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## EDITORIAL

### Conservation in the era of linear infrastructure and social media

The couple of months since the publication of the last issue of the *Protected Area Update* have been marked by two very significant sets of events where conservation in India is concerned. They have blood, death and gore written all over them and underline in different ways, what could/will be major watersheds in the future of conservation in this country.

First is the string, indeed deluge, of incidents of wild animal deaths in rail, road and electrocution accidents: state after state, landscape after landscape, big animal and small, the reports have been as relentless as they are deeply saddening and horrifying. The discussion on linear infrastructure thus far, including in previous editorials of the *PA Update* (Vol. XXIV, No. 3; Vol. XXIII, No. 5 and Vol. XXII, No. 6) has been more about its impact on habitats and the fragmentation it causes; it seems evident now that the threat is more immediate, more intimate. One might say confidently that linear infrastructure has eclipsed all others as the biggest contemporary threat to India's wildlife. It is insidious not just because it is set to grow by leaps and bounds but also it has a very important social and economic dimension to it.

This linear infrastructure is at the heart of the current development paradigm that threatens to flatten everything in its way. Dislodging its centrality might be one of the keys to long-term sustainability, even survival, but it's not going to be easy at. It will need deep re-thinking and fundamental ideological and structural shifts!

The second of two events that has hugely agitated the conservation community is the killing in Maharashtra of the tigress named Avni. There has been much outrage and violent disagreement on all dimensions of Avni's death – her right to be where she is, the method of her

killing, the reason why she was killed, the role of the forest department, the legality of her shooting...the list is a long one indeed. Like in the case of Ustad in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (*PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3) not many moons ago, the issue here is not so much about the actual facts on the ground, (these will remain disputed), but the discourse and the discussion around the actual incident. It is not about the messages that were being carried, but the messenger – the many-headed creature called social media. There has been a paradigmatic shift in the inter-personal and public communication technologies in today's rapidly globalizing world and that imprint is clearly visible now in wildlife conservation. It is critical to note that the nature and intensity of debate around Avni would not have even been possible in another era. How conservation is communicated and indeed contested has changed forever.

It might be a cliché but social media is a beast that is difficult to understand, leave alone control. The contours are not clear, the impacts are not uniform and yet, there is no escaping its reality and influence.

If, however, Avni's case highlights the huge challenges, there are others that underscore the many opportunities. An excellent example of what it can offer is the story of 'Indian Birds', one of the biggest, oldest and most active Facebook groups on, well, Indian birds (see Perspective, this issue of the *PA Update* pg 24). Just like the debate on Avni's death, an 'Indian Birds' kind of initiative would not have been possible in another era!

The growth being seen and challenges offered by both, linear infrastructure and social media, are inescapable realities of the contemporary world. These are unfolding furiously even as we speak and future and fate of wildlife in this country depend hugely on how we are able to negotiate with each of them.

Making some smart choices might not be enough. We will need to make some tough ones too!

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

#### NCSCM prepares resource maps for Andaman, Lakshadweep Islands

The National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai, has come up with resource maps for the South Andaman Region and Baratang Island besides some islands in the Lakshadweep group.

The maps contain details like access to basic amenities including capacity building to treat sewerage water in the islands. Sensitive areas for conservation and preservation of ecosystem have also been marked on these maps. It also depicts locations of the Jarawa Tribal Reserve, buffer zones, regulation zone lines for rivers and creeks and turtle nesting sites.

The draft of the resource maps has been submitted to the union territory administration and uploaded on the official websites inviting suggestions from stakeholders.

The NCSCM came into existence in July last year as part of the government initiative to promote livelihood to and development of coastal communities.

Source: Roopa Lall. 'In a first, NCSCM develops resource maps for ANI, Lakshadweep', [www.echoofindia.com](http://www.echoofindia.com), 03/11/18.

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### Opposition to clearance for Demwe project; impact feared on Kamlang WLS, Dibru-Saikhowa NP

Conservationists have asked the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) to reverse the clearance for the 1750 MW Demwe Lower hydroelectric project. The project's 124 m high dam is to be constructed on the Lohit River jointly by Athena Energy

Ventures and the Arunachal Pradesh government.

An appeal has been filed in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) challenging the 2010 clearance to the project by the environment ministry. It has been pointed out that the NGT had in October 2017 cancelled the final forest clearance as the project site is 8.5 km from the Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary. Environmentalists in Assam have also pointed out that the project would severely impact the grasslands of the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and riverine islands of Lohit River, which constitute an Important Bird Area. As director of Bombay Natural History Society and NBWL member, Asad Rahmani had, in 2014, studied the site and said that the project would submerge parts of the Parshuram Kund Medicinal Plant Conservation Area that the environment ministry had identified for protecting globally significant medicinal plants.

The NGT had sought a peer review of the project, but only a short ministry commissioned study of 20 days was carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India in February 2018. The team has itself admitted that the study needs to be carried out over three seasons. Hydrologists too found flaws in the report.

Based on this report published in May, however, the project was cleared at the 50th meeting of SC-NBWL.

Source: Rahul Karmakar. 'Arunachal Pradesh mega dam clearance shocks greens', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 28/09/18.

### BIHAR

#### Tiger population increases in Valmiki TR

The number of tigers in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (TR) has increased to 35. The number was revealed by the chief wildlife warden recently at 10th meeting of the Bihar State Board for Wildlife that was presided over by the chief minister, Nitish Kumar.

The TR authorities had begun an exercise to conduct the annual tiger census in December 2017. Around 250 pairs of camera

traps, installed over an area of 898 sq km, were used to monitor the movement of tigers in the reserve and count their number.

Between 2006 and 2010, the reserve was said to have had only 10 tigers but successive censuses since then have shown a consistent growth in population. In 2013, the tiger count was 22; it rose to 28 in 2014-15 and it was 31 plus some additional cubs in 2016-17.

Source: 'VTR tiger count rises to 35', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 03/11/18.

### **Valmiki TR reduces rates to attract tourists**

Tourists visiting the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (TR) will now have to pay less to avail various facilities developed for them. Two new facilities — a trip to Manguraha from Valmikinagar and back, and sightseeing in an e-rickshaw at Manguraha — have been added to the tourist attractions. Facilities have also been improved for organising corporate meetings and other such events. The auditorium too has been refurbished with necessary facilities and can be booked at a reduced rate now.

The rates have been revised to attract more tourists to this place. A tourist information centre has been set up at Bettiah and the reserve website is also being updated.

In addition to the forest department, the state water resources department, which has land just outside the reserve area, is also developing an eco-park for tourists near the jungle camp.

Source: Sanjeev Kumar Verma, 'VTR slashes rates to attract tourists', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 12/10/18.

## **HARYANA**

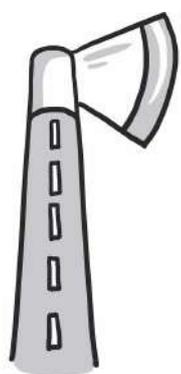
### **Roads to decongest Delhi will destroy Aravalli Biodiversity Park**

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has finalised a proposal for two roads connecting Gurugram and Delhi through the

Aravalli Biodiversity Park (ABP). Both the roads, part of a plan to decongest Delhi, have been strongly opposed by environmentalists and citizens.

The alignment for the roads — one connecting the Mehrauli-Gurugram Road to national highway 8 (Link A) and another connecting Nelson Mandela Marg in Vasant Kunj, Delhi, to ABP and then going towards the Gurugram-Faridabad Road (Link B) was finalized recently by the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA). The project is likely to start in February or March next year.

Persons associated with iamGurugram, the NGO that developed ABP over the past seven years, have said that ABP should be protected as a forest. Besides, the 2031 master plan marks the area as a biodiversity park. Spread over 380 acres, ABP was a mining and garbage dumping site till 2010 and was given to iamGurugram in 2011 to develop the park. It has not yet been recognised as a forest by the Haryana government although it meets the criteria of a forest as ordered by the Supreme Court (SC) in the TN Godavarman case of 1996.



