018 to Wildlife Activist Purnima Devi Barman', thethumbprintmag.com, 07/08/18.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Study reveals hangul in Dachigam NP reviving its traditional summer grazing corridor

Satellite collaring of the hangul population in the Dachigam National Park (NP) has revealed that the animal is trying to revive its traditional summer grazing corridor in the Gurez valley in northern Kashmir. The study of movement patterns of the animal using GPS (global positioning system) was conducted by the state wildlife protection department in collaboration with SKUAST, Kashmir and the Wildlife Institute of India. Officials said preliminary findings from tracking two satellite-collared female hangul have provided significant information on movement patterns and habitat use by the species in and around Dachigam.

Dachigam-Wangath-Tulail, which was the traditional summer corridor of the hangul, has been fragmented and increased human activity along the corridor has hindered the movement of the animal. Now, analysis of data reveals that hangul are using their traditional summer grazing spots in Tulail area of Gurez. Owing to its undisturbed meadows and less human activity, Tulail offers abundant foraging grounds for the hangul. Researchers point out that the upper Dachigam area, which was a favorite haunt of Hangul, is being gradually

abandoned by the animal due to presence of livestock and grazers.

The government has planned a slew of measures to provide safe passage to the hangul while moving through their traditional corridor. The measures include setting up of command and control centre at Haknar Gund for their protection during migration. In case hangul movement is detected, vehicular movement along Sonmarg-Leh highway will be stopped to allow for the animals to cross over.

Source: Arif Shafi Wani. 'Satellite collaring traces endangered Hangul from Dachigam to Tulail', *Greater Kashmir*, 13/08/18.

KARNATAKA

NBWL rejects land diversion for Hubballi-Ankola railway line

In a meeting held in September the standing committee of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) has rejected the diversion of 595.64 hectares (ha) of forest land in Karwar, Yellapura and Dharwad Division for the construction of the new broad gauge Hubballi-Ankola railway line (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 5). The land needed included 42.0 ha in Dharwad, 304.06 ha in Yellapura and 249.58 ha in Karwar. The project also entailed the cutting of over two lakh trees.

The Hubballi-Ankola railway line has been controversial ever since it was envisaged in 1998 to transport mineral ore from the mining districts of Karnataka to various ports along the coast. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) had in February 2016 directed the railways — the user agency, to approach the state government for diversion of land and convert it for non-forest activities. The state wildlife authorities of Karnataka had recommended the proposal with the condition that mitigation measures suggested by the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, be implemented.

However, the site inspection committee of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had rejected the project on many grounds including that the Western Ghats are a

biodiversity hotspot and a world heritage site, that the project would have fragmented the old migration path of elephants and this region offered very good habitat connectivity and contiguity for other species like the tiger.

Source: No Hubballi-Ankola railway line through elephant corridor in Western Ghats', *Bangalore Mirror*, 28/09/18.

Payment of 300 forest watchers of Kali TR delayed

At least 300 forest watchers working across Kulgi, Anshi, Phansoli and four other ranges of the Kali Tiger Reserve (TR) are waiting for their monthly wages, the payment of which has been irregular for the last two years. An earlier inquiry report of the National Tiger Conservation Authority on poor status of protection here had pointed out to such issues as delayed payments to watchers and deployment of less than five watchers in anti-poaching camps.

Senior forest officials have admitted that there has been a delay but said that this was because the state government had not released funds. Last year, their wages were paid from the Tiger Conservation Foundation Fund and this was later reimbursed by the government. The state government has given strict instructions this year, however, not to use this fund for watchers' payments.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj. 'Three hundred Kali Tiger Reserve watchers haven't received wages for months', www.newindianexpress.com, 28/08/18.

Proposal to declare Bukkapatna forests as a wildlife sanctuary

The Tumakuru Forest Division (TFD) has proposed that the Bukkapatna State Forest under its Bukkapatna Range be declared a wildlife sanctuary. The total area proposed for the same is 13,188.70 hectares (ha).

The landscape here is dominated by open grasslands with the rest being covered by

forests and plantations. About 18 mammal species have been camera trapped here.

In 2014, the TFD had helped in getting 5,000 ha of the Thimlapura State Forest of Madhugiri Range declared as a Sloth Bear Sanctuary.

Source: V Sundararaju. 'To create a wild haven', www.downtoearth.org, 14/08/18.

FD to procure revenue land to widen elephant corridors in MM Hills WLS, BRT TR

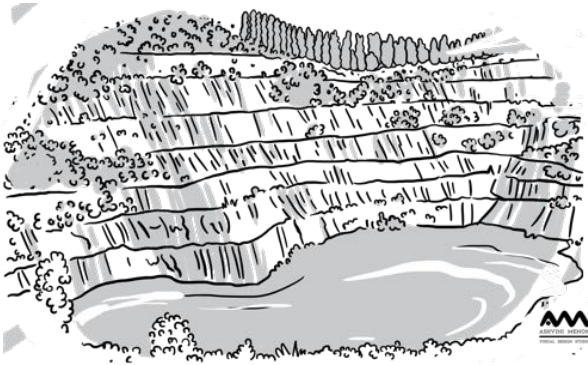
The forest department (FD) is set to procure large parts of revenue land adjoining identified elephant corridors to facilitate free movement of the animal at critical links along the established migratory path. The focus area will be around the M.M. Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and the BRT Tiger Reserve where companies will purchase private land and transfer it to the FD. The move is being promoted under the compensatory afforestation scheme in which industries allotted land anywhere in the state have to compensate for it by procuring private land abutting forest boundaries, the principal chief conservator of forest said.

About 125 acres of land at Badarayanahalli have already been procured by a private firm and the process of its transfer to the FD is on. In all, nearly 1000 acres have been identified for procurement in the long run.

The Edayarahalli-Doddasampige corridor is also set for expansion and authorities have planned to procure 150 acres of land, around 100 acres of which will be on the MM Hills side close to Budipadaga village. The Wildlife Trust of India had procured nearly 25 acres of land from farmers and handed it over to the state government to secure the Edayarahalli-Doddasampige corridor some years ago and the same is now poised for expansion (See *PA Update* Vol. XXIII, No. 4).

Source: R. Krishna Kumar. 'Widening elephant corridors via compensatory afforestation', www.thehindu.com, 10/08/18.

NBWL approves 11 stone quarries in ESZ of Cauvery WLS



The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has approved 11 rough-stone quarries in the ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The 10 km ESZ proposal by the state government is currently pending with the centre and under the present conditions the quarries fall within the ESZ.

