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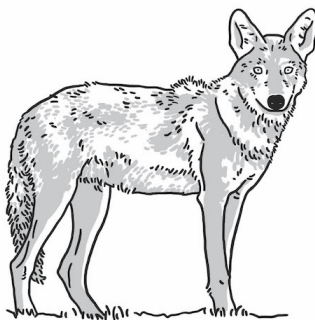
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## EDITORIAL

### A season of loss

Loss of members of endangered species, fear of loss of entire species, loss of habitats, loss of protection, loss of livelihoods...if there is one sentiment that most animates the *PA Update* – particularly the editorial – it is that of loss. Regular readers will recognise it immediately, as perhaps will most who are interested in conservation and related issues. It is not for nothing that conservation science is considered a ‘crisis’ discipline and the trope of loss is central to that idea.

But the loss we discuss this time is of a completely different kind – of a sub-set from our own species, of a set of exceptional individuals who form what we might call the conservation community. The two months since the publishing of the last issue of the *PA Update* has seen an unrelenting stream, almost an avalanche, of news of the passing away of individuals who fought some of the most important environmental and conservation battles of the last three decades. It could be plain coincidence, but it’s still striking how many of them decided to move on at roughly the same time.

Samir Acharya, Ajay Desai, T Peter, Ulhas Rane, BM Parasharya... these might not be names familiar to all readers of the *PA Update*, but there can be no doubt that they are well-known to a significant subset. Each one a pioneer, each one passionately involved in what they believed in, each representing important ideas and ideals and each of whom is not with us today. And for this reason this is a rather atypical issue of this newsletter – it could well have been called an obituaries special.

The obituary is a rather special genre of writing. It is the record of an important moment as much as it is a brief record of the life just lived. It is an opportunity to mourn

and importantly, as most obituaries will do, pay homage. No life can be captured within 600 words (even books can’t do that), but the short obits we carry this time provide a glimpse of the cumulative depth and the vastness of the world that we are part of and indeed the challenges before us.

A dominant line of thinking in conservation suggests that only species matter, individuals don’t. There is no denying, however, that it is in our species more than any other that individuals matter as much as they do. This is perhaps why we are human, why we are what we are. This is why we write obituaries and this is why we remember. This is why loss matters so much in the first place. That is why we perhaps believe that some losses are avoidable and unnecessary even as others are not. That is why we will eventually accept the departure of individuals of our species but find it unacceptable that entire species or systems should be subject to the same fate on account of our actions. It is individuals who lead us in these endeavours... ..and the cycle continues!

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### CHHATTISGARH

#### Coal ministry to acquire protected forest for mining in Hasdeo Arand

According to a notice published in a Raipur-based newspaper on October 15 the Union Coal Ministry will acquire 1,760 ha of land in Surguja for mining, 98 per cent of which is protected forest. The ministry plans to acquire the land under section 7(1) of the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, which allows the central government, if it is satisfied that coal is extractable from the whole or part of a tract of land, to acquire it for mining within two years

of notifying that it intends to prospect for coal in the area.

The notice states that the notification intending to acquire the land was issued on May 11, 2020 following which some corrections had been made in the area to be acquired, which is being published as a notice in the newspaper. The Supreme Court had on September 30 observed, however, that if an area falls in an eco-sensitive zone, neither the Centre nor the state government would have the right to mine it.

Kente extension, the coal block in question, is in the Hasdeo-Arand coalfield and has total coal resources estimated at 200 million tonnes. Hasdeo Arand, however, is one of the largest contiguous stretches of very dense forest in central India spanning 170,000 ha and has 22 coal blocks. In 2009, the environment ministry had categorised Hasdeo Arand to be a 'no-go' zone for mining because of its rich forest cover, but opened it again to mining because the policy hadn't been finalized.

Following resistance by the Chhattisgarh government recently (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5 & 4) Pralhad Joshi, Union minister for coal and mines, had accepted a proposal by the Chhattisgarh government to exclude five coal blocks in Hasdeo Arand which were among 41 coal mines being auctioned. Those excluded from the auction include Morga -2, Morga (south), Madanpur (north), Shyang, and Fathehpur (east).

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Centre may acquire land for mining in protected area', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 19/10/2020.

## HIMACHAL PRADESH

### **Nine new species of fauna discovered in Himachal in 2019**

Nine new species of animals were discovered in Himachal Pradesh in 2019, according to Animal Discoveries 2019 released recently by

the Zoological Survey of India (See National News section).

The nine include a fish, a moth, a caddisfly, two wasps, and four true bugs. A true bug, *Pealius satakshiae*, was named after Satakshi, a high school student who first indicated the occurrence of this species in the Chail Wildlife Sanctuary. A new wasp found in Shimla has been named after Dr. Kailash Chandra, ZSI's director.

Besides the nine discoveries, new records of five species were found in the state. These include a fly from Nagar Castle in Kullu and two species of flies in Jubbal. In Kinnaur's Sangla valley, an amoeba-like organism named *Cyclopyxis leidy* earlier known from France and Indonesia was reported for the first time in India. Sangla also reported a new record of another single-celled organism, *Assulina quadratum*, earlier known from parts of Europe.

Source: Gagandeep Singh Dhillon. 'Himachal: 9 new animal species discovered; one named after high school student', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 24/10/2020.

## MAHARASHTRA

### **ESZ notified around Radhanagari WLS**

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has notified an area of 250.66 sq. km around the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) as an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). The demarcated area extends from 200 m to six km from the boundary of the sanctuary. The final notification that was issued on October 15 states that "all new and existing mining (minor and major minerals), stone quarrying and crushing units shall be prohibited with immediate effect except for meeting domestic needs of local residents, including digging up land for construction or repair work of houses within eco-sensitive zone."

Areas around the sanctuary located towards the southern hills of the Sahyadri

range are being considered for mining activities. Activists said that there were at least two bauxite mining projects underway in the area, while one was in the exploratory stage. In October 2018, the Supreme Court had ordered a mining company to stop operations at Durgmanwadi (within 10 km of sanctuary) as it was allegedly operating within the ESZ limits of the sanctuary without a wildlife clearance (*PA Update* Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5 & 3). On March 6, 2019, the mine's environmental clearance was "kept in abeyance" by an order of the MoEFCC.

As many as 41 villages from Kolhapur and Sindhudurg districts fall in the ESZ. Certain activities such as organic farming, agro-forestry, cottage industries and minor infrastructure work that are permitted, will be regulated and promoted, and are listed in the final notification. A zonal master plan will be prepared within two years from the date of publication for the protection of the ESZ. A monitoring committee headed by the Kolhapur district collector has also been formed.

Source: 'Environment ministry declares 250 sq. km area around Radhanagari wildlife sanctuary as eco-sensitive zone', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 23/10/2020.

### **Five persons submit fake documents to claim rights under FRA in Melghat TR**

Officials of the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) have said five people were caught submitting fake documents to claim rights on forest land in the TR under provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA). The matter came to light when, at the sub-divisional level committee (SDLC) meeting held on 29 September 2020, documents submitted by the five to claim rights in compartment numbers 475 and 476 in Hatru under Sipna wildlife division of the reserve were found to be fake.

Officials realised that all the five claimants had used offence registered (POR

No. 4/10 dated March 23, 1984) against them for illicit grazing to claim rights on forest land and had tampered with names while getting the photocopies of the same.

Forest officials expressed the fear that there could be many more such cases of fake claims. To avoid such malpractices and bring transparency, the forest department has asked collector to upload claim titles on the web.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'FRA claimants doctor papers to get rights in Melghat', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 17/10/2020.