A GMDA official said that ABP land is not with the forest department but with the municipal corporation, so there are no land acquisition issues. But the area is definitely deemed forest as per SC's judgment and the NHAI will require forest clearance.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'NHAI's road project may cost Gurugram its green lung – the Aravali Park', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 20/10/18.

'Greens raise alarm on new Delhi-Gurugram link roads', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 21/10/18.

## KARNATAKA

### Chengadi villagers seek relocation from MM Hills WLS

Over 100 families living in Chengadi village are reported to have sought voluntarily relocation from within the MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). These are in addition to another 135 families that have already requested for relocation.

The families have approached the forest department (FD) and the district administration with a request to move them to a place where they are assured of a house with basic amenities, farming land and other facilities. The village, spread over 480 acres, houses nearly 670 people. Villagers say they do not have access to road, water, sanitation and health facilities, while children often drop out of school after class 6 as the high school is situated in Kowdalli village, nearly 12 km away.

While there are 20-odd enclosures within the 906.2 sq.km. MM Hills WLS, Chengadi is among the first villages to seek en-mass rehabilitation. The FD has now identified 1,600 acres of land near Chikkalur, some 65 km away, as a potential spot for their rehabilitation.

Source: Suchith Kidiyoor. 'Chengadi villagers of M.M. Hills seek rehabilitation in search of 'better life'', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 20/11/18.

### 2,500 leopards in Karnataka

The first-ever estimate of the leopard conducted in Karnataka by the Nature Conservation Foundation and the state forest department (FD) has estimated their population to be about 2500. This is twice the number estimated in the 2015 tiger census. While the latest estimation covered the entire state, the 2015 exercise that estimated 1,129 leopards in Karnataka was limited to tiger landscape areas of the state.

Sanjay Gubbi, lead author of the six-year-long study, used camera traps to estimate leopards' number. The research team found that 27,418 villages in Karnataka have experienced

human-leopard conflict with most of these villages located in and around Udupi, Mysore, Hassan, Mandya and Tumkur. There have been 88 human injuries and 14 human deaths related to this conflict between 2009 and 2016. Sixty-one leopards have also died in unnatural circumstances between 2013 and 2017.

Source: Sibi Arasu. 'In three years, leopard population swells to 2,500 in Karnataka', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 14/10/18.

### Windmills seriously impact birds and mammals: study



Windmills kill birds and bats in collisions and birds and mammals also move away due to the noise: these are among the important findings of a recent study on the impact of windmill structures in Karnataka carried out by the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON). The study was funded by the Karnataka Forest Department (FD), the Karnataka Renewable Energy Development Limited and National Institute of Wind Energy.

The researchers led by HN Kumara looked at windmills in Chitradurga and Gadag, including Kappatagudda, which was recently declared a sanctuary (*PA Update XXIII*, No. 1). They recorded between 35% and 40% of Karnataka's bird diversity in these areas. The team saw instances of 10 collisions - six bats and four birds with the windmills. While the collision rate was low compared to other locations, it cannot be ignored, the study says, as the bulk of them took place in a relatively short span of time. The study also found 50%

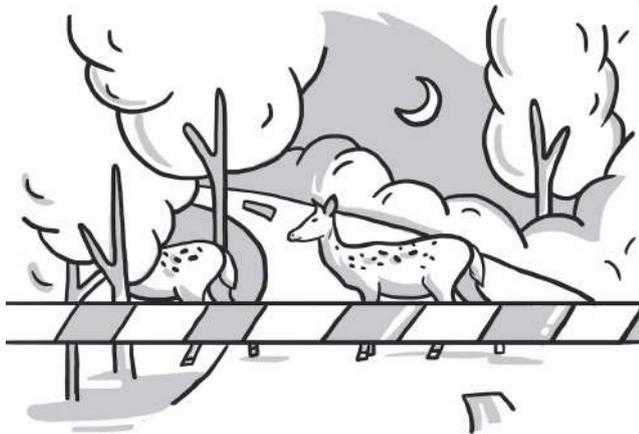
fewer birds in areas with windmills as compared to undisturbed sites. The avoidance is seen among mammals too. Herbivores moved away, with predators following them. Researchers have pointed out that such avoidance and movement to forest fringes might increase conflict with humans.

Responding to the study results, the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) said that the FD has asked for certain refinements, and it will look seriously at the impact of windmills on birds and mammals. It will also draw up guidelines for windmills to mitigate these effects.

Karnataka has diverted 37.80 sq km of forest land for wind farms thus far.

Source: Mohit M Rao. 'Windmills not so green for wildlife', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 14/10/18.

### **Centre insists on widening NH 212 through Bandipur TR amidst opposition by Karnataka, NTCA; Karnataka proposes night traffic ban in wildlife reserves across state**



Brushing aside objections raised by Karnataka and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has placed before the Supreme Court (SC) its proposal to expand national highway (NH) 212 that cuts through Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR). Kerala, in the meanwhile, has sought interim relief from the nine-year-long ban on night traffic in Bandipur to expedite relief and rehabilitation operations to

help flood affected people. Here is a timeline of how the issue had unfolded over the last decade

**2009:** Following a spate of road kills between 2004 and 2007, the Karnataka High Court issues a ban on night traffic on NH 67 and NH 212 that link Karnataka with Tamil Nadu and Kerala respectively.

**2010:** Kerala goes to the SC against the order.

**Jan 2018:** The SC sets up a committee under the secretary, MoRTH, with a representative each from the three state governments and the NTCA to find a solution.

**Mar 2018:** NTCA recommends maintaining status quo

**Apr 2018:** Karnataka writes to MoRTH saying it wants to continue with the existing restrictions and that Tamil Nadu had also accepted the present arrangement.

**Jul 2018:** MoRTH says that the Karnataka chief minister had agreed to the ministry's proposal to open the NH 212 on a 24x7 basis and widening it with adequate mitigation measures and asks the state for its formal consent.

**Aug 2018:** The Karnataka government refuses to accept the ministry's proposal and conveys its stand in favour of a status quo. The environment ministry also reiterates its earlier stand through the NTCA.

Admitting that no consensus could be reached, the MoRTH secretary in his submission to the SC then recommended the ministry's plan for expanding NH 212. Arguing that the alternative hilly road takes longer and adds to fuel consumption, MoRTH has sought to widen the existing width of 10-15 m to a uniform 15 m, create five elevated stretches of one km each and install steel-wired 8-feet high fencing on both sides of the road. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1, Vol. XXI, Nos. 2 & 1; Vol. XVII, No. 6; Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 & 2; Vol. XV, Nos. 5 & 4 and Vol. XIV, No. 6)

In a parallel development, the Karnataka chief minister, HD Kumaraswamy, has proposed a ban on night traffic in wildlife reserves across the state, days after an elephant was mowed down by a bus in the Nagarhole National Park. Nine of the 15 national highways

cutting across Karnataka and 28 of the total 151 state highways pass through wildlife reserves in the state. Traffic movement in wildlife reserves, especially during night, is a highly contentious issue in Karnataka. The latest accident has strengthened Karnataka's case to continue the ban on movement of night traffic in Bandipur.

Source: 'Centre brushes aside objections to widening Bandipur road', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 14/10/18.  
'Karnataka CM Kumaraswamy proposes night traffic ban in wildlife reserves', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 11/10/18.

## MAHARASHTRA

### 16 tiger deaths in Maharashtra this year

Data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) indicates that sixteen tigers, including five cubs, have died this year in Maharashtra thus far. The deaths also include that of T1 or Avni in Pandharkawada and the three cubs crushed on the railway tracks in Chandrapur in November. Tiger deaths have been the highest in Maharashtra in the last three years since 2012 with 21 in 2017 and 16 in 2016. The state is second in the number of tiger deaths this year after Madhya Pradesh.

