

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected
areas in India and South Asia

Our 150th Issue

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Because 150 is just another number 3

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Delhi: Two new members appointed on Ridge
Management Board 4

Goa: MoEFCC approves forest land diversion for projects
through Bhagawan Mahavir WLS and Mollem NP 5

Himachal Pradesh: No car rallies allowed through Kibber
WLS, other PAs in Spiti this winter 5

Kerala: FD denies presence of humans in ESZ of
Mathikettan Shola NP; local residents oppose ESZ
notification 8

Maharashtra: Sub-adult tiger killed on railway track
inside Navegaon Nagzira TR 8

Odisha: Highly contagious infection claims five elephants
in Karlapat WLS 13

Telangana: TSMDC files contradictory information about
Eturnagaram WLS & ESZ to get green clearance for
mining 13

Uttar Pradesh: Hi-tech equipment to deal with human-
tiger conflict situations in, around Pilibhit TR; Joint team
of forest, railway officials and WII inspects track through
Pilibhit TR for gauge conversion 14

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE 18

Odisha: Removal of illegal prawn gherries resumes at
Chilika; 349 ha cleaned on 1st day of drive

Contemporary research in and around protected areas:

An overview 19

OVERHERD – A visual comment 20

FROM THE ARCHIVES 23

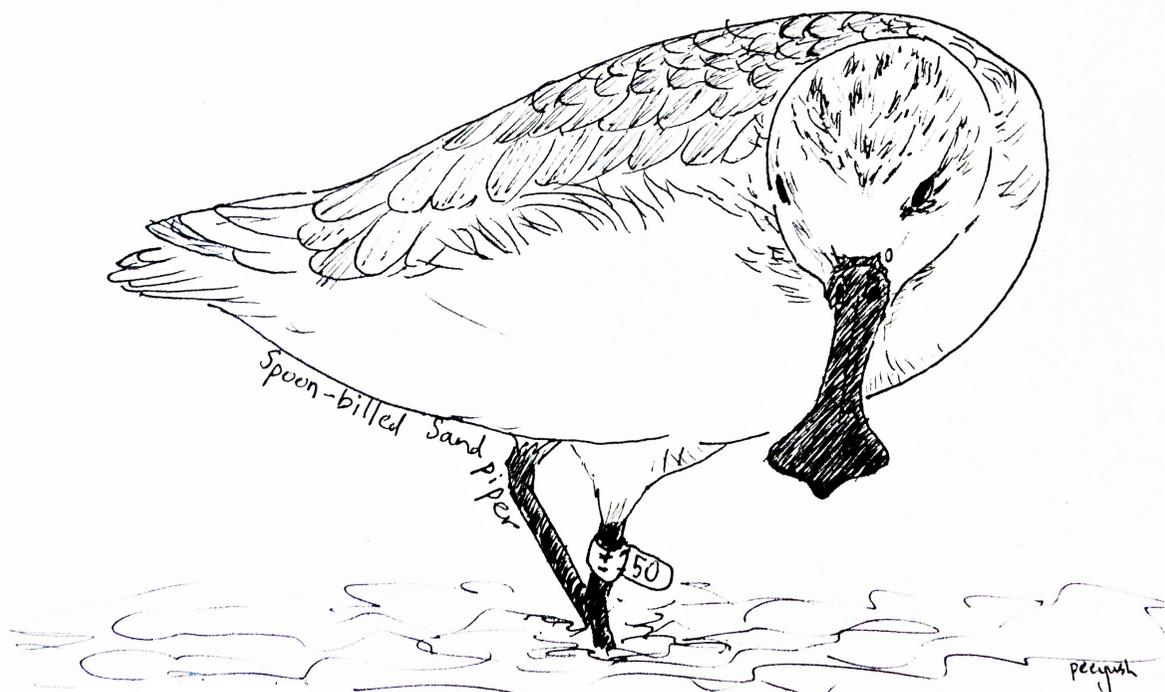
PERSPECTIVE: On the rights of rivers 24

The 150th Specials

- Why conservation is failing and how the *PA Update* might be able to help - *Nitin Rai* 6
- Much achieved but much remains - *Meenal Tatpati* 9
- Documentation and dissemination as key tools of biodiversity conservation - *Sonali Ghosh* 11
- 'The arrival of the *PA Update* is always welcome...'
- *Renee M. Borges* 16
- Whither PAs? Whither the *PA Update*? - *CR Bijoy* 21

+150: The critically endangered list

- *Peeyush Sekhsaria*



Spoon-billed Sandpiper, a lone bird sighted in 2018 on Indian shores; global population is estimated at 240 to 456 individuals (Reference photo by Natthaphat C).

Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

Because 150 is just another number

The *Protected Area Update* began life as the *Joint Protected Area Management (JPAM) Update* at a particular moment and in a particular context. It was the direct outcome of a national workshop held in 1994 on the possibilities of joint protected area management, one of the first of its kind attempts to move conservation to more inclusive and participatory paradigms. Responding to feedback, to news that was more easily available, but also identifying a gap and a need for a more protected area specific focus, 'joint' and 'management' were dropped and the newsletter became the *Protected Area Update*.

Nearly a decade ago when we published our 100th issue, Ashish Kothari, one of the founding members of the *JPAM Update* wrote a special editorial on the journey of the newsletter, and his following para was as true then as it was when the newsletter began as indeed it is today:

The *PA Update* has been a fascinating mirror to how the context and situation of PAs has changed in some ways, and remained static in others. Clearly threats to wildlife (and more specifically to PAs) have increased as India has moved into a phase of economic globalisation and rapid industrialization, demanding land and resources at a rate never before seen. PAs have perhaps not seen as massive an attack as areas outside them (an important contribution of the Wild Life Protection Act), but they too have not always been spared (witness the number of permissions given for mining, dams, etc. affecting them). And as their surrounds get increasingly carved up and they become tiny islands in a landscape of devastation, inevitably they too will suffer.

'The more things change the more they seem to be the same' might be a well worn cliché,

but could anything indeed be truer? Which is why one could argue that 150 is just another number. It is an important one for the *PA Update* at the same as it is just another small step in the journey of a seed planted many many years ago. It is unlikely that anyone had an idea of where the newsletter would go when it began in 1994, leave alone imagining it's fate in 2021. Whether initiatives sustain or go bust depends on many factors - resources, people, circumstances of history and contours of the present where we might have some role to play. No one can claim a full understanding leave alone a control of these trajectories.

It is therefore with a mixed sense of achievement, satisfaction and uncertainty, even trepidation, that we bring out this 150th issue of the newsletter. Uncertainty, because that is in the fundamental nature of all things, trepidation because of the times we live in and for what the future might hold for protected areas, for nature, for wildlife, for people, indeed the world as we have known it to be.

But yes, there is also the satisfaction that we've come this far, managed to continue without pause for nearly three decades, and managed somehow to remain relevant. That at least is the hope. 150 then is part lighthouse of reference, part an anchor-post in choppy seas. It's an opportunity to pause, to reflect and to thank our readers and our supporters. None deserve our gratitude more than the Foundation for Ecological Security and the Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust - without their faith, their trust and their unwavering support this number would never have been reached.

This 150th issue then is also a specially constructed issue - very different from what regular readers have known it to be. We invited five regular readers, some going back nearly two decades in their relationship to the newsletter - to share some of their memories, their thoughts and their critiques. Their short notes are nostalgic, empathetic and also critical. Readers make a

newsletter and we are grateful and proud we have readers such as these.

The other 'treat' we bring to you is visual. It is quite amazing that a simple newsletter with no colour and a basic layout can be made visually engaging. And the credit for this goes entirely to the superbly talented pool of illustrators who have created magic for the *Update* over the years with just their black (and occasionally grey) lines full of grace, wit, sarcasm and much more. These have been our USP and readers have often complimented us for this. Looking back it may also not be incorrect to say we've perhaps failed in crediting and acknowledging our illustrators enough.

Our heart felt thanks to them all. A specific mention must be made this time, of course, of Ashvini Menon for her gorgeous drawings that bring alive our readers' reflections of this 150th issue, and of Peeyush Sekhsaria for a specially conceived series on threatened species he's called +-150. Peeyush was the one, in fact, who set the tone and the template for this prominent signature of the newsletter. He was the first of the newsletter's illustrators and his original line drawings that we could photocopy and then include in the newsletter are still there in the *PA Update* files in Pune.

Technology may have changed, but there is nothing to beat the artist's original line on paper. 150 then is also a reminder that some things do not change, because they cannot change because they must not change.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

DELHI

Two new members appointed on Ridge Management Board

The Delhi government has appointed two new independent members to the Ridge Management Board (RMB), two years after

the term of its previous members ended. The new members — Vivek Menon, chief executive officer of Wildlife Trust of India, and Sohail Madan, the Delhi Centre manager of the Bombay Natural History Society — were approved by environment minister Gopal Rai in February. They will take over from Sunita Narain, of the Centre for Science and Environment, and Vimlendu Jha, founder of environmental NGO Swechha, whose term had expired in March 2019.

The eight-member RMB is headed by the Delhi Chief Secretary and was formed in 1995 on directions of the Supreme Court to preserve the ridge, a reserved forest of over 7,700 ha and the northern extension of the Aravalli Range. One of the major projects that the newly constituted Board will consider is a proposal to use over 82,000 sq. m of the South, South-Central and Morphological Ridge for the Aerocity-Tughlakabad corridor under Phase IV of the Delhi Metro.