A senior wildlife official said that allowing quarries near wildlife sanctuaries would result in increased noise and dust pollution, which will directly impact elephants, leopards and other wildlife in the area. A few years ago, following newspaper reports, the southern bench of the National Green Tribunal had asked, suo motu, for the closure of the stone quarries functioning within the ESZs of Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve. Coimbatore-based environment activist K Mohan Raj said the 11 proposals for stone quarries recommended by the Tamil Nadu chief wildlife warden (CWLW) would contribute to the increased human elephant conflict, which is already very high in this area. All these clearances should be set aside because the wildlife aspects were not studied in this area, which was in the ESZ of the sanctuary, he said.

Member of the NBWL, HS Singh, however said that the board clears the proposals based on the recommendations of the state government. All these proposals are examined by the state board and those that require the consent of the NBWL were sent further. The CWLW should have examined the place before sending it to the NBWL, he said.

Source: 'National Board for Wildlife okays 11 quarry proposals falling within ecologically sensitive zone of Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in TN', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/08/18.

MADHYA PRADESH

MP writes to NTCA to revive plan of cheetah re-introduction



The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to revive the plan to re-introduce the cheetah in the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The ambitious project, conceived in 2009, had hit a roadblock for want of funds and other concerns (*PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 2 and Vol. XV, No. 5).

The Wildlife Institute of India had prepared a Rs. 260-crore cheetah re-introduction project six years ago. It was estimated that an amount of Rs 25 to 30 crore would be needed to build an enclosure in an area of 150 sq. km for the animals in Nauradehi. The proposal was to put the felines in the enclosure with huge boundary walls before being released in the wild. According to the earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa.

Source: 'M.P. seeks revival of cheetah reintroduction project', www.thehindu.com, 27/08/18.

MAHARASHTRA

Raveena Tandon becomes brand ambassador for SGNP

The Maharashtra government has appointed Bollywood star Raveena Tandon as the brand ambassador for the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The actor met Maharashtra forest

minister Sudhir Mungantiwar recently to discuss the 13 crore tree-plantation drive and her contribution to help achieve a greener Maharashtra.

As brand ambassador, Tandon will help the state forest department to create awareness about its various initiatives, like the 50 crore tree plantation drive, eco-tourism in SGNP and the conservation of leopards in SGNP.

Source: 'Actor Raveena Tandon becomes brand ambassador of SGNP', www.business-standard.com, 22/08/18.

SGNP sets up bamboo botanical park with 97 species



The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) has set up a new 'Bambusetum', which will display a variety of bamboo species from all over the country. The three-hectare botanical park will be located at Tumnipada, two km away from SGNP's main entrance gate, and will host 97 of India's 136 bamboo species. Most specimens have been planted and the park is expected to be opened for public soon.

SGNP officials asked bamboo conservationist and researcher Rahmat Ali Laskar from Assam, who made it to the Guinness Book of World Records by collecting 261 species of bamboo, to help them create the collection and to oversee the plantation. The state forest department has also decided to form a company called the Bamboo Promotion Foundation, Maharashtra, to promote conservation of the plant to help its use and reduce the dependency on timber.

Bamboo clusters are being developed in different parts of the state and with more

community participation centres more livelihood activities are being implemented, a senior forest official informed.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Mumbai gets its first botanical park for bamboo cultivation', www.hindustantimes.com, 01/09/18.

Five-year acoustic study of marine mammals along Konkan coast

The Maharashtra Forest Department will soon begin a five-year acoustic study aimed at understanding the distribution, population, behaviour and threats to marine mammals along the Konkan coast. Recurring appearances of dolphin, whale and porpoise carcasses along the coast have prompted the state to conduct the study and to devise measures to protect these species. There have been 90 deaths of marine animals so far along the Mumbai coast since 2016 with the causes of death being unclear.

Instruments that can record sound underwater for upto a distance 25 to 30 km will be installed at different locations, spanning a distance of 15 nautical miles from the coast to the exclusive economic zone. They will record the sounds from marine mammals, who communicate using high frequencies, every six months. The data will be analysed to develop maps of their distribution and movement.

N Vasudevan, additional principal chief conservator of forests (mangrove cell), said that the state intends to develop the project under the species recovery plan by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and a proposal is to be sent to the ministry for the same. Funding has not been finalised but support from the central and state governments is expected. As of now, funds from the mangrove foundation will be used to start the basic data collection when the project is initiated in November.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Maharashtra to begin 5-year acoustic study to understand marine life in November', www.hindustantimes.com, 16/08/18.

State lost more leopards in seven months of 2018 than in entire 2017

Maharashtra has lost more leopards in the first seven months of 2018 than in the entire year of 2017. According to data collected by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), 57 leopards were found dead in Maharashtra till August this year while the total for 2017 was 40. The data suggests that at least 11 of these 57 animals were killed by poachers this year, while 12 died in road accidents and 16 to natural causes. Five leopards have been killed by villagers and six skins were also recovered.

Experts have noted that the actual figures could be higher as poaching figures are generally only five per cent of the actual cases. It has also been suggested on the other hand that the numbers might be high for both years, only that more dead leopards have been found this year.

According to WPSI data, 300 leopard deaths have been recorded across the country this year, with the highest number being in Uttarakhand. The total number of leopard deaths in 2017 was 440.

Source: Benita Chacko. 'Maharashtra has lost more leopards till now than in whole of 2017', www.indianexpress.com, 06/08/18.

MEGHALAYA

Farmlands near Nongkhylllem WLS important habitats for wildlife: Study

A recent study by the Wildlife Conservation Society has shown the importance of wooded cultivated areas for wildlife in the vicinity of the Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary and reserve forest. The forests here are surrounded by community-managed forests and farms and were reported to be home to more than 100 bird species.

The researchers studied how different guilds of birds use these two habitats and the different woodland vegetation found there. It

showed that the areas outside the protected area maintained a functional bird community.

Source: Aathira Perinchery. 'Meghalayan farms are also bird habitats', www.thehindu.com, 18/08/18.

ODISHA

Three elephant deaths within a fortnight in Angul district

Three elephants - two females and a tusker - were reported dead within a fortnight in the month of August in Angul district. On August 10, a female elephant came in contact with a live wire at Tilatalia village under Mandargiri Reserve Forest. On August 17, another female elephant was found dead near Majhipara village under Tikarpara Forest Range of Satkosia Wildlife Division. The cause of death has not been ascertained and the postmortem report is awaited.

The other casualty occurred on August 20, when a 15-year-old tusker was electrocuted in an orchard near Pokhtunga village under Bantala range. A herd of elephants had entered the orchard of one Amulya Pradhan a week earlier and it is suspected that he may have laid a live wire to keep the animals away. Pradhan was arrested and taken to court. Five persons have also been arrested in connection with the Tilatalia electrocution.

The forest department has initiated various measures to deal with the menace. It has opened a toll-free number for people to report elephant-related cases and cabling of live wires is also being undertaken in the forest division.

Source: '3 Elephants killed within a fortnight', www.newindianexpress.com, 22/08/18.