As many as 12 of the 16 deaths this year were outside tiger reserves, either in road or rail accidents or were in attacks by human residents out of fear. Ten of the 16 deaths were under the 'details awaited' category in the database. The reason for the three cubs crushed under a train in the Chandrapur Junona range in November month has been attributed to 'unnatural' causes, while that of a cub in Pench was put as infighting.

An NTCA source said the causes of several tigers' deaths is not known. The NTCA gets the final report from the respective state based on the forensic and postmortem reports and the exact cause of death is attributed only after this report.

Of the 21 tiger deaths in 2017 in the state, causes have not yet been ascertained in nine cases. Four deaths were due to

electrocution, two due to poaching, five were 'natural' while infighting claimed one.

Source: 'Maharashtra loses 16 tigers in 11 months' [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 25/11/18.

### Pune Forest Division to purchase drones and PTZ cameras for monitoring PAs

The Pune Forest Division (PFD) will purchase drones and the pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras for wildlife conservation in four sanctuaries and prevention of encroachments, forest fires and trespassing.

One drone each will be purchased for the Bhimashankar, Mayureshwar Supe and Rehukuri Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs) and two for the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary. Two PTZ cameras each will be bought for the Bhimashankar and GIB WLSs. The Mayureshwar Supe WLS has four towers and the PTZ camera will be installed on one of them. Another PTZ camera will be installed at the highest spot in Bhimashankar. The live footage of the drones and PTZ cameras would be visible on the computers in the forest division's offices for monitoring.

The state has sanctioned Rs. 1.5 lakh for each drone and Rs. 2.5 lakh each for the PTZ cameras. The gadgets will be purchased through government e-marketing or e-tendering within one and a half months.

Source: 'Now, drones to help monitor 4 sanctuaries', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 04/11/18.

### Only electric vehicles for tourists in tiger reserves

The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) will soon run electric safari vehicles to ferry tourists. A private lodge in Kolara has procured two customized vehicles designed for the safaris. Successful trials of these electric vehicles were conducted on September 9, 10, and 11 and these are to be soon handed over to

two village eco-development committees near Kolara, which will operate them as part of an employment generation initiative.

The electric vehicle is similar to a Gypsy and the charges for these vehicles will be Rs. 2,200, the same as what Gypsies charge. However, there will be no guaranteed entry for these vehicles as according to the tiger conservation plan, the carrying capacity of Tadoba has already been fixed at 125 vehicles per day.

Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan too is procuring two such vehicles for Rs. 12-13 lakh each. Authorities there plan to utilize them for patrolling and official work; not for tourism.

In a related development Maharashtra recently passed a government resolution (GR) mandating the forest department (FD) to now only use electric vehicles inside tiger reserves to ferry tourists. Where new vehicles are needed, electric vehicles will be bought on priority.

The decision is a step towards promoting the Maharashtra electric vehicle policy – 2018 and environment-friendly tourism. The government has announced the policy to make the state competitive in production of electric vehicles and its parts at the global level. The National Tiger Conservation Authority too has recommended use of electric vehicles in tiger reserves for tourism and for safaris. The FD has also linked the initiative to the Central government's National Electric Mobility Plan under which a target has been set to ensure over 60 lakh hybrid and electric vehicles on roads.



Source: 'In a first, Tadoba tiger reserve to run e-vehicles for safari',

[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 05/10/18.

'Now, only electric vehicles in tiger reserves', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 24/11/18.

## **Dodamarg-Sawantwadi not included in draft ESA**

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), has in a draft notification released on October 3, proposed the declaration of 56,825 sq km or 37% of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive area (ESA). The forests of Dodamarg-Sawantwadi in Sindhudurg district have, however, not been included raising concerns related to mining and other developmental projects (*PA Updates* Vol. XX, No. 5 and Vol. XIX, No. 6).

The draft notification was a result of a September 4 National Green Tribunal order following the Kerala floods, directing the environment ministry to finalise the ESA at the earliest.

While the proposed Western Ghats ESA for Maharashtra is spread across 17,340 sq km, this is the second time the wildlife corridor in Sindhudurg has been left out after a similar draft notification in 2015. The corridor connects the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Kolhapur, Maharashtra to Bhimgad WLS in Karnataka. The state forest department confirmed that the area has 22 to 25 tigers and a family of four elephants was also recorded here recently.

Madhav Gadgil who headed the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel in 2010 said that the panel's report had quoted petitions from gram sabhas across 25 villages in Dodamarg-Sawantwadi that had passed resolutions asking their areas to be declared ecologically sensitive.

Based on a 2011 petition by Awaaz Foundation, the Bombay High Court had in 2013 asked the state to declare Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor an ESA. In another order based on a petition filed by Vanashakti in 2016 seeking enforcement of the previous order widening the scope of inclusion of the entire Sawantwadi district as ESA, the HC banned all tree felling in the area. Subsequently, the decision for final declaration of ESA needed to be taken by the environment ministry, which was never done.

Vanashakti has shared satellite images of one of the villages, which has been included in the Centre's draft notification, showing how over the past three years it has fallen prey to large-scale tree cutting. Other villages such as Gharpi, Kumbal and Shirval are witnessing the same pattern.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'No special tag for Maharashtra's tiger corridor, danger of mining lurks around', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 22/10/18.

### **Court orders BMC to conduct public hearing for Aarey car shed again**



The Bombay High Court has instructed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) garden department to conduct a second public hearing for the Aarey metro car shed construction after the first one had to be wrapped up abruptly. The date and time for the second hearing will be decided by the BMC soon.

For the public hearing organised at the Byculla zoo on October 10, hundreds of people turned up to register their suggestions and objections against the felling of 2,238 trees and transplantation of 464 others that are coming in the way of the construction. This hearing saw members of the tribal community, activists, conservationists, and residents of Aarey Colony voice their opinions.

The public hearing was meant to last half an hour but went on for more than two hours. Prior to the meeting, the civic body had registered 33,000 suggestions and objections, and an additional 7,000 were accepted on the day of the hearing (Also see *PA Updates* XXIII, No. 1 and Vol. XXI, No. 5).

Source: Steffy Thevar. 'Fate of 2,238 trees at Aarey to be decided after second public hearing', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 18/10/18.

### **Bamboo garden opened at the Sanjay Gandhi NP**

A World Bambusetum and Garden featuring 97 species of bamboo species from around the world was inaugurated recently at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) (*PA Update* XXIV, No. 5). Consul generals of over 30 countries and many Indian dignitaries attended the event, along with State Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar, Secretary for Forests Vikas Kharge, and member of parliament Gopal Shetty. A coffee table book about the flora and fauna of the SGNP was also released, and sand artist Nitish Bharti displayed his artwork.

Saplings of bamboo species found in India and in the countries of the attending consul generals were also planted on the occasion.

Source: Dheeraj Kumar. 'Sanjay Gandhi park gets a new bamboo garden', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 24/11/18.

## **ODISHA**

### **Three, including two foresters, arrested in case of Dhenkanal elephant electrocution deaths**

The Odisha Crime Branch has arrested three persons including two officials of the Meramundali forest range in connection with the death of seven elephants due to electrocution in the Dhenkanal Sadar forest range on October 27.

Severe lapses on part of forest and electricity departments had come to the fore following the incident. Following a public outcry, the Odisha chief minister, Naveen Patnaik, had ordered a crime branch probe into the incident. A four-member team has initiated an inquiry and the findings of the report are awaited.

Source: Vikash Sharma. 'Dhenkanal Elephant Deaths: Crime Branch arrests 3 including 2 forest officials', [www.odishatv.in](http://www.odishatv.in), 03/11/18.

### **Relocated tigress 'Sundari' kills two; tranquilised, captured**

Tigress Sundari who had been translocated from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) to Satkosia TR in Odisha was recently tranquilised by a joint team of experts from Satkosia and the Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZN). The operation was conducted with the help of a trained elephant brought from the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary. The elephant was accompanied by four mahouts and a team of forest officials. Earlier, a team of experts from Madhya Pradesh had failed to capture the animal.