### **No entry for private vehicles inside SGNP**

Private vehicles will, henceforth, be prohibited from entering into the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). 16 battery-operated buses are being deployed to ferry people inside the park, especially to the Kanheri caves. A parking lot, with a capacity to accommodate 300 cars, is under construction near the SGNP's entrance. And, walkers will be allowed between 5.30 am and 7.30 am on a marked trail inside the forest.

The decision is in response to the situation earlier where private vehicles heading towards Kanheri caves caused traffic jams inside the park, especially on weekends. On an average, the park sees 100 private vehicles daily and the SGNP director has noted they cause considerable disturbance to the animals here.

Source: Sanjana Bhalerao. 'Mumbai: No private vehicles to be allowed inside SGNP, 16 battery-operated buses to ferry passengers', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 07/10/2020.

### **Human-tiger conflict increasing in Maharashtra; 31 people killed till September this year**

Tigers have killed 31 people in Maharashtra in the first nine months of 2020. The state also

witnessed the most – 57 human deaths - in wild animal attacks, equaling the previous high of 2016, during this period. Recent data tabled in the Lok Sabha shows that Maharashtra also has the highest annual deaths due to human-tiger conflict in India since 2014. Thirty-one is the highest number of people killed by tigers in one year in the state over the past decade, with a total number of humans killed since 2010 being 153.

A National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India study on the status of tigers had in 2018-19 found Chandrapur to be the region with maximum human-tiger conflict. Forests in Chandrapur are home to 175 of the 312 tigers in the state. 82 of the 175 are in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, 23 in Central Chanda, 31 across Chandrapur forest areas including Pandharkawada, and 39 in the Brahmapuri forests. The district reported just five deaths in 2016 but this shot up to 11 in 2017, 17 in 2018 and to 24 in 2019. In 2020, 26 of the 31 deaths in Maharashtra reported thus far have been from Chandrapur district.

In an effort to deal with the situation and mitigate the conflict, the State Board for Wildlife had during its 15th meeting in August earlier this year recommended the formation of a committee to study and deliberate measures to reduce the population of tigers. Accordingly, the Maharashtra government has set up an 11-member committee, which will submit its report by December 31. Chandrapur's chief conservator of forest, NR Praveen, is the head of this committee (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5, 4; Vol. XXV, No. 5 & 1).

During the corona virus related lockdown phase (March to May), Maharashtra witnessed 11 human deaths in tiger attacks. So far, five tigers involved in the conflicting situations have been captured. This includes one animal one each from Yavatmal and Gondia, while the remaining were from Chandrapur. Also, the demand by political leaders to shoot down tiger RT-1, who is

allegedly responsible for eight human kills in Rajura and neighbouring forest ranges since February, has intensified following the failed attempts to capture it.

Other deaths in tiger attacks have been reported from Yavatmal, Gondia, Gadchiroli, Bhandara and Nagpur districts this year, with each of these regions reporting one such incident.

Tiger population in Maharashtra has increased from 103 in 2006 to 168 in 2010, 190 in 2014 and is 312 as per the latest assessment in 2018-19. Total number of people killed by wild animals in Maharashtra between 2010 and 2020 stands at 467, data from the state forest department has revealed.

Source: Badri Chatterjee. 'Maharashtra sets up Chandrapur human-tiger conflict resolution study group; report by Dec 31', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 08/10/2020.

'Netas demand shoot order for Rajura tiger', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 08/10/2020.

Badri Chatterjee. '31 killed in tiger attacks across Maharashtra in 2020, highest in a year since 2010', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 03/10/2020.

## ODISHA

### Eco-retreat festival at Bhitarkanika NP

Odisha state's tourism department is set to organize a three-month eco-retreat festival in Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) from December 1, 2020 to February 28, 2021 to attract domestic and international tourists to the country's second largest mangrove forest.

The festival will be organized on the banks of a river at Nalitapatia village, six km from the park. 15 luxury tents equipped with water and power connection and having parking facilities will be set up for the tourists. Cultural shows, food festivals, trekking in the forest and a visit to the nearby

beach at Penthla will be organized for the visitors during their stay. A photo exhibition, a seminar and exhibition of films on Bhitarkanika and other wildlife will also be organized during the three-month period. The festival, it is hoped, will help generate income for the local communities, said the divisional forest officer of the park.

In a bid to attract more tourists, particularly foreigners, the authorities have also built cottages at Habelikothi, Gupti, and Dangamal.

The state government had earlier organized a month-long eco-retreat festival along the Marine Drive on Chandrabhaga beach near the famous Konark sun temple from December 14, 2019.

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Bhitarkanika to host three-month eco retreat', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 24/10/2020.

## TAMIL NADU

### **Apex court upholds state's authority to notify elephant corridor in the Nilgiris**

The Supreme Court recently upheld the Tamil Nadu government's authority to notify an 'elephant corridor' and protect the migratory path of the animals through the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR). The corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau, which connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats and sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity. It has the Nilgiri hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar river valley on its northeastern side. The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water depending on the monsoon.

A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice SA Bobde said that it is the State's duty to protect a "keystone species", which are immensely important to the environment. "Elephant corridors allow elephants to continue their nomadic mode of survival, despite shrinking forest cover, by facilitating

travel between distinct forest habitats... these corridors play a crucial role in sustaining wildlife by reducing the impact of habitat isolation," Justice S Abdul Nazeer, who wrote the judgment, observed.

The judgment came in response to 32 appeals filed by resorts/private land owners against a Madras High Court (HC) decision of July 2011 that had confirmed an earlier, August 2010 order notifying the elephant corridor (*PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 5).

The court set up a three-member inquiry committee of former Madras HC judge, Justice K Venkatraman, Ajay Desai, consultant to World Wide Fund for Nature-India, and Praveen Bhargava, trustee, Wildlife First. Appellants can approach the committee within four months with their complaints against the action taken by the Nilgiris collector, which included sealing of their buildings, and allegations about the "arbitrary variance in acreage of the elephant corridor".

The court had taken serious note of a report filed by amicus curiae, advocate ADN Rao, to seal or demolish 821 buildings, except tribal houses, within the areas marked as elephant corridor by the Tamil Nadu government. Rao had suggested a rehabilitation plan for 186 households belonging to Scheduled Caste, Backward Caste and Most Backward Caste people.

In 2011, the HC had held that the government was authorised by the Centre's 'Project Elephant' to earmark the corridor since there was no impediment in the Wildlife Protection Act. It had held that the state government's action to identify the corridor was in complete obligation to its duties under Article 51-A(g) of the Constitution, which said it was the duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including wildlife.

Source: Krishnadas Rajagopal. 'Supreme Court upholds 2011 Madras HC order on T.N. elephant corridor', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 14/10/2020.

## UTTARAKHAND

### Centre rejects ‘temporary’ land-use change in Rajaji NP for Maha Kumbh

Citing forest laws, the Centre has rejected the Uttarakhand government’s plans to temporarily divert a patch of the Rajaji National Park (NP) for the construction of housing, toilets and parking facilities for the Haridwar Maha Kumbh pilgrims. Calling it ‘an exceptional case’, the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) had sought the Union environment ministry’s nod for the transfer of 778 ha of the park and Narendra Nagar Forest Division to the Kumbh Mela Samiti in order to initiate ‘temporary’ construction work for the devotees. The state government had asked for the area of the NP to remain with the Kumbh Mela Samiti for nine months, from September 1, 2020 to May 31, 2021.