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) had in March 2020 sought permission from the RMB to use about 14,000 sq. m of the Ridge area on a permanent basis, and 68,000 sq. m on temporary basis for construction of stations at Mahipalpur, Kishangarh, Ma Anandmayee Marg and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The proposal will first be considered by the RMB and if deemed fit will be recommended to the SC's Central Empowered Committee (CEC).

Details obtained under an RTI show that in August 2020, Delhi's principal chief conservator of forests, Ishwar Singh, had asked the DMRC to identify a parcel of non-forest land, equivalent to that being used in the Ridge, for compensatory afforestation. A DMRC spokesperson said that they have identified land for compensatory plantation but have not received permission yet to construct in the Ridge area.

Source: Shivam Patel. 'Delhi: Panel to preserve Ridge gets two new members', www.indianexpress.com, 01/03/2021.

GOA

MoEFCC approves forest land diversion for projects through Bhagwan Mahavir WLS and Mollem NP

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has granted clearances for the diversion of 140 ha of forest land for South Western Railway's double-tracking project through the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and the Mollem National Park (NP). In a letter to the state's principal secretary (forests) on February 4, the MoEFCC granted its in-principle approval for diversion of 120.87 ha of forest land between Castlerock Railway Station in north Karnataka to Kulem railway station in south Goa. Two other clearances were issued for the diversion of 1.90 ha of private forest and 15.6 ha of forest land for double-tracking between Kulem and Margaon Railway Stations in south Goa.

Many have been opposing three linear projects — the railways double-tracking project, the four-laning of a national highway and the Goa-Yanmar transmission power project – as these could cause large-scale destruction to forests here. The Central clearances will be legally opposed, asserted the Goa Foundation, which has been at the forefront of the 'Save Mollem' movement that gathered momentum last year in the wake of the diversion of forest land. Goencho Avaaz, another NGO, has also announced its political foray against the projects.

Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister of Goa, speaking at an event said that the linear projects were being executed keeping the future of Goa in mind. However, he noted, many people were opposing the projects for the sake of opposing and to politicise the issue.

Source: 'Centre grants clearances to 140 hectares of forest land for Goa projects', www.indianexpress.com, 01/03/2021.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

No car rallies allowed through Kibber WLS, other PAs in Spiti this winter

Special steps were taken by the additional district magistrate (ADM), Spiti, to ensure no car rallies pass through the snow leopard habitat including protected areas in the region in winter. This included the invocation of Section 144 in the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) preventing the use of the public works department road—Lidang, Demul, Komic, Hikkarm to Langcha and from the Rangrik bridge to Chicham via Kee Kibber village.

The decision came following the recent publication jointly of a study by the Himachal Pradesh Wildlife Department and the Nature Conservation Foundation showing that the state had at least 73 snow leopards, excluding cubs.

A senior official noted that wild animals such as the Snow leopard, ibex, Himalayan serow and Blue sheep come down to the lower areas of Spiti valley due to heavy snowfall. The months of February and March are also breeding time of the Snow leopards and it is in exactly this period that the car rallies pass through the snow leopard landscape of the valley.

While opening the region to tourists in February 2021 after almost a year of the covid related lockdown, the Spiti Tourism Society had specifically asked the tour and travel operators to strictly observe the standard operating procedures; further it has even made a COVID-19 test report mandatory for tourists checking-in at local hotels and homestays.

Source: Ashwani Sharma. 'Following Study On Snow Leopards In Himachal, Kaza Admin Bans Car Rallies In Sanctuary Area', www.outlookindia.com, 12/02/2021.

Dipender Manta. 'Car rallies banned in Spiti sanctuary area in winter', www.tribuneindia.com, 11/02/2021.

The 150th specials

Why conservation is failing and how the *PA Update* might be able to help - Nitin Rai



Nitin Rai is a political ecologist working with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment.

For 27 years now the *PA Update* has catalogued the successes and ills of the state's conservation apparatus, which provides a student of Indian conservation a treasure of information. As most readers of *PA Update* will agree, the term 'protected area' comes with a lot of baggage. These areas which constitute 5% of India's land area have impacted local people in adverse ways even as they have to a variable extent helped to build up wildlife populations.

In an exercise carried out recently, my colleague Shruthi Jagadeesh poured over issues of the *PA Update* from 2007 to 2016 to record human rights violations in protected areas and found 112 records of forced evictions, harassment, and denial of rights in 50 protected areas across the country over this ten-year period. This averages about two articles reporting human rights violations in every issue of the *PA Update*! This is an indictment of the coercive conservation apparatus in the country and calls for a radical rethink of the current conservation approach that is based on evicting people and denying them rights to an approach that acknowledges that these landscapes were produced and managed by local people for centuries before the advent of 'protection' by dictat.