The tigress brought from Bandhavgarh TR in June, had been released in the Satkosia TR in August as part of a tiger relocation project (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 5). But after the tigress allegedly killed two persons and a bullock in separate incidents in Baghamunda and Tainsi villages inside Satkosia in October triggering tension in the area, the state government had to capture the big cat and bring it to the NZN.

Source: Saswat Singhdeo. 'Tigress Sundari tranquilised in Satkosia', [www.odishatv.in](http://www.odishatv.in), 06/11/18.

## **TAMIL NADU**

### **Early warning system to avert human-elephant conflict**

A 'smart fence for early elephant warning' that has been designed by a research team from the Bannari Amman Institute of Technology, Sathyamangalam, was recently installed at Ammapalayam village on the Bhavani Sagar – Mettupalayam Highway where elephants frequently cross the road. The smart fence is composed of a detection module, a warning module and a drive-away module. The detection

module is a long distance laser fence indigenously designed by the team and can be operated at a distance of up to 400 metres. The warning module sends the SMS alert while the drive-away module has an automatic pattern-changing flashlight that would turn on when an elephant was detected, and would scare it away.

The system has been developed as part of a project funded by the International Elephant Foundation (IEF) based in the U.S. A three-member team from the IEF inspected the system recently and following its success, the system could be deployed in other conflict prone areas as well.

This new system is an upgraded and modified variant of the 'Roadkill Prevention System' that the same team has designed and deployed at Velamundi on the Sathyamangalam - Mettupalayam Highway earlier in the year.

Source: 'Early warning system to avert human-elephant conflict', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 21/11/18.

## **UTTARAKHAND**

### **Labourer killed by tigress in Corbett TR**

A 20 year old labourer, working in a group deployed for repair and maintenance work in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR), was killed recently in an attack by a tigress. The group accompanied by a forest guard was returning after completing work when the man, walking last in the line, was attacked by the big cat. The forest guard raised an alarm and the group ran towards the tigress to scare her away. He also fired in the air, which scared the animal. The injured man was taken to the hospital in Ramnagar where he was declared dead.

The family members and villagers staged a demonstration at the hospital demanding Rs. 10 lakh compensation for the bereaved family and a government job for one of its members. However, after discussion, it was decided that Rs. three lakh ex-gratia would be paid as compensation. Further, a member of the family would be provided a daily wage job and Rs. two lakh would be provided through a non-governmental organisation.

The incident has created an atmosphere of fear among labourers working in CTR. The sub-divisional officer said that the forest department team has been alerted to keep a watch on the movements of the tigress.

Source: 'Labourer killed by tigress in Corbett', [www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com), 05/11/18.

### **Research work shows 129 tiger deaths in 18 years; numbers don't match with government records**

A research paper titled 'Scenario of In-situ Tiger Conservation and Health Management in Uttarakhand' by Dr. BM Arora has revealed that a total of 129 tigers — 57 males, 55 females and 17 unidentified — died in the state in 18 years from 2000 to 2017. The data on tiger deaths and the reasons behind the casualties were collected through various RTI replies, the National Tiger Conservation Authority website, media reports as well as post-mortems of dead animals conducted by the author himself.

The study revealed that around seven to eight tigers have died in Uttarakhand every year since 2000, when the state was carved out from Uttar Pradesh. The maximum tiger deaths (19) were recorded in 2011. Of the total 129 deaths, 34 died of natural causes, followed by infighting (30), accidents (17), unknown causes (12), poaching (11), trauma injury (8), disease and disorder (8), man-animal conflict (4), inter-species fights (3), and infanticide (2). The research paper presented also revealed that 58 tigers died in summer (March-June), 46 in winter (November-February) and 25 during the monsoons (July-October).

The paper also points to several other discrepancies in the number of deaths of the big cats - these are discrepancies in the death reports of 129 tigers in respect to number, age, gender and cause of death. The data revealed in the paper does not match with the records maintained by the wildlife wing of the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD).

When contacted for their response on the matter, the FD said that the numbers were not alarming and since 2013, the population of

the big cat in the state has been increasing. In 2003, the state's tiger population stood at 245 and this has increased to 340 in 2014 and further to 361 in 2017.

Source: '129 tigers died in Uttarakhand in 18 years, claims wildlife expert in research paper', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 10/10/18.

### **47 human deaths in Uttarakhand in human-animal conflict in nine months of 2018**

47 people have died in last nine months in Uttarakhand in incidents of human-wildlife conflict. This includes as many as 20 people who were mauled to death by leopards and tigers. The casualties this year have seen a sharp jump as compared to last year, when 39 people were killed in such conflict.

Of the 32 wildlife and forest territorial divisions of the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD), Rajaji National Park (NP) recorded a maximum nine deaths this year, followed by Bageshwar (6) and Terai (5). The data provided by the FD shows that the maximum number 69 people had succumbed to animal attacks in 2016-17. This year's figures are the second highest in the past seven years.

The expenditure on compensating the families of the victims is also on the rise. Ever since Uttarakhand has started giving compensation to the victims of wildlife-human conflict from the year 2012, Rs 40 crore has been spent on compensating the families of 313 people who were killed in wild animal attacks.

State forest minister Harak Singh Rawat had announced after the state wildlife board's meeting in June that compensation to the victims will be increased from Rs three lakh to five lakh in the state. That plan is yet to be implemented.

Source: '47 killed in Uttarakhand due to man-animal conflict this year', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 16/11/18.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### Retaliatory killing of tigress at Dudhwa TR

After a tigress attacked a 50-year-old man near the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (TR), angry villagers marched to the core area of the park, allegedly, beat up forest guards, snatched a tractor and then ran over the 10-year-old tigress when they found her.

According to forest officials, however, the tigress had never attacked anyone and have asked the police to take action against those identified as responsible for the animal's death.

The villagers said that the animal had been attacking their livestock for two weeks and they were terrified. They also said that they had complained to forest officials about the tigress several times.

Source: Alok Pandey. 'Angry Villagers Run Tractor Over Tigress After It Mauls Man In UP', [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com), 05/11/18.

### Man-animal conflict is a 'State Declared Disaster' in UP

The Uttar Pradesh government has made man-animal conflict a 'State Declared Disaster' bringing such incidents under the ambit of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) to ensure better coordination and relief. The state government has issued orders that will enable faster monetary relief to the victims of attack of wild animals. It will now be mandatory for all the authorities concerned to complete paperwork swiftly and disburse the relief amount within 24 hours of the incident and the production of the post-mortem examination report of the victim.

As per the provisions of the order, relief of Rs. five lakh would be given to the family of the deceased in the case of human death in such conflict, while the disbursement of compensation for injury would be in accordance to SDRF guidelines. The order also makes it clear that the amount of Rs. one lakh per death would be arranged by the state forest department from its own budget to the revenue

department. The order also discusses issues about creating awareness, ensuring police support in areas where such conflicts happen and proper guidelines to handle situations when wild animals venture into human inhabitation.

98 cases of human and big cat conflicts have been reported in the state in the last two years. Tiger attacks alone have claimed seven lives in the last three years in the state.

Source: Namita Bajpai. 'In a first, Uttar Pradesh government makes man-animal conflict a 'State Declared Disaster'', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 17/10/18.

### State shelves proposal for road through a number of PAs in the Terai

The state wildlife board headed by chief minister Yogi Adityanath has shelved a proposal for the construction of a 800 km long Indo-Nepal Border Road that would run through a number of protected areas in the Terai region and necessitate the cutting down of 55000 trees, some of which are believed to be more than 200 years old. The project that will need a total of 287 ha of land was to pass through the Dudhwa and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TRs), and the Katarniaghat, Suhelva and Sohagi Barwa Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLS).

The proposal was shelved after concerns were raised by directors of the TRs that felling thousands of trees would disturb animal migration from Dudhwa to the mountainous regions of Nepal.

The board will now prepare a proposal for an alternate route that will result in felling of lesser number of trees with minimum loss of habitat.