The state government was initially expecting 10 crore pilgrims for the religious event but has scaled down the number to around four crore on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Centre, however, returned the proposal refusing to list it for discussion before the Forest Advisory Committee. It pointed out that the diversion would be a violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Forest Conservation Act, 1980. Wildlife activists had already pointed out that the proposal is in blatant violation of both the Acts.

On its part, the FD said it has already started radio-collaring the elephants in the region to monitor their movement in the hope that they will be able to prevent human-animal conflict and keep them away from the 100-odd ghats in the holy town during the Maha Kumbh.

Source: Archana Jyoti. ‘Centre rejects U’khand Govt’s plan for use of Rajaji Park for Kumbh’, [www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com), 19/10/2020.

### Tiger population in Corbett TR up by 21 in one year

The annual tiger population estimation exercise carried out recently by the Uttarakhand Forest Department and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) shows that the tiger population in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) has gone up to 252 - an increase of 21 from 231 in one year. Of the total 252 animals, 119 were identified as females and 91 as males. The sex could not be determined in 41 cases.

In July this year, a report titled ‘Status of Tigers Co-predators and Prey in India’, released by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change revealed that the CTR has 14 tigers per 100 sq. km, which is the highest in India. The total number inside the reserve was 231, while the number utilising the reserve was 266.

Source: Vineet Upadhyay. ‘Corbett tiger count goes up by 21 in one year, stands at 252 now: Survey’, [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 05/10/2020.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### Finance ministry recommends MoEFCC disengagement from WII, IIFM and three other institutions

The Union finance ministry has recommended that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) disengage from five autonomous institutions working under it and merge two others, thus reducing the 16 autonomous organisations under the MoEFCC to nine. The recommendation is part of an exercise carried out by the department of expenditure (DoE) for rationalisation of autonomous institutions that function under different ministries, and was sent to the Cabinet secretary on September 30.



The DoE has recommended that the MoEFCC disengage from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) in terms of financial support and administrative control. It has suggested a three-year time-frame for the disengagement, a gradual budget reduction of 25% each year and that they both be converted to deemed universities. The WII has received Rs. 34 crore and IIFM Rs. 37 crore from the Centre in 2020-21. The other three institutes recommended for disengagement include the CPR Environmental Education Centre, the Indian Plywood Industries Research & Training Institute and the Centre for Environmental Education.

Further, it has recommended that the Society of Integrated Coastal Management be merged with the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, as both perform similar roles of promoting coastal management and avoid duplication.

The DoE also recommended merging of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, which receives Rs. 14 crore annually from MoEFCC, with the ministry. It has further suggested that the Indian Council for Forest and Research Education, GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development continue to function under and with the financial support of MoEFCC.

The DoE also reviewed the functioning of five statutory bodies including the Central Pollution Control Board, National Tiger Conservation Authority and National Biodiversity Authority and recommended that they should be encouraged to become “self-financed”.

Source: ‘Govt. suggests ‘disengaging’ WII, IIFM, three other premier green institutions’, [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 20/10/2020.

Kalyan Das. ‘Govt plans to cut funds to 5 autonomous bodies’, [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 19/10/2020.

## **Retired foresters recommend lifting of ban on elephant-catching to curb conflict**

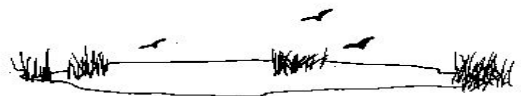
Expressing concern over the rising human-elephant conflict, some retired foresters have recommended elephant-catching as the best possible way to deal with the situation, and have approached the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) demanding lifting of the ban on elephant catching.

RS Bhadauria, who served as principal chief conservator of forests and chief wildlife warden of Uttar Pradesh, has written a letter to the MoEFCC recommending reverting back to the former system of capture, training, taming and reopening private ownership of elephants, allowing riding them in zoos, and their export to zoos abroad where there is a great demand for Asian elephants.

A former wildlife warden, Mahendra Singh, who headed the state’s last elephant-catching operation in 1977 said that the government should assess the carrying capacity of the forest area and should allow elephant-capture in areas that are overpopulated. Elephant catcher Kamaal Sheikh echoed similar views, saying lifting the ban on elephant catching will not only keep a check on the increasing population of elephants but will also revive an over 3000-year old art, locally known as mela shikaar or khedda.

As per data recently released by MoEFCC, at least 500 people and 100 elephants are killed every year in human-elephant conflicts.

Source: Oliver Fredrick. ‘Lift ban on elephant catching to curb man-jumbo conflict- Wildlife experts’, [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 17/10/2020.



## **ZSI & BSI publish new species discoveries of 2019**

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) recently released their respective Animal Discoveries 2019 and Plant Discoveries 2019.

Animal Discoveries 2019 lists 368 faunal species as new to science, and 116 species as first records from India. Among the new discoveries, 294 species are invertebrates and 74 are vertebrates. Insects outnumbered other groups in general and in vertebrates, fish diversity is high with 38 new species and five new records. With the new discoveries and new records, Indian faunal diversity stands at 1,02,161 species, which is equivalent to 6.52% of all the species across the globe.

Plant Discoveries 2019 lists 180 new plant species and 73 new records from the country. The new discoveries include 134 seed plants, five fern and fern allies, six bryophytes, 18 lichen, 51 fungi, 23 algae and 16 microbes. Vascular plants contributed to 55% of all new discoveries and new records, while non-vascular plants contributed the rest. The number of plant species found in India according to the BSI now is 50,012 and accounts roughly for 12% of all floristic species in the world.

Both the ZSI and BSI have been releasing Animal Discoveries and Plant Discoveries since 2007, and this is the 13th publication in the series. Data analysis from the past decade reveals that a total of 2,444 species of faunal communities were newly described from India, while the number of plant species described in the same period is about 3,500.

Most of the new discoveries were reported from biogeography hotspots in the country. Maximum floristic discoveries were made from the state of Kerala, followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Arunachal Pradesh, the BSI publication stated.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'Frog to fungus, 544 species add to India's diversity in 2019', [www.hindu.com](http://www.hindu.com), 09/10/2020.

## **Proposal to amend WLPA for legal status to elephant reserves**

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has proposed an amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WLPA) to accord legal status to elephant reserves (ERs) and corridors on the lines of tiger reserves (TRs). The MoEFCC has sought responses from 10 elephant range state governments on the proposed amendment, on measures to mitigate human-animal conflict and to prepare a comprehensive National Elephant Action Plan (NEAP).

In its first meeting in November 2019 a committee formed to prepare the NEAP had made several suggestions including the proposed amendment to the WLPA. Zones were also demarcated for the action plan.

DS Srivastava, a former member of the steering committee of Project Elephant said that elephant conservationists have been fighting for legal status to ERs for more than a decade. But no state is ready for this as once the legal right is given, several restrictions would come into place.

According to data shared with the Lok Sabha on September 23, close to 2,300 people have been killed by elephants in the past five years until 2019. This is 10 times the number killed by tigers.

At least 433 people have been killed by elephants across West Bengal between April 2014 and September 2019. In Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the death toll was 447, 391 and 329 respectively. 400 elephants have also been killed in the same period by poachers or through poisoning by local residents.

Source: Sanjoy Dey and Joydeep Thakur. 'Govt. seeks legal status for elephant reserves', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 05/10/2020.