Odisha proposes TR tag for Debrigarh; sends final proposal for Sunabeda TR

The wildlife wing of the Odisha Forest Department (FD) has proposed Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) as a tiger reserve (TR) and has also sent in the proposal for final

notification of Sunabeda as a TR (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 4).

Located in Bargarh district, Debrigarh has been proposed as a TR with a total area spreading over 900 sq. km., about 500 sq km of which will be the core zone. According to the chief wildlife warden of the state the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had sought three clarifications for granting in-principal approval. These have been submitted by forest authorities to the state government.

Sunabeda WLS, which was proposed as a TR in 2008, is seen as a good habitat for tigers because of its connectivity to the Central Indian landscape facilitating population exchange and contiguity to Udanti and Sitanadi TRs in Chhattisgarh. The wildlife wing has now sent in the proposal for final notification for Sunabeda as a TR.

Source: Siba Mohanty. 'Debrigarh proposed as tiger reserve, Sunabeda ready', www.newindianexpress.com, 23/08/18.

Bandhavgarh tigress released in Satkosia TR

A tigress brought from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) on June 27 to the Satkosia TR was released into the wild on August 17. The tigress had been housed in the specialized enclosure in Satkosia and was released after checks found her health condition and psychological status to be normal. The movement of the animal is being monitored round the clock by the TR officials along with veterinarians and researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India.

In the meanwhile, the MP government has put on hold translocation of four more tigers to Satkosia amidst reports of resentment amongst forest dwellers there over alleged rumours that two big cats that were translocated in the first phase have a history of attacking humans.

Source: 'Bandhavgarh tigress released into wild', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/08/18.
'Madhya Pradesh tigress released in Odisha's Satkosia', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/08/18.

Translocation of tigers to Satkosia TR resulting in increased conflict



Odisha Forest Department officials have said that the newly released tigers in Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR) were under threat from villagers who might attack the animals fearing their safety and that of their cattle. The officials said that some villages surrounding the reserve were living in fear of a tigress named Sundari, who has frequently strayed into adjoining farms in search of prey. While pointing out a possibility of fear driving villagers to injure or kill the animals, the officials said that it is expected the tigers will initially explore their surroundings before settling down.

A tiger was shifted from Kanha TR in Madhya Pradesh to Satkosia TR in the month of June. Days later a tigress was also relocated from Bandhavgarh TR.

Residents of villages in Angul district said that one of the locals suffered injuries after having a narrow escape from the tigress. No one is willing to take the cattle for grazing anymore, unless in the company of 8-10 men, said a villager of Satyajapur. Another villager said that they were afraid of sending their children to school. While some villagers have threatened to attack the animals, others said that they would approach the state human rights commission.

Stating there was no cause for concern even if the tigers venture towards human settlements, the principal chief conservator of forests said that the tigers have neither attacked cattle nor humans and their movement is being closely monitored via satellite (Also see accompanying story).

Source: Sampad Patnaik. 'Big cats in Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve may be under threat from panicked locals', www.indianexpress.com, 28/08/18.

Tigers sighted in three more Odisha forests

The Odisha government has confirmed the presence of tigers in three more forests in the state. Movement of tigers has been captured by cameras installed at the Hemgiri forest in Sundargarh and Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuaries in Sambalpur districts, while indirect evidence such as tiger calls and cattle killing by big cats have been collected from the Muniguda forest in Rayagada district.

This has prompted the State Forest and Environment Minister Bijoyshree Routray to put the state's tiger population at around 60.

According to a tiger census conducted by the state government in 2016, there were around 40 tigers in Similipal alone. The Wildlife Institute of India had estimated the tiger population of Similipal at 28 in 2014.

Source: Satyasundar Barik. 'Tiger presence in 3 more Odisha forests', www.thehindu.com, 01/10/18.

Increase in blackbuck population in Ganjam district

The blackbuck population in Ganjam district has increased by 276 in the last three years. According to a census conducted in February 2018 via the direct sighting method, the current population of the animal is 4,082 as against 3,806 in 2015. The number counted in the district in 2011 was 2,194. The population of blackbuck in the area was 523 in 1973. Their number increased to 551 in 1998, 786 in 2004 and 1,101 in 2006.

The Ghumusur South Forest Division was found to have the highest number at 2,809 followed by Berhampur (1,049) and Ghumusur North (224). Blackbucks, which were sighted in Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary in Puri district till 2012-13 have, however, vanished from that area.

Source: 'Population of endangered blackbuck rises', www.hindu.com, 02/08/18.

PUNJAB

Punjab Biodiversity Board plans to set up biodiversity parks in Ludhiana and Bathinda

The Punjab Biodiversity Board has planned to set up biodiversity parks in Ludhiana and Bathinda. There is also a proposal to carve out an acre dedicated to local flora and fauna in every village of the state. Dr. Jatinder Kaur Arora, member secretary of the board, made these announcements at the state-level consultation workshop on national biodiversity targets organised by the board recently. The workshop brought together people working in the field of biodiversity from all parts of Punjab to brainstorm the state's contribution to India's national report on the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The meeting unveiled the posters of a rare bird and tree found in Punjab. On the verge of extinction in the state, *Tecomella undulata*, called *rahoora* in Punjabi, is an evergreen tree with fern-like leaves and bell-shaped flowers in peach, red and yellow. The other poster showcased the Rufous-vented grass babbler.

Source: 'Two biodiversity parks on the anvil in Punjab', www.hindustantimes.com, 10/08/18.

SIKKIM

Kanchenjunga BR is on UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves

The Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve (BR) has been added to UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). It is the eleventh such entry from India in the list that has 686 BRs from 122 countries.

The decision to include Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve in the world list was taken in the International Coordination Council meeting of the UNESCO in Indonesia in July.

The other Indian biosphere reserves in the list include the Nilgiris, Gulf of Mannar, Sunderbans, Nanda Devi, Nokrek, Pachmarhi,

Similipal, Achanakmar-Amarkantak, Great Nicobar and Agasthyamala.

Source: 'Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve gets entry into the UNESCO's global list', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 08/08/18.

TAMIL NADU

140-year-old Nilgiris Wildlife & Environment Assn shut down

The 140-year-old Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association (NWEA), one of the oldest of its kind in the country, has been closed down. Nilgiris collector, J Innocent Divya, who is also the honorary president of the association, oversaw the closure and secured the keys of the NWEA office, housed in the forest office building in Ooty.

This is the outcome of a case filed in the high court in 2015 in matters related to the association. There have been allegations of groupism, nepotism and mis-appropriation of funds. The collector too had filed an affidavit in the court recently. As an interim order, the court has ordered the collector to issue a public notice inviting information about the antecedents of NWEA members and asked for this to be submitted by October 4.