Source: '50,000 Trees To Be Cut In UP's Tiger Reserves For Road Project: Officials', [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com), 11/10/18.  
Over 50,000 trees to be axed in UP's tiger habitat to build roads', [www.mid-day.com](http://www.mid-day.com), 10/10/18.  
'After concerns over loss of animal corridor, UP govt shelves plan to axe 55k trees for road via Dudhwa', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 21/10/18.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### **Make elephant corridors eco-sensitive zones: NGT**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to consider declaring all elephant corridors in the country as eco-sensitive zones (ESZs). The NGT has asked for the same following a plea that sought legal recognition to the elephant reserves and corridors in the state of Assam. The ministry was given a time of two weeks to look into the issue and proceed for the declaration of these corridors as ESZs.

The NGT's observations came when hearing a plea moved by Assam resident Pradip Kumar Bhuyan, which highlighted the increasing number of unnatural elephant deaths taking place in the state. "It is the case of the applicants that it is the complete lack of legal protection to elephant corridors and elephant reserves that has led to a large number of deaths in areas beyond the protected areas and for which the applicants have sought intervention from the tribunal" read the petition.

The petition further said, "Owing to the increased denudation and loss of their forest habitats, elephants have come increasingly into conflicts with humans and faced deliberate retaliatory killings and accidents at railway crossings, high tension power lines, power fences and trenches."

Source: 'Make elephant corridors eco-sensitive zones, says NGT', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 19/11/18.

### **50 annual electrocution deaths of elephants on an average: MoEFCC**

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) data has revealed that 50 elephants on an average have been killed by electrocution in the country for the period 2009 – 2017. The total number of electrocution

deaths for this period has been 461 elephants. Between August and October 2018 alone, more than a dozen elephants died of electrocution in the eastern and northeastern parts of India, including seven in Odisha's Dhenkanal district.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. '461 elephants electrocuted between 2009 and 2017', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 02/11/18.

### **Over 1.4 lakh incidents of forest fires in 20 districts of India between 2003 and 2016**



A recent report of the Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has noted that up to 1,41,747 forest fires were detected in 20 districts of India over a span of 13 years between 2003 and 2016. The report, co-authored by the World Bank, seeks to understand how forest fires are deterring India's efforts to meet its climate change goals.

Of the 1,41,747 forest fires, the maximum – 9.49% - occurred in Lunglei district of Mizoram alone. In central India, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra had the largest area affected by forest fire – 8.24%, followed by Bijapur in Chhattisgarh at 5.29% and Khammam in Telangana at 3.86%. The report says that Central India and Northeastern states are the ones severely affected by forest fires. While states in the Northeast account for the greatest share of fire detections, the largest area affected by fire is in the Central region.

A shortage of dedicated funds for forest fire prevention and management at the central and state level has been a perennial issue and has also been documented by the Comptroller

and Auditor General (CAG) in various states. The CAG had in 2017 pointed out that shortages of equipment, accessories and vehicles required for fire-fighting in the fire season ranged from 31 to 100%, while shortage of manpower ranged from 16 to 55% at the foresters and forest guards level.

In the MoEFCC report, the principal chief conservator of forest and head of forest force for Uttarakhand has mentioned that there was meagre budgetary support to tackle forest fires. Only Rs. five crore were sanctioned in 2015. The amount sanctioned during the massive forest fire of 2016 was Rs. 22 crore though a demand of Rs. 446 crore had been placed before the state government. The official claimed that it is next to impossible to depute manpower, purchase equipment, maintain fire lines or hire people for controlled burning.

According to MoEFCC, its guidelines released in 2000 were not widely known by the forest department staff and are no longer being implemented.

Source: 'Over 1.40 lakh forest fires in 20 districts between 2003-2016: MoEFCC', [www.thehindubusinessline.com](http://www.thehindubusinessline.com), 09/10/18.

### Three Indian organisations receive grants from Disney Conservation Fund

# DI\$NEY

Three Indian organisations – Arulagam, International Fund for Animal Welfare and Panthera — are among the 76 organisations worldwide that have received grants from the Disney Conservation Fund (DCF).

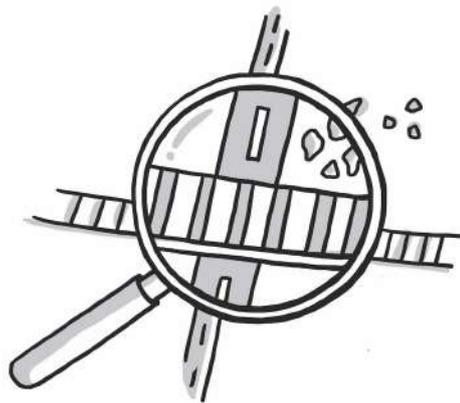
Arulagam, which focuses on the Oriental white-rumped vulture, engages with communities and stakeholders in South India through conservation programmes to protect

vulture breeding habitats. The International Fund for Animal Welfare's project aims to reduce human-elephant conflict and raise support for elephant conservation and protection in India, while Panthera will work to educate villagers, children and religious figures about snow leopards and the threats they face in Northern India.

DCF awards \$5 million to conservation organisations around the world and names its Disney Conservation Heroes (DCHs) by felicitating and rewarding those who work to protect nature. It has recognised 13 people across the globe for the DCH award.

Source: 'Three Indian organisations win grants from Disney's Wildlife Conservation Fund', [www.firstpost.com](http://www.firstpost.com), 17/10/18.

### Study identifies 567 barriers in 30 corridors in Central Indian tiger landscape



A recent study by researchers from the Columbia University and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, both in the USA, has identified 567 barriers in 30 corridors in the Central India tiger landscape consisting of 3,84,508 sq km spread across 16 protected areas (PAs) in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. It mapped 30 corridors and ranked them according to their restoration potential. The study found that the barriers included agricultural land (1,260 sq km), forests (1,821 sq km), degraded cover (1,183 sq km), open-water (150 sq km), barren land (17 sq km), and settlements (15 sq km).

The study associated barriers with infrastructure to show where mitigation

measures can be targeted. It mapped 567 barriers within 30 linkages in this landscape of which 265 barriers intersect with infrastructure and include 694 km of roads, 150 km of railway, 48 reservoirs, and 10 mines. Besides, 302 barriers are due to land-use or gaps in forest cover. It was found that 86 barriers have both roads and railways and there are 80 surface mines and thermal power plants within 10 km of the least-cost paths (LCPs) and more coal mines are closer to connectivity areas where linkages are narrow.

Of all the 16 PAs, corridors between Kanha-Pench, Satpura-Melghat, Kanha-Nagzira, Nagzira-Pench, and Pench-Umred-Tadoba were found to have high quality and potential for tiger connectivity. The Kanha-Pench corridor was considered the best while that between Satpura-Ratapani was the poorest. The Kanha-Pench corridor was selected as the best based on several different analyses that not only include quality and width of the corridor but also the tiger density of the respective reserves.

The researchers pointed out that the entire study area has high quality and potential for tiger connectivity, however, there has been considerably less effort at strategically identifying and removing barriers along potential corridors.

Source: 'Study identifies 567 barriers in 30 tiger corridors in Central India', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 16/10/18.

### DNA database of rhinos

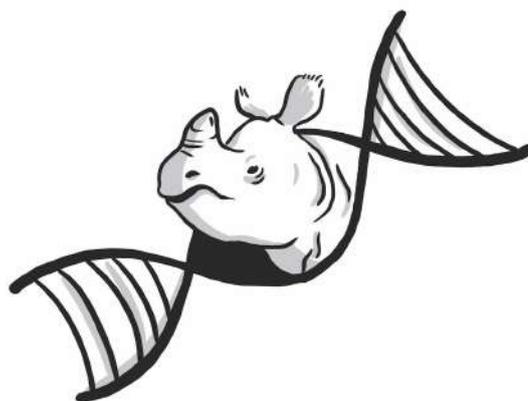
The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has been creating a DNA database of rhinos from across the states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. The compilation is part of a larger DNA database of 3,300 rhinos in India, which was proposed by the WII earlier this year.