## SOUTH ASIA

### Nepal

#### **Snow leopard and livestock numbers determine livestock depredation, not wild prey density: Study**

A study published recently in the journal *Ecology and Evolution*, suggests that the livestock depredation level may largely be determined by the abundances of the snow leopards and livestock in the area rather than the wild prey density. The study compared whether the extent of livestock killing by snow leopards would differ in relation to densities of wild prey, livestock and snow leopards at two sites — Upper and Lower Dolpa — inside Shey Phoksundo National Park (NP).

The researchers used the camera trap method to estimate snow leopard density and double-observer surveys to estimate the density of snow leopards' main wild prey species — the blue sheep. They also conducted household surveys to estimate livestock population and number of livestock killed by snow leopards in both Upper and Lower Dolpa.

The total livestock population of Upper Dolpa was approximately 13,000 while that of Lower Dolpa was approximately 1,600. The household surveys revealed that in 2017 a total of 487 livestock were reportedly lost to snow leopards in Upper Dolpa while the number in Lower Dolpa was 30. Goats and sheep accounted for 90 percent of the cattle loss to snow leopards. According to the livestock survey findings, the proportion of livestock lost per household was seven times higher in Upper Dolpa in comparison to Lower Dolpa. Upper Dolpa had higher snow leopard density and higher livestock density compared to Lower Dolpa. However, the blue sheep density was similar in both the regions.

The study concluded that the combined influence of higher snow leopard and livestock density appeared to have resulted in greater livestock predation in Upper Dolpa, suggesting that an increase in livestock population and/or snow leopard population could potentially intensify predation.

In recent years, the Nepal government has been focusing on managing human-snow leopard conflicts and the NP authorities have been providing relief funds to local communities to compensate for the livestock loss.

A similar study conducted in multiple sites in India and Mongolia had found that snow leopards in Asia would still prey extensively on livestock even when wild prey is available in high numbers. Another study, which had analysed 347 scat samples, collected across 5,000 sq. km in the central Himalayas in Nepal, had concluded that more than a quarter of the animals consumed by snow leopards were livestock.

Source: Chandan Kumar Mandal. 'Snow leopards are eating livestock despite availability of preys in their habitat, study finds', [www.kathmandupost.com](http://www.kathmandupost.com), 06/10/2020.



## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

### INTERNATIONAL NEWS

#### **RSPB honour for Ram Jakati for his contribution to vulture conservation**

Former chief wildlife warden, Haryana, Ram Jakati was honoured recently by Great Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for his contribution in saving endangered vultures. He had played a key role in getting the drug Diclofenac banned and also in establishing a network of sanctuaries, breeding centres and taking urgent action needed to ensure that vultures did not go extinct before the ban could be implemented.

He also helped found SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction), an international partnership that plays a coordination role in the conservation of South Asia's vultures.

Source: Bobins Abraham. 'Indian conservationist who saved vultures from extinction gets top UK honour', [www.indiatimes.com](http://www.indiatimes.com), 15/10/2020.

### HARYANA

#### **Eight White-rumped vultures released into the wild from JCBC, Haryana**

Eight White-rumped vultures were allowed to go free from the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Haryana in the month of October. These vultures, comprising six captive-bred and two rescued ones from the wild, are of the age seven-eight years and each of them has been tagged with a 30 gm satellite transmitter that will allow scientists to monitor their movements and survival. JCBC head Dr. Vibhu Prakash said that the door of the aviary will remain open so that the released birds can go back to their comfort zone till such time as they are fully acclimated to freedom. In the

first instance, however, the birds chose to remain within the confines of their enclosures and did not step out.

Prior to this release, two captive Himalayan griffon vultures had been released in June 2016 from the centre on an experimental basis. Both birds were wing-tagged and leg-ringed for identification, but had not been tagged with satellite transmitters.

A 100 km diclofenac-free zone has now been created around the JCBC to give the released vultures the best chance of survival. This area has a large number of carcass dumps and the vultures can also keep feeding from the JCBC. However, the challenge will be to get the drug control authorities and the animal husbandry department to regulate veterinary drugs harmful to vultures and ensure that farmers do not administer over-dosage of drugs to their livestock, said Dr. Prakash.

The JCBC, a joint project of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Haryana Forest Department (FD) was set up in September 2001 on the edge of the Bir Shikargah Wildlife Sanctuary in Morni hills. It is the model centre after which seven other such vulture centres were opened in the rest of the country. These eight centres hold 766 vultures currently of which the JCBC has 370. The project has had major support from the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Rufford Foundation and the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species Fund and incurs an annual running expense of Rs. six crore.

Of the 600 pairs of three critically-endangered Gyps vulture species that are slated for release in the next 10 years, the JCBC alone will feed 30-40 pairs each year.

In the meantime, the FD has also renewed its memorandum of understanding with the BNHS till 2034 for running of the centre.

Source: Vikram Jit Singh. History's vultures spurn open door, bide their time', [www.indiatimes.com](http://www.indiatimes.com), 09/10/2020.  
'Critically endangered vultures introduced into wild', [www.tribuneindia.com](http://www.tribuneindia.com), 08/10/2020.

## KERALA

### **ESZ draft notification published for Mangalavanam Bird Sanctuary**

The draft notification for the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the Mangalavanam Bird Sanctuary was published in the first week of September by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It will be taken into consideration on or after 60 days of its publication.

As per this notification, felling of trees within one km around the boundary of the sanctuary without prior permission from a competent authority in the state government is restricted. A ban has also been proposed on new commercial construction of any kind within one km from the boundary or up to the extent of the ESZ of the protected area, whichever is nearer. However, small temporary structures for eco-tourism activities are permitted and local people shall be permitted to undertake construction work in their land.

The draft notification has suggested the formation of a monitoring committee for overseeing the implementation of its provisions. While the Ernakulam District Collector will be the ex-officio chairman of the committee, the Ernakulam MLA, an expert in ecology and environment, regional officer from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board, a representative of a non-governmental organisation working in the field of environment, including heritage conservation, a wildlife expert from the Kerala Forest Research Institute and the Town Planning Officer from the Kochi Corporation will be its members.

The corporation councilor of the region, president or secretary of Mangalavanam Samrakshana Samiti, and an expert in biodiversity nominated by the State government will also be its members. The wildlife warden of the sanctuary will function as the member secretary of the committee, which will have a term of three years or till a new committee is reconstituted by the State government.

Source: 'Ban on felling of trees around Mangalavanam', [www.hindu.com](http://www.hindu.com), 12/10/2020.

## RAJASTHAN

### **Keoladeo NP facing high threat from invasives**

A study has revealed that Keoladeo National Park (NP) is facing a high threat from invasive species. The park was identified as facing 'low threat' in the invasive alien species threat level indicated in the 2017 International Union for Conservation of Nature World Heritage Outlook — the first global assessment of natural world heritage. A new study using a new methodology that was published recently in the journal *Biodiversity and Conservation*, has however categorised the site as facing 'high threat' from biological invasions.

The new method developed by Ross Shackleton, lead author of the study and faculty member at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and his team, lays out a step-by-step procedure to collect information and to report on pathways through which alien species are spreading, assessing their impact and management as well as predicting future threat and management needs, finding the status of knowledge and gaps and assigning an overall 'threat score'.

The researchers consulted with experts from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and combed through literature to assess the level of risk. They have identified 14 species that can be considered invasive in KNP – nine plants,

two fish (common carp and African catfish), two mammals (bovine and rhesus monkey) and one moth. However, formal surveys on the site could reveal more invasive species, say the researchers.

Professor K Sivakumar, head of the department of endangered species management, WII, who lent his insights to the study said that not enough attention has been

paid to invasive alien species even though the country needs a policy to deal with them on war footing and reduce the threat to biodiversity.