Founded in 1877 as the Nilgiri Game Association, it became the Nilgiri Wildlife Association (NWA) in 1972 and the NWEA in 1985. In 2003, the association was given the Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Conservation Award in recognition of its outstanding efforts. The association has a membership of 951, but is said to have been inactive in recent years. Recently, at least six executive members out of 10 resigned from their posts. The district collector said that she had called an emergency general body meeting some time back, before she could submit a report to the court. No one, however, turned up.

Source: '140-year-old Nilgiris Wildlife & Environment Assn shut down', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/09/18.

Tamil Nadu invites proposals for biodiversity heritage sites



The Tamil Nadu State Biodiversity Board has invited proposals and written to district collectors and various departmental heads to have a consultation with local bodies and identify the potential biodiversity heritage sites (BHSs).

The secretary of the board has clarified that creation of BHSs will not put any restriction on prevailing practices and usage of local communities, other than those voluntarily agreed to by them. The official said that the purpose is to enhance the quality of life of the local communities through this conservation measure. The BHS would have a detailed management plan prepared by the community itself.

One of the potential sites proposed by board members is the Vagaikulam tank in Tirunelveli. It is an important nesting area for many migratory bird species. However, the place is facing threat due to rampant tree felling. Another site is Arittapatti, a tiny village on the outskirts of Madurai that has emerged as a hotspot for birding. A large number of raptors are spotted here. The village is also home for Pandya period rock-cut cave temple and Tamil Brahmi inscriptions.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'Proposals invited to notify Biodiversity Heritage Sites', www.newindianexpress.com, 23/08/18.

FD wants to turn deer park into rescue centre for Nilgiri tahr

The deer park in Udthagamandalam town, home to around 15 Sambar and Barking deer, could soon be turned into a rescue and rehabilitation centre for the Nilgiri tahr. A senior forest department (FD) official said that a proposal was being readied for the same.

The park, which has been closed to the public over the last few years, has posed a challenge for FD officials with many of the animals, especially newborn calves and older animals, dying as a result of sickness arising from the build-up of pathogens within the five-acre enclosure.

The Mudumalai Tiger Reserve management, which now manages the deer park, has been trying to shift the animals to zoos in other districts, but have been facing hurdles in transporting the animals as they are susceptible to stress induced by capture and travelling. Officials are still discussing the best possible course of action that can be followed to relocate the animals. Releasing the animals back into the wild was not an option as they do not have the requisite skills to survive in the wild.

Source: Rohan Premkumar. 'Ooty deer park likely to become Nilgiri tahr rehabilitation centre', www.thehindu.com, 21/08/18.

SC directs closure of 27 resorts in elephant corridor in the Nilgiris

While 27 resorts in the elephant corridor in the Nilgiris will be closed down or sealed as per the directions of the Supreme Court (SC), the district collector (DC) has identified 821 irregular constructions in the corridor. The Nilgiris DC, in her plan of action report before the SC, stated that there were 39 resort complexes with restaurant facilities. Of the 39 resort complexes, 12 were unapproved and 27 resorts had obtained permission for residential usage but were being used for commercial purposes. The total number of buildings in these resorts, the DC reported, were 309.

On July 12, the SC had directed the DC to prepare a report action plan on identifying the constructions, when they were made and the purpose for which they are utilized. Based on the order, the DC conducted an inter-department meeting and deliberations were held keeping in mind the framework of the 'Gajah' report of the Elephant Task Force. Following this, the DC and revenue divisional officer formed three teams comprising officials of revenue and forest departments and local bodies to undertake enumeration work that was then carried out between July 23 and July 31.

The DC's report pointed out that 289 houses had encroached government land and approval was not obtained. On *patta* land, 78 houses were unapproved. The teams demarcated the corridor and informed the people about the importance of the area. It also discouraged them from carrying out activities detrimental to wildlife movement and urged them to help local authorities plan developmental activities in an ecologically sensitive manner.

After seeing the plan of action report, the SC gave directions to the DC to close down or seal the 27 resorts running commercial enterprises without approval. The other 12 resorts were given 48 hours to produce documents showing approval and valid title and possession for running them.

Source: B. Aravind Kumar. '821 constructions under lens in Nilgiris elephant corridor', www.thehindu.com, 10/08/18. 'SC asks TN to seal 11 resorts on Nilgiris elephant corridor within 48 hrs.', www.thehindu.com, 09/08/18.

***Bandh* in Masinagudi over sealing of 27 resorts**

Starting August 13, about 15 organizations, including the Masinagudi Farmers' Association, the Drivers' Association, the Tourist Guides' Association and the Masinagudi People's Livelihood Rights Association, organized a three-day *bandh* in the Masinagudi area to protest the sealing of 27 illegal resorts in the Moyar Valley elephant corridor in the Nilgiris.

All commercial establishments, including restaurants and shops, also downed shutters.

The organizations have claimed that the corridor map notified by the Tamil Nadu government and submitted to the Supreme Court was not scientific. Their demands include proclamation of 'individual and community rights' and amending the present Forest Rights Act 2006. They raised questions over the fate of over 390 houses in the corridor as per the district administration's action plan as the court did not talk about it.

The next hearing in the case is scheduled for October 24, 2018.

Source: 'Resorts closure: Bandh observed in Masinagudi', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/08/18.

Forest officials conduct test drone flights along Mudumalai and Coimbatore forests

Forest officials have been conducting drone test flights in some conflict zones such as Mangarai and Periya Thadagam in the forests of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and of the Coimbatore Forest Division to explore ways of monitoring and mitigating the situation.

The two drones, costing Rs. 12 lakh were procured using funds provided by the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity and Greening Project. The drone can stay in the air for 25 minutes and provide sharp pictures. Since the battery has to be charged after 25 minutes, it is necessary to bring it back for re-charging every 25 minutes. Otherwise, it is quite helpful, an official said.

Source: Kumar Chellappan. 'TN forest officials resort to drones', www.dailypioneer.com, 03/09/18.

UTTARAKHAND

NGT forms committee to check illegal constructions in Haridwar Forest Division

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttarakhand government to check

illegal construction in Haridwar Forest Division (HFD) and has formed an oversight committee for the same. The NGT was hearing a plea against illegal constructions in the Shyampur range in which the applicant argued that the Chandi Block here, which is part of the Shivalik Elephant Reserve and the adjoining Rajaji Tiger Reserve were experiencing large scale illegal construction.

The committee will comprise Justice U C Dhyani, principal chief conservator of forest, Dehradun, Manoj Chandran, IFS, CCF land survey directorate, Dehradun and the district magistrate of Haridwar. It will take stock of all action taken so far and prepare an action plan to deal with the problem and ensure its implementation.

The bench has posted the matter to February 13, 2019 for perusing the report of the committee.

Source: 'Panel to check constructions in Haridwar forest division', www.tribuneindia.com, 29/08/18.