Leader of the project at WII, Samrat Mondal, said that a DNA database will allow the concerned authorities to match the confiscated rhino parts with the tissue of the poached animal and thereby, not only identify

the rhino but also cement a case against the poacher.

The WII has managed to obtain the DNA samples of about 40 rhinos from the Manas National Park (NP) and about 80 rhinos from the Kaziranga NP. At the same time, they have also obtained the samples of 40 rhinos from Dudhwa and 100 rhinos from the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

Four cases of poached rhino parts have already been solved with the help of the data collected by WII. The institute is being aided by the WWF India in this data collection.



Source: 'Indian scientists creating DNA database of over 3,000 rhinos to curb poaching, trade of animal parts', *Mirror Now*, 05/10/18.

## SOUTH ASIA

### New species of shark identified in Indian Ocean

A new species of a deep-sea shark has been found in the northern Indian Ocean, the first such discovery in India since 2011 when the Mangalore houndshark was identified. The Pygmy false catshark *Planonasus indicus* is currently known only from deep waters (200-1000m depth) and has a length of about 65cm. It is dark brown without any prominent patterns. The discovery was made by a team of three

scientists including from the United States of America, Germany and KV Akhilesh from India's Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI).

Their finding was published recently in a peer-reviewed research journal on marine biodiversity published from the Senckenberg Research Institute in Germany. The new species was first observed on April 26, 2008, when it was caught in fishing nets in Kochi, Kerala. A second specimen was caught on March 15, 2018, off the coast of Trincomalee, in Sri Lanka, following which Sri Lankan scientists

shared the information with David A Ebert, research associate, department of ichthyology, California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, and lead author of the study. Following consultation with Simon Weigmann who had discovered the Dwarf false catshark, and review with international experts, the identity was finally confirmed.

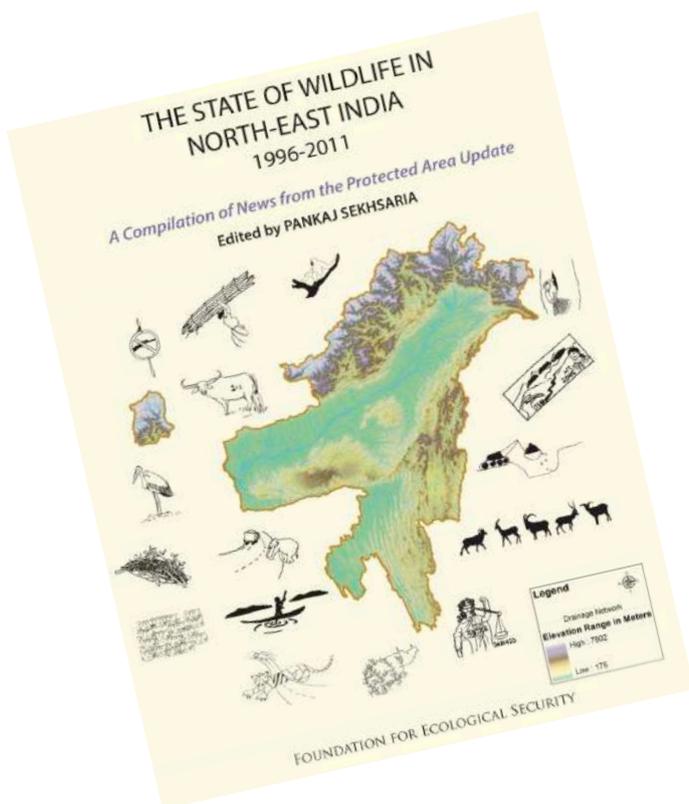
Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'New species of shark identified in Indian Ocean', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 23/11/18.

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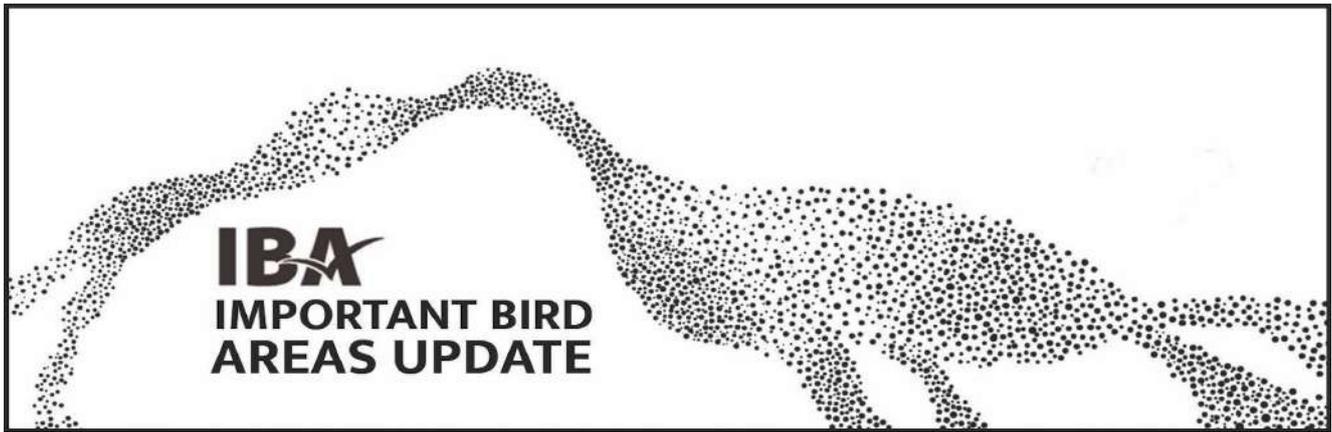
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**Annexures**



## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### **20 wetlands and nine wetland clusters identified for migratory bird conservation**

The Union Ministry for Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has identified 20 wetlands and nine wetland clusters for conservation as they are congregation sites for several migratory water bird species. These wetlands include, among others, Keoladeo in Rajasthan, Coringa in Andhra Pradesh, Bhitarkanika in Odisha, Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu, Sunderbans in West Bengal, Harike in Punjab, and Gulf of Mannar and Nal Sarovar in Gujarat. These wetlands will be protected as part of the Centre's Central Asian Flyway (CAF) Action Plan that was launched recently.

The plan states that the boundaries of these wetland clusters will be demarcated and notified under the Wetlands Rules 2017. Additional water will also be allocated whenever needed to maintain the ecological health of these wetlands.

The action plan proposes that scientists undertake and publish national inventories of the stopover and wintering sites of migratory birds and their population status; implement single-species action plans for 20 species which includes Greater flamingo, Great knot, Lesser flamingo, Eurasian curlew, European roller, White-headed duck, Yellow-breasted bunting, and Ferruginous duck.

The action plan states that threats to migratory birds such as feral dogs, sand and boulder mining, and land use changes will be

assessed, periodic disease surveillance will be carried out, impact of night light and electrocution risks evaluated, and local communities encouraged to participate in the conservation of these bird species. It states that the CAF includes several important migration routes over the high Himalayan passes along with the breeding sites of critically endangered species.

Birders and scientists have welcomed the plan, which will be implemented between 2018 and 2023. They have cautioned, however, that hundreds of wetlands that act as stopovers for these species are still unprotected and extremely vulnerable to land use change. According to the Bombay Natural History Society there are 460 wetlands of ornithological importance in India and about 190 of them meet the Ramsar criteria of wetlands of international importance. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 5)

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Wetlands visited by migratory birds identified in conservation push', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 21/11/18.

## ANDHRA PRADESH

### **Greater flamingoes spotted at Coringa WLS after a long gap**

A flock of five Greater flamingoes was spotted recently along the coast of Hope Island, a part of the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary after a period of 25 years. The flock was spotted during a routine survey of the mangrove plantations here.

A group of birds was last seen here in 1993, while a lone flamingo was recorded

during the 2016 Asian Water Bird Census at Sirra Yanam village in the East Godavari district.