Source: Ruchika Uniyal. 'Bharatpur sanctuary under threat from alien species: Report', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 03/10/2020.

## Environmental Justice Atlas

### Nearly 13500 families displaced from 26 PAs between 1999 and 2019

The Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas) <https://ejatlas.org/country/india> and Kalpavriksh (KV), have launched an interactive map (<https://ejatlas.org/featured/conflictprotectedareasindia>) revealing the ways that 'wildlife conservation' undermines the rights of indigenous people and local communities living within protected areas (PA) across India. The map is a product of three years of extensive research covering 26 PAs, carried out in association with numerous organizations, activists and independent scholars working in and around these PAs.

The PA network in India has increased from 67 in 1988 to 870 in 2020, covering approximately 5% of the national territory. Approximately 4.3 million people are currently living in and around these PAs. This is contrary to the prevalent notion that such PAs are human-less expanses of pristine wilderness.

Although the major international conventions such as the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), recognize the right of the local communities and indigenous peoples in identification, governance and management of protected areas, India continues to follow a 'fortress conservation model' based on relocation of people in the belief that people and wildlife cannot co-exist. Local communities traditionally inhabiting these PAs have seen their fundamental constitutional and customary rights

systemically restricted, annihilated and violated in the name of conservation. Displacement of communities through relocation or/and evictions, dispossession, criminalization of subsistence and livelihood activities and atrocities, imprisonment and murder of local people and activists have been the consequences of these policies in many PAs, with not so positive consequences for wildlife itself.

In 2006, the Parliament of India enacted The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act 2006, also called Forest Rights Act of India (herein referred to as FRA). The FRA acknowledged the historic injustice that has been carried out on forest dwelling communities in colonial and post-colonial times and provided for recording of their rights over their traditional forests. Seen with the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area (PESA) Act in scheduled V Areas, the 2006 amendments to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, guidelines on Biodiversity Heritage Sites under the 2003 Biological Diversity Act, and earlier legal/policy measures, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and scheme, the FRA provides an opportunity to move into integrated landscape management, which combines a variety of governance and management regimes to provide greater ecological and livelihood security. The Act also provided legal and institutional mechanisms to the Gram Sabhas

(village assemblies) of the scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs) for protection and conservation of wildlife, and natural and cultural heritage from internal and external threats.

It was hoped that these legal changes would usher in a shift away from the traditional top-down approaches towards a more democratic process of conservation in the country. On the contrary and as this map reveals through specific details of 26 PAs, the situation of extreme conflicts arising out of India's conservation practice not only continues but has arguably intensified in last few decades bringing about greater polarisation between the proponents and opponent of rights based approaches to conservation. Since its inception, for example, the FRA has faced great resistance towards its implementation in PAs, especially from the forest and wildlife bureaucracy. Consequently, more than a decade later there are just a handful of PAs where rights under the FRA have been recognised.

According to the data collected and analysed for this initiative and map about 13,445 families were displaced from the 26 PAs between 1999 and 2019. In most of these cases the steps specified in the FRA and Wild Life Protection Act (WLPA) for relocation had not been completed. These include among others that rights under the FRA are recognised in full, prior and informed consent of the *gram sabha* (village council) is sought (but not under coercion, threat or by employing fraudulent methods) and a scientific study is carried out to prove that coexistence with wildlife is not possible.

While actively alienating local people, the continuous decline in wildlife habitat due to large-scale diversion of biodiversity rich areas for mega infrastructural and 'developmental' projects like roadways and railways, dams, mining etc. continues. In 2019 itself, more than 113 sq. km forest land was diverted for different

developmental projects, including over 200 ha within and around PAs and in some of the most sensitive wildlife corridors.

This thematic map is an ongoing process towards recording and analyzing the socio-environmental conflicts emerging within various protected areas in India. With the hope that highlighting these issues will create a wider debate around whether official conservation policies and praxis in India want to continue to be alienating, conflict ridden and violative of laws of land or they want to comply with and become part of a sustainable and just society with a much greater and wider support for conservation among local, national and global communities.

The list of 26 PAs:

State	Protected Area
Assam	Kaziranga TR, Manas TR
Andhra Pradesh/ Telangana	Nagarjunasagar Srisailam/ Amrabad TR
Madhya Pradesh	Kanha TR, Panna TR,
Maharashtra	Tadoba Andhari TR, Pench TR, Bhimashankar WLS, Melghat TR, Yawal WLS.
Odisha	Bhitarkanika WLS, Similipal TR
Karnataka	Nagarhole TR, Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple TR
Kerala	Wayanad WLS
Chhattisgarh	Achankmar TR, Banrawapara WLS
Rajasthan	Ranthambhore TR, Sariska TR
Tamil Nadu	Mudumalai TR
Uttarakhand	Corbett TR, Rajaji TR
Uttar Pradesh	Dudhwa TR
West Bengal	Jaldapara WLS, Buxa TR, Sundarbans TR

**For more information:**

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## Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

An assortment of research findings from across the country

**1. Three new species of *Protosticta* Selys, 1885 (Odonata: Zygoptera: Platystictidae) from the Western Ghats, India, with taxonomic notes on *P. mortoni* Fraser, 1922 and rediscovery of *P. rufostigma* Kimmins, 1958**

**Author(s):** Shantanu Joshi, K.A. Subramanian, R. Babu, Dattaprasad Sawant, Krushnamegh Kunte

**Keywords:** Odonata, *Protosticta*, New species description, taxonomy, species rediscovery, endemic species, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu

**Summary:** Three new species of *Protosticta* (Reedtail damselflies) have been described from the Western Ghats. *Protosticta cyanofemora* sp. nov. was found in Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Kerala and Kalakkad Mundanthurai TR, Tamil Nadu (TN); *P. myristicaensis* sp. nov. was found in Shivamogga, Karnataka and *P. sholai* sp. nov. in Meghamalai WLS, TN. Taxonomic validity of *P. mortoni* was established with fresh specimens from Hassan, Karnataka. *P. rufostigma* was rediscovered from Kanyakumari WLS, TN.

**Link:**

<https://www.biotaxa.org/Zootaxa/article/view/zootaxa.4858.2.1>

**2. A novel, diminutive *Hemiphyllodactylus* Bleeker, 1860 (Squamata: Gekkonidae) from a sacred grove in Odisha, eastern India**

**Author(s):** Pratyush P. Mohapatra, Akshay Khandekar, Sushil K. Dutta, Cuckoo Mahapatra, Ishan Agarwal

**Keywords:** Reptilia, Biogeography, conservation, northern Eastern Ghats, taxonomy

**Summary:** *Hemiphyllodactylus minimus* sp. nov., a distinct new species of gecko is described from a sacred grove near Humma in Ganjam, Odisha. It is the first member of its genus to be described from Odisha as well as

the first species of *Hemiphyllodactylus* to be known from < 100 m asl.

**Link:**

<https://www.biotaxa.org/Zootaxa/article/view/zootaxa.4852.4.6>

**3. Five new species of trap-door spiders (Araneae: Mygalomorphae: Idiopidae) from India**

**Author(s):** Manju Siliwal, Rajshekhar Hippargi, Archana Yadav, Dolly Kumar

**Keywords:** New Species description, Idiopidae, taxonomy, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand

**Summary:** Five new species of trap-door spiders - *Heligmomerus wii* from Wildlife Institute of India main campus, Dehradun, Uttarakhand; *Idiops bonny*, *I. reshma*, & *I. sally* from Vansda National Park, Dangs, Gujarat and *I. vankhede* from Siddheshwar Van Vihar, Solapur, Maharashtra, have been described.