HC expresses discontent over state's approach towards wildlife conservation

The Uttarakhand High Court expressed discontent with the state's approach in dealing with issues pertaining to wildlife conservation in protected areas, including the Corbett and Rajaji Tiger Reserves (TRs), and warned that it would denotify the protected areas if elephant and tiger protection and relocation of Van Gujjars continued to be sidelined.

A division bench of justices Rajiv Sharma and Lok Pal Singh had earlier asked the state to file affidavits pertaining to the pending issues of formation of a special tiger protection force (STPF), relocation of Van Gujjars from Corbett and Rajaji TRs, and protection of elephants.

An order issued by the court stated, "...The wildlife may not survive in the state after 15-20 years. Thus, in order to save the wildlife, we may be constrained to order relocating tigers and elephants from the state of

Uttarakhand to better managed national parks and sanctuaries in other parts of the country.”

The court lashed out at the state government for not forming a STPF inspite of an order for its creation being passed in 2014. Referring to the relocation of Van Gujjars, the court order said: “We give a last opportunity to the state government to apprise the court how soon these Van Gujjars would be relocated since the affidavit filed by the additional chief secretary on this issue was vague and evasive.”

Criticising the ‘tardy’ approach in poaching cases, the court order directed the trial courts to expedite and conclude the trials and civil suits within a period of six months. The court also directed the state government to identify elephant corridors and develop trenches along them. It ordered the railways to make underpasses in the identified corridors and that the train speeds through the Rajaji forests must not exceed 25 km per hour. It also directed the railway ministry and the state forest department to use satellite space navigation system to track elephant movement.

Source: Kavita Upadhyay. ‘Will get protected areas denotified if tigers, elephants not conserved, Uttarakhand HC tells govt’, www.indianexpress.com, 11/08/18.

HC bans commercial use of elephants for joy rides and safaris; only 100 safari vehicles per day in Rajaji and Corbett TRs

Citing breach of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, the Uttarakhand High Court (HC) has banned the commercial use of elephants for joy rides and commercial safaris in the state. The chief wildlife warden (CWLW) was directed to take possession of private elephants within 24 hours. The CWLW was further directed to issue proper receipts to the owners of the elephants and take over them for medical examination, treatment and proper care. The court directed that the elephants be temporarily kept at Rajaji Tiger Reserve (TR) and that injured and maimed animals elephants be attended to by the veterinary doctors immediately.

The court directions came in response to a public interest litigation filed by a Ramnagar-based NGO, Himalayan Yuva Gramin Vikas Sanstha, in 2012. The petitioner had said that the domesticated elephants were not being treated well.

The court also issued directions to reduce to no more than 100 private and commercial gypsies that should be allowed to enter the Corbett and Rajaji TRs. The Wildlife Institute of India has been asked to carry out a survey within three months to assess the capacity of these vehicles that will ply in the various zones to prevent disturbance to animals as much as possible. Only those private vehicles would be permitted to ply to whom valid permits have been issued by the RTO (regional transport office) and concerned divisional forest officers, the court said.

Source: Kriti Gupta. ‘No More Elephant Rides In Jim Corbett Park As Uttarakhand Govt Bans Animal Safari’, www.indiatimes.com, 04/08/18.

Prescribe speed limit to curb accidental deaths of wild animals: HC



Expressing concern over the death of wild animals in vehicle hits, the Uttarakhand High Court has directed the state to prescribe a maximum speed of 40 km per hour for motorists on national and state highways passing through national parks and forest areas.

A division bench of acting Chief Justice Rajiv Sharma and Justice Lok Pal Singh gave the directive while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by an NGO, Operation Eye of the Tiger India. The petitioner’s counsels also gave suggestions to the court on how to check

the death of wild animals, especially elephants, on rail tracks. Responding to the suggestions, the court directed the railway ministry and the state forest department to use the satellite space navigation system to track movement of elephants, particularly in the vicinity of tracks, within 12 weeks.

In another development, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the National Board for Wildlife to take cognisance of the death of wild animals along Bareilly-Haridwar national highway due to vehicular traffic. The NGT was hearing a petition pointing out that vehicles had killed 222 wild animals within a 30-km stretch of the highway in the Haridwar Forest Division. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 5)

Source: Neeraj Santoshi. 'Limit vehicle speed to curb wildlife deaths: HC to Uttarakhand govt', www.hindustantimes.com, 12/08/18.

In-principle approval to TR tag for Nandhaur WLS

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has given an in-principle approval for the Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to be notified as a tiger reserve (TR). The state will have to wait longer for the same for the Surai range bordering Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh as the NTCA has sought more details in the matter from the Uttarakhand government.

The Uttarakhand State Board for Wildlife had recently approved plans to declare Nandhaur WLS and the Surai range as tiger reserves. It has also given a go ahead for increasing the ex-gratia amount for kin of those killed due to human-wildlife conflict to Rs. five lakh from Rs. two lakh. In case of severe injury, a victim will get a compensation of Rs. two lakh. Earlier it was Rs. 50,000.

Source: 'Nandhaur wildlife sanctuary approved as tiger reserve', www.dailypioneer.com, 30/08/18.

UTTAR PRADESH

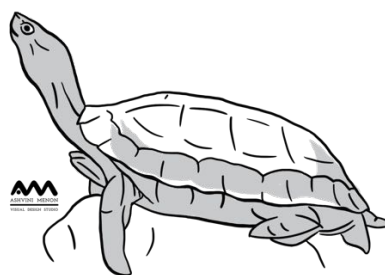
Complete drone camera surveillance for Dudhwa TR

The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (TR) will soon be under complete drone camera surveillance. Work for the surveillance programme, which is being called the e-bird project, has already begun. A pilot operation was conducted on International Tiger Day, July 29, where drone cameras were used to monitor rhinos in the rehabilitation area.

The e-bird project is a joint initiative of the TR and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). WII will provide the required number of drone cameras to the reserve and also give training to the forest staff.

Source: 'Dudhwa Tiger Reserve to be under complete drone camera surveillance', www.ndtv.com, 02/08/18.

Turtle rescue centre to be set up in Pilibhit



A turtle rescue centre will be set up near Phulhar lake in Pilibhit district. A decision to the effect was finalized in a recent meeting between the district administration and the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA). The district administration will provide land for the rescue and the interpretation centre while TSA will manage the project. The decision was taken in view of reports by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau on rampant poaching and illicit trading of turtles.

A project will also be launched for the identification of turtle species in various water bodies of Pilibhit. Work on this project will begin once TSA submits a detailed proposal.

The state has as many as 16 known species of turtles of which 12 are present in Pilibhit.

Source: 'Turtle rescue centre to be set up in Pilibhit', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 05/08/18.