Source: K.N. Murali Sankar. 'Greater flamingoes visit Hope Island after 25 years', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 05/11/18.

### **Cyclone Titli kills over 200 storks in Telineelapuram Sanctuary, over 5000 in Odisha**



At least a couple of hundred Open billed storks were killed in the Telineelapuram Bird Sanctuary due to the heavy rain and winds during cyclone Titli. Large numbers of these storks migrate to Telineelapuram for nesting from parts of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha every year and over 1,000 nests were also reported destroyed after trees were uprooted in the storm.

In Odisha too thousands of Open-billed storks were killed and many more were injured in Jagannathpur. According to locals, nearly 5000 birds could have been killed in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Source: Bobins Abraham. 'Thousands of migratory birds killed, nests destroyed In Andhra, Odisha in Cyclone Titli', [www.indiatimes.com](http://www.indiatimes.com), 13/10/18.

## **HIMACHAL PRADESH**

### **Himalayan Griffon Vultures spotted in Himachal Pradesh**

The Himalayan Griffon vulture appears to have made a comeback in Himachal Pradesh. Bird watchers and wildlife experts have reported sighting the endangered bird in Kinnaur district. The birds were spotted at a reservoir across the Baspa river in Sangla valley during a three-day

birding event in Sangla Rakcham and Chitkul valley, organised by wildlife wing of the forest department.

The objective of the three-day event, which commenced on October 14, was to assess the presence of different species of birds at the wildlife sanctuaries in tribal Kinnaur district. Apart from Himalayan vultures, birders also spotted over 60 other species of birds, including the White-cheeked nuthatch, Ferruginous pochard, Bearded vulture, European goldfinch, Eurasian sparrow hawk and the Red-headed bullfinch.

Around ten years back, ornithologists across the world had called for monitoring populations of vultures, post which Himachal's wildlife wing undertook a statewide study and found that the vulture population had declined. Studies found that the exploitation of cheer pine forest was also impacting the breeding of vultures that use old dried trees for roosting and surveillance. Vultures use needles and branches of pines for their nests.

The conservation programme that was initiated in 2004 focused on monitoring of nests and enforcing a ban on diclofenac through conservation education and by involving local communities. The wildlife wing had mapped more than 354 nests and about 374 fledglings.

Source: Gaurav Bisht. 'Endangered Himalayan vulture makes a comeback in Himachal's Kinnaur', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 17/10/18.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Thane creek, Mumbai harbor, Jaikwadi Dam, Nandur-Madhmeshwar Sanctuary included in Central Asian Flyway**

Wetlands along Thane creek and Mumbai harbour have been included in the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) — an important migratory route for birds. Globally, nine migratory flyways have been identified under the Convention of Migratory Species. CAF, which covers migratory bird routes across 30 countries, is one of them. The identification of these areas is part of the five-year national action plan announced

in September by the Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change to conserve migratory bird routes.

Apart from locations in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Alibaug, Uran in Raigad district, and Jaikwadi Gangapur Dam and Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary in Nashik, are other sites in the state selected under the CAF.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is one of the agencies that identified Sewri, Mahul and Thane Creek as sites that need to be included in the CAF. While Thane creek is a flamingo sanctuary the 22 km long Mumbai-Trans-Harbour Link sea bridge is planned close to the Sewri mudflats (*PA Updates* Vol. XXII, Nos 2 & 1; Vol. XXI, Nos. 5, 4, 3 & 1; Vol. XX, No. 2; Vol. XIX, No. 1 and Vol. XVIII, No. 4). Site-specific guidelines will be issued to the state government and inputs will be needed from the state to cover each site under the action plan, the BNHS has said.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Three bird habitats in Mumbai included in Central Asian Flyway', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 10/10/18.

## MANIPUR

### **Amur falcon makes it to Somalia from Manipur**

A female Amur falcon named Tamenglong, after the place in Manipur where it was set free on November 5 by forest officials with a GPS-transmitter fitted, was reported to have reached Somalia after flying a distance of 5,700 km. Another similarly tagged male bird, Manipur, could not make and is believed to have been shot down by local hunters as soon as it was released.

Every year Amur falcons make a long journey covering many countries including China, Mongolia, Russia and India to reach Somalia. A few thousands halt in Tamenglong district of Manipur and some parts of Nagaland where they feed on termites and other insects for about three weeks.

In the recent past, hunters caught Amur falcons in hundreds everyday in Tamenglong. Live and barbecued falcons were on open sale in many parts. However, elders of the district have opposed wanton killings of these migratory birds. Forest officials said they have also intensified patrolling around the Loktak lake to prevent hunting including of the migratory falcons. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIII. No. 6 and Vol. XXII, No. 6).

Source: Iboyaima Laithangbam. 'Amur falcon makes it to Somalia from Manipur', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 26/11/18.

## NAGALAND

### **Amur Falcon Conservation Week and Festival 2018**

The Amur Falcon Conservation Week and Festival (AFCW) 2018 was held from the 8th-10th of November 2018 with the aim of creating awareness on conservation issues as well as exploiting the potential of eco-tourism in and around the Doyang Valley. The activities conducted included those related to conservation, adventure sports, watersports and angling, culture and tradition and food and music. The event was conducted jointly by the Nagaland government and Natural Nagas, an NGO that works in the region.

While Nagaland Tourism was the nodal agency for AFCW 2018 others that participated included Natural Nagas, the state Department of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Association of Off-roaders Nagaland, Native Station, Team Metamorphosis, Club Royal Enfield Wokha, District Anglers Wokha Nagaland and Explore Morashen Eco-tourism Association.

An estimated 15,000-20,000 tourists attended or witnessed the three-day event. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 6; Vol. XXI, No. 6; Vol. XX, No. 6 and Vol. XIX, No. 6)

Source: Steve Odyuo. 'Amur Falcon Conservation Week and Festival 2018', [www.morungexpress.com](http://www.morungexpress.com), 18/11/18.

## TAMIL NADU

### **Huge damage, wildlife mortality caused by Cyclone Gaja in, around Point Calimere WLS**

Thousands of birds, 17 blackbuck, spotted deer and wild boar were among those killed within the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) due to Cyclone Gaja that hit Nagapattinam in the month of November. There was large scale mortality outside the sanctuary as well and this included that of birds like flamingos and Painted storks.

More than 1.5 lakh teak trees that were raised under the Canal bank plantation programme were also uprooted during the cyclone. Anti-poaching watchers from 10 districts, equipped with electric saws and ropes were deployed in Nagapattinam district to clear the roads of the fallen trees.

Source: 'Wildlife from Point Calimere sanctuary became victims of Gaja', [www.timesofindia.com](http://www.timesofindia.com), 24/11/18.

### **Villagers near Koonthankulam, Kaadankulam ban firecrackers for birds**

After Koonthankulam and nearby Kaadankulam – both waterbodies – started attracting domestic and migratory birds, local villagers began on their own to observe a ban on bursting of firecrackers and using cone speakers as part of Diwali celebrations. The voluntary ban that is still in vogue was implemented even before a protected area was declared here.

Some children in the village burst an occasional small firecracker but most of the elders are keen on preserving the tradition of boycotting crackers for the sake of the birds. They have been appealing to the children not to go in for noisy celebrations.

Source: P. Sudhakar. 'A Deepavali sans crackers, for birds' sake', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 06/11/18.

## **Seeking your support for the *PA Update***

The *PA Update* needs your support and help to sustain itself. We are seeking donations and subscriptions and also happy to receive ideas of how further funds can be raised. Please do subscribe for yourself and also for others in addition to considering making donations.

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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>

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## Obituary

### The man with the baseball cap – remembering Harry Andrews

As I sit down to write this note in memory of Harry Andrews, one realizes what a strange thing memory is. I cannot recollect exactly when I first met him, and neither can I recollect exactly when I met him for the last time. The last meeting was about a decade ago – perhaps 2007, and the first meeting somewhere about a decade earlier, most probably 1997.