**Link:**

<https://www.threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/5434>

**4. Detecting disturbed forest tracts in the Sariska Tiger Reserve, India, using forest canopy density and fragmentation models**

**Author(s):** Purva Jain, Raihan Ahmed, Sufia Rehman, Haroon Sajjad

**Keywords:** Forest disturbance, Fragmentation, Canopy density, Sariska Tiger Reserve

**Summary:** A disturbance map produced using fragmentation and canopy density models by comparing single-scene images of Landsat-5 (1989) and Landsat-8 (2015) revealed the level of forest disturbance in Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan.

**Link:**

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40808-020-00755-4>



**5. Rediscovery of *Madhuca diplostemon* (Sapotaceae) -a threatened species of the Western Ghats after a hiatus of 184 years**

**Author(s):** Shailajakumari S., Santhosh Kumar E.S., Sreekala A.K., Parthipan, B. & R. Prakashkumar

**Keywords:** Endemic species, Kerala, Kollam district, Madhuca, Sacred Grove, Sapotaceae

**Summary:** *Madhuca diplostemon*, an endangered species of flora in the IUCN Red List, has been rediscovered from a sacred grove near Paravur in Kollam district, Kerala.

**Link:**

<https://www.rheedeia.in/journal/NdT9fvjQ>

**6. The balancing act: Maintaining leopard-wild prey equilibrium could offer economic benefits to people in a shared forest landscape of central India**

**Author(s):** Mahi Puri, Arjun Srivathsa, Krithi K. Karanth, Imran Patel, N. Samba Kumar

**Keywords:** Carnivores, Diet, Ecosystem services, Human-felid interactions, India, Occupancy, *Panthera pardus*

**Summary:** This study has been carried out through field surveys, questionnaire surveys and scat analysis to detect indirect signs of leopards in the reserve forests between Kanha and Pench National Parks in Madhya Pradesh.

**Link:**

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1470160X19309264?dgcid=author>

**7. Population assessment of the Endangered Nilgiri tahr *Nilgiritragus hylocrius* in the Anamalai Tiger Reserve, using the double-observer survey method**

**Author(s):** Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi, Divya Mudappa, Munib Khanyari, T R Shankar Raman, Devika Rathore, M Ananda Kumar, Jenis Patel

**Keywords:** Capture–recapture, double observer method, endemic, Nilgiri tahr, *Nilgiritragus hylocrius*, mountain ungulate, population estimation, Western Ghats

**Summary:** In Tamil Nadu's Anamalai Tiger Reserve, 510 individuals of Nilgiri tahr, an

endangered species of mountain ungulate endemic to the Western Ghats of India, are estimated to be present as per surveys conducted between February–March 2018.

**Link:**

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605319000553>

**8. Patterns in distribution of butterfly assemblages at different habitats of Corbett Tiger Reserve, Northern India**

**Author(s):** Manoj Kumar Arya, Dayakrishna, Aman Verma

**Keywords:** Abundance, Habitats, Nymphalidae, Pieridae, Status, Threats

**Summary:** A total of 56 species of butterflies belonging to five families were recorded during surveys conducted from July 2013 to June 2014 in six different habitats of Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand. Thirty species of the total were new records for the reserve.

**Link:**

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42965-020-00077-7>

**9. Remote Sensing approach to evaluate anthropogenic influences on Forest Cover of Palamau Tiger Reserve, Eastern India**

**Author(s):** Binita Kumari, Arvind Chandra Pandey and Amit Kumar

**Keywords:** Population density, Settlement density, Remote sensing and GIS, Palamau Tiger Reserve

**Summary:** An analysis of forest cover using the satellite imagery from Landsat TM, ETM<sup>+</sup>, and OLI during 1975–2015 shows a gradual decrease in forest cover of Jharkhand's Palamau Tiger Reserve. An overall decrease of 14.55 sq. km in the forest cover was observed.

**Link:**

<https://ecologicalprocesses.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s13717-020-0219-z>

This section has been collated by Anand Pendharkar and Aradhya Sardesai (SPROUTS Environment Trust, Mumbai).

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## OBITUARIES

### Passing of Ajay Desai, a great loss to elephant conservation

- AJT Johnsingh

Ajay Desai, a marine biologist from Karnataka University, joined the US Fish and Wildlife Service funded Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) elephant project in the year 1982. I initiated the project in the Mudumalai landscape with Ajay Desai and N. Sivaganesan (another researcher) under the tutelage of Mr. JC Daniel of BNHS who had served as the Chairperson, Asian Elephant Specialist Group.

The Mudumalai landscape continued to be the main study area for Ajay Desai but over the years his knowledge of elephants grew so much that he had the distinction to be the Co-Chair of IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group and was a member of several other important committees in India, related to elephant conservation. Apart from India, he had worked on elephant and other large mammal conservation and training field officers in a range of countries, viz. Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Malaysia.

As he was knowledgeable, good natured, passionate and dedicated to conservation, he was immensely respected and liked by all of his colleagues. He had developed a special rapport with the Kuruba tribals in Mudumalai WLS who have immense knowledge of the forests and its denizens. He also trained many students from AVC College, Mayuram, Tamil Nadu in various aspects related to elephant research and this was remarkable as these students coming from rural background lacked fluency in English.

His recent assignment was as part of the three-member committee (the other two were Justice K. Venkatraman, former

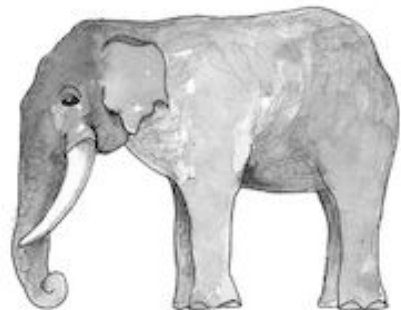
judge, Madras High Court, and Praveen Bhargava, trustee, Wildlife First) appointed by the Supreme Court of India to help the Government of Tamil Nadu establish the Sigur (Singara) corridor, a crucial elephant pathway in the Mudumalai landscape. He made his only field visit in recent months in November for work of this committee.

Soon after his demise I learnt from his wife Shanthi that he had been completely home-bound because of COVID-19 and had been sitting in front of his laptop and working on conservation related documents day and night. This was possibly slowly telling on his health.

Neeraj Khera, GIZ, New Delhi with whom Ajay was working and developing guidelines for addressing human-wildlife conflict in India, informed me that Ajay had informed Shanthi of high blood pressure on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November. She'd advised him rest, yet he worked through the night and died of massive heart attack in the wee hours of 20<sup>th</sup> November.

May his soul rest in peace and may god take care of his family aided by many of his trustworthy friends.

- **AJT Johnsingh** is Member, Asian Elephant Specialist Group.  
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## Samir Acharya: A voice for the islands\*

- Pankaj Sekhsaria

I was about half his age when I met him first. Me in my mid-20s then, he touching about the half-century mark. It was two and a half decades ago - 1994 or perhaps 1995 - and I was making my first trip to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The conversation that first evening was very interesting and I was excited about the travel tips he gave me for the islands. That I did quite widely and wildly then - down to Indira Point in the deep south, then back, and up north to Diglipur. I remember him telling me about the Jarawa and the threats being faced by the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. He even sent me with a government officer friend on a jeep journey to Kadamtala via the Andaman Trunk Road at a time when the Jarawa reputation as a hostile community was at its peak.