SC upholds NGT order regarding ESZ around Kaimur WLS

The Supreme Court (SC) has upheld an order of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), dismissing a plea challenging the declaration of a one-km eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The court said that there was no ground to interfere with the NGT's direction. The civil appeal was accordingly dismissed.

In October last year, the NGT had dismissed a plea filed by an NGO, the Vindhyan Ecology and Natural History Foundation, on the ground that objections and suggestions were considered by the expert committee for declaration of a one km ESZ around the sanctuary. The plea had contended that the fixation of ESZ of one km uniformly around the boundary of the sanctuary was unjustifiable.

The NGT said that the relevant authorities are likely to have taken various factors into consideration while ensuring the applicability of principle of sustainable development. It also asserted that it had no doubt that the ministry had acted in consonance with the relevant provisions of the NGT Act, 2010.

Source: 'SC upholds NGT order on eco-sensitive zone around Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary', www.indianexpress.com, 26/08/18.

A toll-free number to deal with human-animal conflicts in Dudhwa TR

The forest department (FD) in collaboration with the Reliance Foundation has launched a toll-free number 1926 to deal with human-animal conflicts in and around the Dudhwa

Tiger Reserve (TR). The helpline will work in tandem with the 'Dial 100' emergency service. The service has been initiated from Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary where several leopard attacks have been reported in recent months.

As a pilot project, the service would cover three divisions of the reserve including Dudhwa, Katarniaghat and the buffer zone of north Kheri forest areas. A database of villagers living in the periphery of sensitive forest areas was being prepared and their phone numbers were being collected for the same.

Audio and text messages to alert the villagers about big cat movements and advisories such as not to defecate in the open are already being sent on their mobile numbers. The helpline can also be used by villagers to report the movement of a big cat in their neighbourhood to get assistance from the FD.

Source: 'Dudhwa Tiger Reserve sets up helpline to curb man-animal conflicts', www.business-standard.com, 24/08/18.

NTCA to provide more weapons to Bijnor Forest Division, Amargarh TR

The Bijnor Forest Division will receive three rifles and one revolver from the National Tiger Conservation Project Authority for protecting wildlife in the divisional forest areas that includes the Amargarh Tiger Reserve. The current arsenal here comprises 17 rifles. The divisional forest officer (DFO) had sent a proposal for acquiring more rifles and a revolver some months ago as he did not have a service revolver and also because the rifles with the forest department are about 20 years old.

Bijnor district has two forest divisions — Bijnor and Najibabad – and these are also connected to the Rajaji National Park (NP) in Uttarakhand. Poachers are known to enter Najibabad division, which has limited security cover and patrolling by forest staff. It is vulnerable as tigers from Corbett NP also frequent it via Rajaji, especially in winter.

The recovery of a tiger skin and bones in a raid near Kotkadar in Bijnor's Nagina area on May 9 this year revealed that poachers had

killed the animal in Corbett a few months ago and hidden its parts in Bijnor's forest area. Tiger bones and pelts were also seized in 2016 and 2013 in Bijnor (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 1).

Source: Harveer Dabas. 'Bijnor forest dept to get 3 rifles, one revolver for protecting wildlife', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 23/08/18.

WEST BENGAL

Elephants inside Mahananda WLS saved as railways receive timely information

The Northeast Frontier Railway tweeted video footage recently showing a herd of elephants along tracks inside the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary and claiming that they could be saved because the forest department had shared details of the animals' movement on time. The Bamanhat-Siliguri Junction Passenger was therefore stopped 250 m from the elephants which were on the tracks and waited for 10 minutes for the herd to move away.

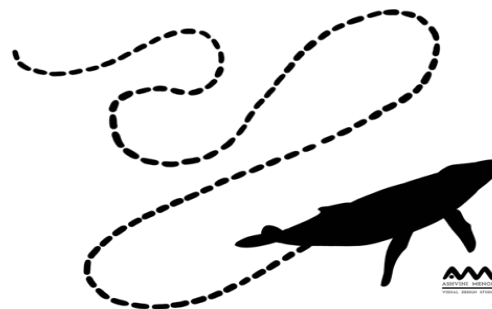
The railways have decided to felicitate the driver and the assistant driver of the passenger train for applying the brake and saving the animals between Gulma and Sevoke stations in the Dooars, said the divisional railway manager of Alipurduar.

The Dooars tracks that connect Siliguri Junction with Alipurduar Junction, pass through a number of reserve forests and protected areas. Over 70 elephants have been run over by trains on the stretch since 2003 when the tracks were converted from meter gauge into broad gauge (*PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, No. 5; Vol. XX, No. 4; Vol. XIX, Nos. 6 & 2; and Vol. XVII, No. 6).

Source: 'Alert helps train save jumbos in nick of time', www.telegraphindia.com, 27/08/18.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Whale species proposed for inclusion in centre's recovery programme for endangered species



The Mangrove Cell, Mumbai, will soon submit a proposal for a 10 year study of the Arabian Sea Humpback Whale as part of the Centre's Recovery Programme for Critically Endangered Species. The whale is found along the Maharashtra coast as it migrates from the Oman coast to Sri Lanka and the proposal is for a study of the pattern of migration, its population and distribution. The cell also plans to work on conservation efforts for the species through these studies.

The minutes of the standing committee of the National Board of Wildlife meeting held on June 13 noted that the species faces risks from shipping and fishing activities.

During the meeting, it was also decided to include the Northern river terrapin, Clouded leopard and Red panda in the species recovery programme.

Source: Benita Chacko. 'Mangrove Cell to submit proposal for conservation of Arabian Sea Humpback Whale', www.indianexpress.com, 22/08/18.

National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank dedicated to the nation

Union Science and Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan recently dedicated to the nation, the National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank that is based in the Laboratory for the Conservation of

Endangered Species (LaConES), a part of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad. The bank currently has genetic resources from 23 species of Indian wild animals. This is set to increase via collaboration with zoos across India.

The facility would also facilitate exchange of genetic material between Indian zoos for maintaining genetic diversity and conservation management.

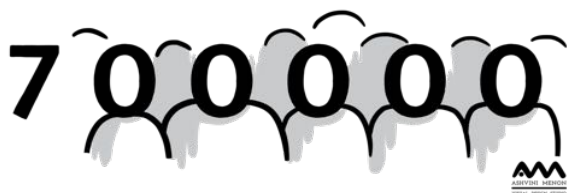
In another event, the minister flagged off vehicles carrying a batch of Mouse deer *Moschiola indica* from Hyderabad's Nehru Zoological Park (NZP) to be reintroduced in the Farahabad range of the Amrabad Tiger Reserve. The Telangana Forest Department, Central Zoo Authority, NZP and CCMB are jointly conducting the reintroduction of Mouse deer. This follows more than seven years of conservation breeding of the species at the NZP.

Source: 'National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank dedicated to nation', www.business-standard.com, 12/08/18.

SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

Nepal's protected areas attracted 7 lakh tourists in 2017-18



Nepal's national parks and conservation areas were visited by seven lakh tourists in the last 12 months leading to revenue earnings of Rs. 646 million for 2017-18. Nearly half the number of these tourists were foreigners. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation has also noted that at least 60% of all foreign

tourists in Nepal explore parks and conservation areas.

Nepal has 12 national parks, with the Sagarmatha and Chitwan National Parks being the most popular.

Source: 'Nepal's protected areas attract 7 lakh tourists', www.business-standard.com, 08/08/18.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka to extend electric fencing to curb man-elephant conflict

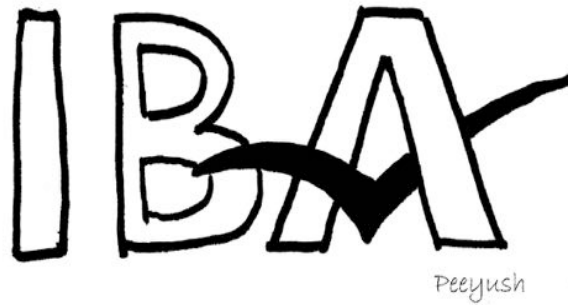
Sri Lanka has announced plans to substantially extend electric fencing with wild elephants killing 375 people in the past five years and villagers retaliating by slaughtering nearly 1,200 elephants. The government would begin constructing 2,651 km of new electric fencing to keep elephants away from villages bordering wildlife reserves. The cabinet recently approved a plan to upgrade the existing 4,349 km of electric fences to ensure better maintenance.

The announcement came two days after President Maithripala Sirisena called for urgent action, saying elephants were straying from national parks, raiding villages and destroying crops. He had pointed out that wildlife, including elephants, destroyed about 35 percent of the country's agricultural produce. Official figures show 5,800 incidents of elephants attacking property in the past five years.

Sri Lanka has banned the capture of wild elephants, although many people have illegally raised baby jumbos that are seen as a status symbol. Official records show there were about 200 domesticated elephants in Sri Lanka before the recent ban on capturing them. The population in the wild is estimated at 7,500. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 3)

Source: 'Shock treatment as Sri Lanka battles wild elephants', www.business-standard.com, 08/08/18.

Important Bird Areas Update



NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

India unveils five-year action plan for migratory birds

India has unveiled a five-year plan for conservation of habitats visited by migratory birds in winter. The national action plan (NAP) spanning 2018-23, brought out by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is meant for coordinated action among states for securing and enhancing population of migratory birds in India within their range across the Central Asian Flyway (CAF).

The CAF encompasses overlapping migration routes over 30 countries for different water-birds linking their northernmost breeding ground in Siberia to the southernmost non-breeding grounds in west and south Asia, the Maldives and the British Indian Ocean territory.

The NAP lays down a range of actions at national, state and local levels with an overall longer-term goal to arrest population decline and secure habitats of migratory bird species. It includes measures to manage wetlands and coastal areas, which are being used by 310 species of migratory birds as their habitats in several states having wetlands and coastal areas.

Given India's strategic role in the CAF, the NAP has even suggested establishing a flyway secretariat in the country to enhance interaction and cooperation between governments, conservationists and technical experts from all the countries to promote concrete action.

Besides recommending various measures to protect habitats including wetlands, the NAP also suggests having National Green Corps (NGC) within educational institutions across the country to encourage students to monitor bird migration sites. It also suggests building a network of 'Student Ambassadors' for enlisting support of communities for conservation of migratory birds.

Source: 'India unveils five year action plan to remain a paradise of migratory birds', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/09/18.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CEC opposition to denotify land from Kolleru WLS

The Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has objected to the Andhra Pradesh government's efforts to denotify nearly 15,000 acres of private lands and another 5,600 acres of D-patta (land given to poor by the government) from the Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). It has been argued that the decision to denotify over 20,000 acres as an alternative to reducing the size of the lake from contour +5ft to +3ft (above mean sea level), that is from 673 sq. km. to 135 sq. km. would lead to large-scale encroachment of the lake.

Reducing the size of KWS to exclude the private and patta lands from the sanctuary has been one of the long-standing election promises of political parties. The ruling Telugu

Desam Party (TDP) passed a resolution in the legislative assembly asking the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and the CEC permission to reduce the size of the sanctuary. The NBWL has reportedly granted its approval but the CEC has raised objections.

Even the Congress government that preceded the TDP government had passed such a resolution, but the Azeez Committee that made a thorough study in April 2011 said that there was no real benefit in resizing (*PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1; Vol. XXI, Nos. 5 & 1; Vol. XIX, Nos. 3 & 1; and Vol. XVIII, No. 6). The Raman Sukumar Committee constituted by the NDA government in December 2016 had opposed resizing but had agreed to denotification.

Source: G. Venkataramana Rao. 'CEC objects to denotification of lands in Kolleru sanctuary', www.thehindu.com, 15/08/18.

MAHARASHTRA

Vulture population on the rise in Gadchiroli district

Surveys conducted in the last six months indicate that the vulture numbers in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra are on the rise. The population is currently estimated to be between 450-500.

A joint survey of roosting trees and nesting sites by the forest department (FD) and Conservation Research & Nature Education Society (CRANES) between February-July 2018 revealed that there are nearly 200 Vultures in Chamorshi, Dhanora, Kurkheda, Navegaon, Kunghada in Gadchiroli Forest Division alone.

It has been noted that a Diclofenac ban may not have much of an impact here because farmers in Gadchiroli don't use this drug. The larger concern is related to non-availability of food for the birds. Attempts to feed the birds through restaurants are yielding results and hence there is increase in their numbers. It has also been suggested that if old and unproductive cattle could be procured from farmers at a price and kept in shelters, more food will eventually be available for the vultures.

Raptor expert Dr. Ajay Poharkar has cautioned, however, that sighting of more vultures is not necessarily an indication of rising population. It is necessary to count their nests as the increase in sightings could be on account of birds coming in from neighbouring Telangana and Chhattisgarh.

Source: 'With better monitoring, vulture no. rises in Gadchiroli', *The Times of India*, 04/09/18.

ODISHA

Opposition to water aerodrome project in Chilika

Environmental activist Prafulla Samantara said that his organization, Lok Shakti Abhiyan, will oppose the proposed water aerodrome project in Chilika lake at national and international fora. The organisation will also unite and organise the fishermen living along Chilika to protest against the project that can affect their livelihood. Samantara is also reported to have written to chief minister Naveen Patnaik urging him to prevent the implementation of the project.

The project, which has received in-principle approval from the Centre, is part of an initiative of the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation for the construction of water aerodromes in Chilika lake in Odisha, Sabarmati riverfront and Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat in the first phase, with an aim to promote tourism.