What I can remember however, very vividly in many cases, is what happened in these 10 years. This decade has been the period of my most intense engagement with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Harry Andrews is written all over it. Two of my most enriching, even enthralling, outings in the islands were the two boat surveys I participated in - the first in the late 90s when I had just started working in the islands and the 2<sup>nd</sup> was in February 2005 (memory grips me here like super-glue that will stick forever), in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004. These were under Harry's leadership –the surveys of course, but also of the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team (ANET), an institution that he helmed for a very long time.

ANET was default home for me in the islands and Harry was always there – never overbearing or intimidating, but present all the time – calm, quiet, firm. I knew he was a keen croc man and also got to see how much of a hands-on guy he was! One of the most abiding memories I have of him is walking to the ANET boat parked in the bay, his baseball cap fixed firmly on, the engineer's green coloured tool box held, almost lovingly, like an executive will hold his leather briefcase. A crocodile survey I realized then, is as much about having the right tools for a machine that you are sailing in as the croc that you might actually be seeking out – you have to get home at the end of it, right?

The first glimpse of the fiery eyes of a crocodile in a dark mangrove creek, an aerial attack by an Andaman serpent eagle as I climbed up too close to its nest in the mangrove canopy, the first ever experience of a Green sea turtle as she comes ashore to lay her eggs,

photographing the Jurassic looking, slow moving but gorgeous Giant robber crab, the unbelievable uplift of coral reefs due to the earthquake of December 2004... cold nights on a Karen dungi anchored deep in Port Campbell, throwing in the fishing line at sunset discussing something deeply thoughtful – these are all a patchwork of extra-ordinary experiences I have had in these islands when Harry was around. Harry, in fact, was instrumental in making it all happen and for that I will be ever grateful.

And there is something here that I must mention – something that has been very evident to those who knew the islands and who knew Harry. Many have asked me the question and I've always avoided answering this explicitly. Yes, the crocodile researcher Dr David Baskaran, one of the key characters in my 2014 debut novel, *The Last Wave*, a story deeply based on the ecology, history and people of the Andaman Islands, was based, in significant ways, on Harry. His has been an influence that is much deeper and influential that it has appeared, even to me.

Like I mentioned, I'd not met Harry since perhaps 2007, but when the news of his death came in a couple of weeks ago, there was a deep sadness and a sense of loss. I also realized that his death marks the passing away of a generation of pioneering researchers where these islands are concerned – the first was Ravi Sankaran, very unexpectedly many years ago, then there was Rauf Ali and now Harry – three distinctly different personalities who can never be matched for who they were and what they did. These are not shoes that can be filled easily, if they can be filled at all!

- **Pankaj Sekhsaria** is editor, *Protected Area Update* and author, *The Last Wave – an island novel* and *Islands in Flux – the Andaman and Nicobar Story*.

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago**

*PA Update 75, December 2008*

### **WEST BENGAL**

#### **Pesticide use in tea estates suspected cause of elephant deaths in Mahananda WLS**

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) has suggested that the deaths of three wildlife elephants in the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary in the month of July have been caused by pesticides used in neighbouring tea estates. The bodies of the elephants were found near the Simulbari Tea Estate at Khuklong. Details of the viscera tests were awaited before the final cause of the death was determined. But post-mortem reports did indicate that the animals had died of poisoning.

As an initial precautionary measure, the FD has written to tea garden owners in North not to use pesticides in their plantations to avoid the recurrence of such incidents. It has also been pointed out by the FD and NGOs working in the area that workers applying weed and pest control in the Simulbari tea garden were hospitalized because of the effect of the chemicals at the same times as the animals were found dead.

The Indian Tea Planters' Association, on its part, assured the foresters of the garden owners' co-operation on the pesticide issue, but wanted to know what steps the FD has taken to stop elephants from foraging into the plantations. It is estimated that there are at least 70 tea gardens in the region located close to reserve forests and protected areas including the elephant corridor stretching from Mechi on the Indo-Nepal border to Sankosh on Indo-Bhutan border.

Source: 'Whiff of poison prompts forest letter,' *The Telegraph*, 01/08/08

#### **Leopard killed by train dead in North Bengal**

An adult male leopard suspected to have been hit by a speeding night train was found dead on the railway tracks near Songachi Tea Estate in the Dooars in the month of August. The body bore injury marks on one of the hind legs, skull, ears and tail; and was sent for the post-mortem examination at Gorumara National Park.

The railways have denied that the leopard died of collision, arguing that the animal has reflexes too quick to permit such accidents. Hinting at revenge killing instead, the additional divisional manager of the Northeast Frontier Railways at Alipurduar, P.M. Mondal, said that the leopard was probably killed when it strayed into human habitation near the tea gardens to feed on cattle or chickens, and was then dumped on the tracks.

Wildlife experts, however, dismissed this theory, holding that anyone with the intent getting rid of the body could've hidden it in the nearby forests instead.

A number of wild animals continue to be killed similarly in train accidents on this route that passes through five protected areas in the North Bengal region (see *PA Updates* Vol. XIII, Nos. 6 & 3; Vol XII, No. 3 and Nos. 49, 47, 43, 39, 36, 34, 32 & 29).

The more recent incidents include two that occurred about a year ago, each of which resulted in the death of an elephant in an accident with the same train (Jhajha-bound Guwahati Jhajha Express) and another one involving a tiger.

Source: 'Leopard dead on tracks,' *The Telegraph*, 13/08/08

## PERSPECTIVE

### Ten years of 'Indian Birds' – looking back, looking ahead!

Birdwatching, like anything else, is about passion and conviction, about people and about reaching out to others who share this passion.

In the earlier, pre-internet era, we connected by subscribing to magazines or writing letters to share experiences, seek information or to get assistance. Cities might have had small communities of local birdwatchers, but in most other parts, a birdwatcher was a slightly cranky individual, who spent much time walking the countryside alone with a pair of primitive binoculars, taking notes of the birdlife around him. The scribbles in the field were then validated with a few books that may have been available.

The internet changed this end-1990s onwards. First were the email-based groups that helped birdwatchers share their notes and obtain quick answers. Though connectivity was still patchy, strong, well-connected birdwatching communities had taken shape in all large cities and more loosely, pan-India, by the early 2000s. Advances in digital cameras also started to bring in more new enthusiasts into birding and wildlife photography. The social media platform that so much dominate our lives today also began to make inroads about a decade ago and Facebook was launched in India towards the end of 2007.

It was in November 2008, just as Facebook was starting to create a buzz in India that I conceived of the idea of bringing birders from across India together through a Facebook group 'Indian Birds'. The idea was not new since the email-based group earlier, and even today, serve a similar purpose. However, social media that rules our lives today is a different beast and requires a different kind of handling in order to retain its core purpose while also providing an open platform to the members.

Today 'Indian Birds' has nearly 1.3 lakh members; arguably, the largest online community of Indian bird enthusiasts. Admittedly, not everyone is active but statistics

suggest that participation is high across the membership. Over 500 posts are uploaded every day and other daily interactions run to over ten thousand. 'Indian Birds' provides an unmatched platform for bird enthusiasts to connect with others who share their passion about Indian ornithology. Numerous significant reports have been shared here, including first India records of several species.

This growth wouldn't have been possible without a careful nurturing and support by the team of admins. In order to avoid adhocism in functioning, we have carefully laid out policies for uploads and interactions. These guidelines were put in place after detailed discussions with the members. The panel of admins and moderators are carefully chosen and we also have a 'redress mechanism' to address any concerns and complaints

As we turned ten earlier this month, many suggestions have come in about how the group and its vast membership may be further leveraged to help the cause of the birds we all love. We're evaluating these suggestions carefully to ensure 'Indian Birds' continues to provide an unmatched platform for connecting Indian bird enthusiasts, while simultaneously helping the cause of birds through education, advocacy and conservation.

- **Kanwar B Singh** is one of the founder-moderators of Indian Birds.  
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