Acharya was far ahead of most in this country on issues of the environment, of civic matters and on the rights of indigenous peoples. His was the first opposition to the introduction of exotic fish farming in the islands on grounds of ecological concerns of the oceans. He argued tirelessly to strengthen the shipping services here; road based transportation, he reasoned, would be a huge environmental and infrastructural liability here. He wanted swimming to be made compulsory in the education system and he wanted the spectacular biological diversity - the corals, the forests, the dolphins, the turtles - to all be an integral part of the school curriculum for a populace that lives completely surrounded with water.

He fought some of the most important environmental battles for the islands and was made to pay for it too - by a system that was hostile and a people that were both unable and unwilling to understand. In 2002 the Supreme Court, responding to an intervention filed jointly by his organisation, the Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology, the Bombay Natural History Society and Kalpavriksh that I represented, passed landmark orders to

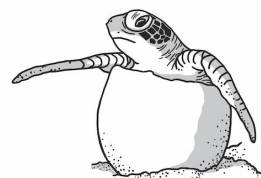
protect the island's fragile ecology and deeply vulnerable indigenous people. I was witness then to a period of his deep vulnerability and loneliness. There were accusations and threats and I realised the guts it takes to be at the centre of the action. That too in a small place where everyone knows the other. We too were accused - the outsiders intervening with no stake in the well-being of the islands and the islanders. It was an immediate lesson on the futility of creating the insider-outsider dichotomy and conflict. He understood this because he knew people located differently could do different things.

The tsunami of 2004 struck soon after and he became, like in most other situations, the go to person for anyone wanting an independent insight into what was happening. His deep understanding of the islands and his wide-networks meant he was a reliable source not just for the outsider but often for the administration and even the intelligence networks. He was always up for a good fight and fought hard for what he believed in.

Samir Acharya made his final journey in the middle of October this year. His was one of the most important voices for the islands for over three decades. It's a big loss and an irreplaceable one.

(\*This is an abridged version of the obituary that was published in *The Hindu Sunday Magazine* dated 01 November 2020)

- **Pankaj Sekhsaria** is editor, *Protected Area Update* and author of four books on the islands, including most recently, *Islands in Flux – the Andaman and Nicobar Story* (HarperLitmus, 2019).  
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## **Remembering T. Peter and his fight for an environmentalism of fishers**

- Aarthi Sridhar

On the night of 8<sup>th</sup> October this year, T. Peter, one of India's most prominent fishworker leaders passed away from COVID-19 related complications. This was an abrupt end to a life dedicated to securing the rights of small-scale fishers (SSF) and their interests.

The suddenness of Peter's death, and the fact that he succumbed to the very illness whose effects on fishworkers he was working hard to stave off, came as a shock to many of us. A week before his passing, he was organizing a statewide protest of fishworkers (scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> October) against laws affecting their livelihoods, was training fishers to get back on their feet using digital means for communication and activism, sharing information on multiple national and international platforms, even collaborating over his newsletter *Alakal's* You Tube channel highlighting threats to fisher communities from projects like the proposed 'New Shipping Corridor'. The virus however was agnostic to this full life.

Given the pandemic and the prevailing immobility, two well-attended online obituaries and memorials for Peter were organized by his close friends and colleagues from a range of important global and international networks such as the National Alliance of People's Movements and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples. Peter's close friends and colleagues in the fishworker movement shared important insights into his little-known personal life and the making of a leader. Like many fishworker stalwarts of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), the national-level body where Peter served as general secretary for many years, Peter's own life appeared to have little separation of the personal and professional.

I was fortunate to witness Peter's contributions to the fishworker movement and will remember him most for his politics - the principles and ideals by which he fought

trenchantly, how he forgave quickly, and how he would reorient his energies.

He might be best remembered for raising the question of representation in people's movements. Peter was regularly vocal about issues of identity and leadership in the fishworker movement and was outspoken about 'positionality' long before it was a buzzword. He argued strongly for organic intellectuals from fisher communities themselves to take on the role of leaders, even as he was aware of the inherent challenges this posed to complex leadership challenges in a dynamic fishing sector and the changes in our deeply networked and globalized world.

Another significant aspect was Peter's position on the funding of non-party political campaigns - people's movements. He was attentive to the effects of money power on tainting campaigns or derailing agendas and urged the use of legitimate and mass-based fund-raising campaigns. Despite the rising atomization and fragmentation among fishing communities he continued to use time-tested mobilization and conscientization mechanisms. *Alakal*, a Malayalam newsletter that he produced was almost always a loss-making venture, but nonetheless, his favoured method of being in conversation with people.

Peter followed a long and impressive line of fishworker leaders who were prescient enough to bring together the question of rights of the 'traditional' fisheries sector and the rising coastal environmentalism right from the 1980s. He was steadfast in his opposition to destructive fisheries and haphazard maritime industrialization, and often worked in collaboration with environmentalists to leverage legal spaces such as the Coastal Regulation Zone regulations and even with 'green' lawyers to explore judicial means of redressal. His support ultimately always was firmly for grassroots environmentalisms and its myriad street practices.

As a national and international leader and spokesperson for SSF, he understood the power of the written word, media and digital

technologies and platforms and allowed them a new place in his campaigns. His ability to accommodate the new, keep conversations alive while constantly building alliances is a lesson for those wishing to advance the interests of SSF through collectives. In the wake of the death of leaders like Peter who straddled the long life-spans of people's movements comes a collective grief and loss whose contours are yet unknown.

- **Aarthi Sridhar** is Programme Head at Dakshin Foundation. Views here are personal.  
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### **The birdman of Gujarat: BM Parasharya** - IR Gadhvi

It was Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020. I called Dr. BM Parasharya on his cell phone asking bhai (as I usually called him) if we should go birding in the afternoon? "Yeah," he responded with his customary zeal, "lovely, but why don't you join us right now at Victoria Park (a reserve forest in Bhavnagar). He was with a group of students of zoology, teaching them about butterflies. We birded till late that evening and as the light was not favourable for photography, we planned to visit the place again after a couple of days. That day, however, will never come. I received a call from Dr. Dishant, his nephew at 10 pm on 9<sup>th</sup> Oct., that we have lost the warrior, as he had himself lost the battle against COVID-19.

Dr. Bhavbhuti Mukundray Parasharya was sixth of seven children of Smt. Nirmalaben and great poet and writer, Shri. Mukundray Parasharya. He did his BSc in zoology from Bhavnagar and went to Vadodara for an M.Sc. in zoology with specialization in ornithology and fishery biology from the MS University, Baroda. His Ph.D. thesis was on the biology of the Indian Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* (Bosc.) under the supervision of Prof. RM Naik from Saurashtra University, Rajkot. He worked first for six

months in 1984 at the National Institute of Virology in Pune. Then on he held different positions at the Anand Agricultural University, Anand, in Gujarat where he was finally Senior Professor Research in the All India National Project on Agricultural Ornithology there.

Dr. Parasharya authored 112 peer reviewed research papers and nine books, one of which was on butterflies of Gujarat. He was a regular contributor to the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) since 1987 and was coordinator of the AWC programme for Gujarat from 2001 till his sad demise. He also designed two masters' degree courses: one in agricultural ornithology and the second, vertebrate pest management, which were taught in all agricultural universities in India.

He was an active member of the Research, Monitoring and Advisory Committee on Applied Ornithology constituted by the International Ornithological Congress for the term 1990-1994 & 1994-1998 and of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, from 2006 to 2020. He was also an active member of more than 10 national and three international organizations working for avian diversity and conservation. Being a member of IUCN flamingo specialist group he prepared an informative booklet on the Lesser flamingo. He was founder member of Bird Conservation Society Gujarat and served as joint secretary, secretary and vice president and chief editor of *Flamingo*, the newsletter of the society.