The activist has pointed out that the Chilika lagoon is a unique brackish water body visited by lakhs of migratory birds and that it is also a Ramsar site. It is feared that the project will impact the resident and migratory population of Chilika besides affecting the fish and other marine produce catch here.

Source: 'Green activist opposes water aerodrome project in Chilika', www.thehindu.com, 15/08/18.

TAMIL NADU

FD to conduct toxicological analysis of vulture carcasses

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department has decided to conduct toxicological analysis in the event of any vulture-death reported in habitats spread across the Nilgiris and the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR). The analysis of the carcass will be carried out at the Salim Ali Center for Ornithology and Natural History.

Jagulikadavu and Siriyur in Segur range, which was recently added to the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR), has one of the biggest colonies of White-backed and Long-billed vultures in South India. As many as 68 nests of the two species were recorded at these places in 2011. The Moyar valley is another prime habitat in the Nilgiris with resident populations of all the four species found in South India.

According to some experts, use of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenac on livestock was not a major threat to the vulture population here due to healthy population of carnivores in the region. Vultures get adequate amount of animal kills to scavenge but deliberate poisoning of the remains of the livestock killed by carnivores in forest peripheries, as retaliation by the livestock owners, was the bigger threat.

A request has now been sent to the state government to set up a Vulture Monitoring and Research Centre in the Nilgiris based on resolutions passed at the workshop 'Securing Vulture Populations in India' held at Udhagamandalam in January earlier this year.

Source: Wilson Thomas. 'Toxicological study to find cause of vulture deaths', www.thehindu.com, 23/08/18.



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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 yahogroup 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>

FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago

PA Update 74, August 2008

ANDHRA PRADESH

Area of Kolleru WLS to be reduced

The Andhra Pradesh State Assembly adopted a unanimous resolution in the first week of September requesting the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and the Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court to reduce the area of the Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS) from the present 84,000 acres to about 30,000 acres. The proposal is to change the boundary of the sanctuary from the +5 feet contour to the +3 contour. The move comes in light of the recent 'Mee Kosum' yatra of the former Chief Minister, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu and his promise that the area of the sanctuary would be reduced if his party, the Telugu Desam (TD), was returned to power in the upcoming state elections.

It has been argued that the suggested denotification would benefit the livelihood prospects of at least three lakh farmers, as presently nearly 15,000 acres of 'zeroythi' patta land had been included within the boundaries of the sanctuary. The resolution to reduce the area was initiated in the assembly by the ruling Congress Party to prevent their political rivals from gaining mileage from the statements made by Mr. Naidu.

The issue is linked to the 1999 Government Order (GO) 120 for preventing misuse of the lake bed. Ironically, the order had been issued when the Telugu Desam was in power, but had not been implemented for various reasons. Large scale removal of encroachments like the illegal fish tanks was finally undertaken in 2006. (see *PA Updates* Vol. XII, No. 4, and Nos. 55 & 49).

There was considerable opposition to the removal of the encroachments. The latest developments are linked to the continued demands for reduction of the sanctuary area because of the impediments to agriculture and other economic activities. The denotification now needs to be approved by the Central Government and the Supreme Court.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) has meanwhile said that they would oppose the move to change the boundaries as this was being done to woo the fish tank lobbies.

Source: 'Unanimity on reduction of Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary boundary', *The Hindu*, 05/09/08.
'CPI to fight against Kolleru move', *The Times of India*, 07/09/08.
Sreenivas Janyala. 'Cost of three lakh votes in Andhra: 50,000 acres of sanctuary land' *The Indian Express*, 10/09/08.

JHARKHAND

DNA fingerprinting to help decide number of tigers in Palamau TR

DNA fingerprinting will soon determine the number of tigers left in Palamau Tiger Reserve. The genetic determination project will be carried out by the Reserve in collaboration with the Union Science and Technology Ministry (which has also funded the initiative), the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and the Central Zoo Authority.

The project is the outcome of a two-year long controversy over the number of tigers in the reserve. The Forest Department (FD) estimates there to be 30 tigers in the reserve and has started collecting and sending the scat samples to be used for the study. A tiger monitoring report prepared by the Field Director of Palamau in 2007 indicated the existence of 17 tigers on the basis of pugmarks, and claimed the existence of 13 others in an area of the Park which could not be accessed due to Naxalite presence. The Wildlife Institute of India, however, had said that no tigers were sighted at the reserve during the phase I of its national survey.

Source: Aneeta Sharma. 'Palamau tigers await DNA test,' *The Telegraph*, 16/07/08

PERSPECTIVE

Conservation in India finally gets prime time on air!

I have recently co-produced and directed a series called *On The Brink* that has been on air on Animal Planet and Discovery. In its first season, this is an eight episode series that aims to give an unprecedented portrait of India's natural world - exploring species, habitats and grassroots conservationists - all of which are rarely seen on Indian television.

The idea came about after looking at the state of infotainment content currently being broadcast in the country. Nature programming has always inspired wonder and curiosity, but off late, television content speaks a different language. It either showcases animals as monsters, or is all about pets or pure blue chip. Of this, very few films come from India and these too focus on mega fauna – tigers, leopards, elephants, lions, and rhinos. We wanted to bring a change, bust myths, showcase the incredible diversity we live with and ignite hope for the future through stories of people. This is more for the next generation, the future custodians of this heritage. We want them to grow up with pride, empathy and responsibility towards the environment. And thus, the first step is to know what their natural world holds.

How is wild India surviving in the 21st century?

It, clearly, is 'On the Brink'! Forests are under grave threat, migratory corridors are being torn apart, water bodies are heavily polluted and climate change is beginning to play havoc. Within all this, the varied plant and animal diversity too is under threat – dramatic declines in populations are underway and local extinctions have begun. We may lose so much within this century itself.

But there are individuals working and struggling to keep hope afloat. Had it not been for them, India today may have been a very different story. What we need is a growing breed of such people, sooner than ever before.

We filmed Red pandas with Degin Dorjee and the focus was on local community conservation initiatives. We joined hands with Tiasa Adhya to film fishing cats in Howrah to show the community how resilient and important their closest wild neighbour is. The tiger episode, filmed across Ranthambhore, Tadoba and the Pilibhit – Dudhwa Landscape, explored ways to balance the tigers' need for space and accommodate the needs of communities that live alongside them. The last episode's theme was the urban jungle and we filmed the Grey Slender loris in Bengaluru with members of the Urban Slender Loris Project started by Dr. Kaberi Kar Gupta.

Season Two will start after Diwali and showcase King cobras with Ajay Giri, Purple frogs with Dr. Karthikeyan Vasudevan, Black bears with the Kashmir Forest Department and the Great Indian bustard with Suthirta Dutta. There will be a season three next year with more such unheard, unseen stories.

- Akanksha Sood Singh is a natural history filmmaker.

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