His demise is a great loss to scientific community of our country.

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## **Ulhas Rane - a naturalist to the core**

- Usha Lachungpa

Ulhas was indeed the kindest and most soft-spoken person I have ever met. A man of limitless patience, he never spoke ill of anyone and was always respectful of your thoughts and opinions. A naturalist to the core - be it the world of plants, insects, the landscapes or the starry skies, he knew it all. Whatever natural history knowledge and understanding I have today, a large part of the credit goes to him; he was not just deeply observant and knowledgeable but also extremely patient and generous as a teacher.

I joined the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) as a class 12 student and started going out regularly on nature walks, bird counts, hikes and treks organized by the society for its members. I was slowly absorbed into the BNHS family and one thing that was evident was Ulhas's devotion to Renée. In our group, it was always 'Rane and Renée', or as Meena Haribal would joke 'Ranebennur and Renigunta'.

Six of us, Ulhas, Marcelin Almeida, Manek Mistry, Arati Kaikini, Meena and myself embarked on a one-month BNHS natural history expedition to Sikkim in 1980. It was a magical time and such a learning experience. Here we became friends with Ganden Lachungpa. Just out of college and in the forest department then, Ganden soon followed us to Mumbai (then Bombay) and over time we got close enough to get married. In the simple registered marriage it was my father, Ulhas and Manek who signed as witnesses. Our bonds were further sealed.

In 2005 when the Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Government of Sikkim, needed to create a butterfly park and a bird park as part of a CSR activity, I suggested Ulhas' name as not only a landscape architect but someone with immense knowledge of natural history. Earlier in 1994 he also created another butterfly park as a 'Butterfly Valley' at Golaghat, Assam, for Numaligarh Refinery

Ltd. As one of his teammates then I saw how he never undertook any project without a thorough research into the area and its surroundings as far as a 5-10 km radius. I learnt that this is how perfection can be aimed at without compromise on quality.

He had so many accomplishments that just reading his CV was exhausting. He created the Conservation Education Centre of the BNHS adjoining the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai, which through its sterling work has benefitted lakhs of students and others sympathetic towards nature or in awe of natural history. He was also Honorary Secretary, BNHS, for the period 1990-1992. Under his Envirodesigners banner, he executed a slew of projects including the Maharashtra/Mahim Nature Park in 1983, Rutuchakra Nature Park (Flower Calendar Park) in 1998 (both in Mumbai), Heritage landscape project at the world famous Ajanta and Ellora Caves in 2001, Zoological park at Surat, Gujarat in 1993, and these were only a few of his achievements.

In addition to his deep association with the BNHS he was Founder Member, SACON (Salim Ali Centre of Ornithology and Natural History) Coimbatore, and active in many organizations and fora like the Save Sahyadri Movement and Maharashtra Pakshimitra.

I am grateful that he was part of my life and heartbroken that he is no more. So cruel that he was snatched away by the COVID-19 virus without giving us a chance to say goodbye. My heart goes out to Renée, and brilliant scientist that she is, I hope she has the strength to carry on guiding young conservationists and living a life without an ever-loving Ulhas by her side. My time with him is just a speck in the vast ocean of experience and sagacity that was Ulhas, but I will treasure it as long as I live.

- **Usha Lachungpa** is Founder Member, Sikkim Ornithological Society and Member, Sikkim Biodiversity Board.  
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## **FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago**

*PA Update 88, December 2010*

### **NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA**

#### **India, Norway to collaborate for protecting biodiversity**

India and Norway will work together for developing professional expertise in dealing with policy and legal issues relating to protection of biodiversity. Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh and his Norwegian counterpart Erik Solheim recently signed an agreement for establishing a Centre for Biodiversity Policy and Law (CEBPOL) in the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) in Chennai.

The objective of CEBPOL will be to develop professional expertise in the complex and still-evolving policy and legal issues relating to biodiversity, including access and benefit sharing, through research, development and training.

Source: 'India, Norway to collaborate for protecting biodiversity', [www.sify.com](http://www.sify.com), 19/11/2010.

#### **National Board for Wildlife reconstituted**

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) was recently constituted. The board, which is constituted for three years, has Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh as its chairman and Environment Minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh as its vice-chairman.

The NGO members of the board include the Mumbai-based Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Aaranyak from Guwahati, Satpuda Foundation from Amravati, Nature Conservation Foundation (Mysore) and Wildlife Society of Orissa (Bhubaneswar).

Among those representing the board in their individual capacities as wildlife experts are Valmik Thapar, Brijendra Singh, MK Ranjitsinh, Divyabhanusinh Chavda, Bittu Sahgal, AJT Johnsingh and Prerna Bindra. Rajya Sabha member Karan Singh and Lok Sabha MPs Chandresh Kumari and Dushyant Singh have also being nominated as its members.

The special invitees to the board would include forest officials from the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Source: 'National Board for Wildlife reconstituted', *The Pioneer*, 21/09/2010.

#### **CEE to implement gibbon conservation programme in five North-Eastern states**

The Centre for Environment Education will implement a Gibbon Conservation Program in eight clusters in five states in North East India. These are Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. A total of 130 - 150 schools will be covered under the program.

The project is being implemented as a follow up to The United States Fish and Wildlife Services grant to the Government of India in 2009 for gibbon conservation under its Great Ape Conservation Fund

Source: Akankshya Chaliha, 'Project to protect gibbons', *The Telegraph*, 20/10/2010.

## PERSPECTIVE

### Should we still be enduring manels (all-male panels)?

A Gender Diversity Database to open up our conversations

Since the pandemic, our inboxes have been filled with a flurry of emails notifying us about exciting webinars on all kinds of topics of significance to the environment. While the topics are important and interesting, those invited to share their work have mainly been men. This is not a new phenomenon. For years, diversity and inclusion have taken a back seat as panels are put together or interviews are taken. The excuse we receive when we question the occupation of public spaces by men is “But we don’t know of non-cis men (men who don’t identify their gender) working on environmental issues”

Fed up with this excuse, and to increase the diversity in panels and other public spaces, we decided to curate a crowdsourced database where women, transgender and non-binary persons working on the environment could be listed. This database seeks to usher a beginning where public discourse, through webinars, conferences, media interviews and other such spaces can be representative of the gender diversity of people working in different aspects related to the environment. The database thus far has a total of 180 names, with a majority being women, working on a range of areas from conservation science, law, and activism to sustainable architecture and farming. New names will continue to be added periodically as we update the database, and we are now looking to expand the database through making the form available in languages other than English.

Our knowledge and understanding of the world is shaped by the voices that we hear. For the discourse on the environment to be enriched, we need to look beyond the same few, and find fresher voices. With the database being publicly available, we hope

that the excuse of “not knowing names” is now a weaker and less acceptable barrier for inclusion.

The diversity database is only a start to what we hope will be a process of looking within, with the mirror held high up on how our workspaces, our conversations, our decisions are exclusionary of women and non-binary persons. Nor is gender the only such exclusion, and identities of language, caste and educational backgrounds continue to create exclusive clubs where only a few are allowed in. We hope that the gender diversity database encourages all of us to work harder to find ways to diversify our public spaces such that it is representative of the depth and richness of experience that we contain within us.

The data base can be accessed at:

<https://tinyurl.com/y3w3ae5l>

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