The challenge for the *PA Update* then is to connect what is happening within PAs to the larger political economic project so that we are reminded of the contradiction between the narrow definition of conservation success in protected islands and global biodiversity declines resulting from a capitalist growth model. We need to therefore update our understanding of what drives state interest in protecting areas as if people did not matter.

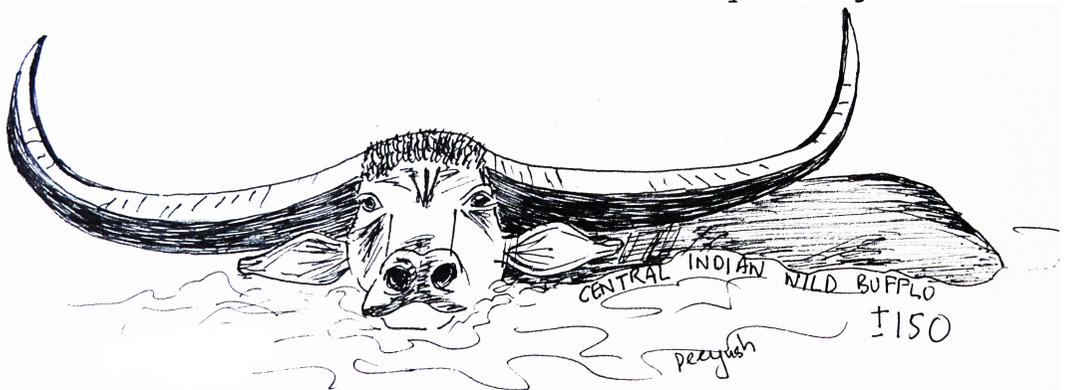
A record of the violations that have been so diligently compiled in the issues of *PA Update* over the years should suggest that such instances have no place in a democratic country and yet state and non-state agencies are pushing for evictions of local people. This begs the question what is motivating such draconian conservation practice? The state's conservation goals are being met in these conservation enclaves even as the rest of the country is being fed to a gluttonous economic development machine.

PAs therefore serve as a sop for the state's rapacious activities to reach its economic goals at great environmental cost. The state seeks complete control of PAs and centrally and singularly manages these for wildlife and therefore excludes people. Such an understanding of the motivations of the state's practice in PAs forces us to focus on not just what is happening inside PAs but also on the policy context that is decimating landscapes outside.

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We need to therefore update our understanding of what drives state interest in protecting areas as if people did not matter, for which the *PA Update* will and must continue to be play a significant role as it documents the many facets of PA policy and practice.

The critically endangered list



Central Indian Wild Buffalo, estimated at less than 50 in its Central Indian range (Reference photo by RP Mishra/WTI).

KERALA

FD denies presence of humans in ESZ of Mathikettan Shola NP; local residents oppose ESZ notification

While the forest department (FD) says there is no human settlement in the 17.5 sq. km ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Mathikettan Shola National Park (NP), the Santhanpara panchayat has pointed out that more than 8,000 people reside there. Most of them are marginal farmers cultivating cardamom on land holdings measuring between 0.5 to 2 acres.

Since there is zero buffer zone on the Tamil Nadu side of the NP, farmers and agricultural workers in the panchayat have formed an action council against the ESZ declaration in Kerala. They have submitted representations to authorities in the state and at the Centre, and are also planning to approach the high court.

In 2003, the government evicted encroachments in the Mathikettan forest area and had recommended to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change (MoEFCC) to declare 12.43 sq. km of forest in Mathikettan Shola as a NP. The Santhanpara panchayat president said that the government had evicted 176 encroachers from forest land in 2003 and farmers had supported that eviction drive. However, now the farmers have claimed that they were not aware of the draft notification issued in 2016 and learnt of the ESZ only days after the final notification was issued.

In another matter, around 4,500 families in Kuttampuzha panchayat and 750 families in Keerampara panchayat have been brought under the buffer zone of Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary. The elected representatives and farmers living in the ESZ of the sanctuary in Ernakulam too have decided to oppose the move and to approach the court to protect their livelihood.

Source: Manoj Viswanathan. 'Eco-Sensitive Zone: Santhanpara rises in revolt', www.newindianexpress.com, 12/02/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

Sub-adult tiger killed on railway track inside Navegaon Nagzira TR

A male tiger, between 12 to 15 months old, was found dead on a railway track passing through the Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve (TR) in the morning on March 8. The tiger was one of the three cubs of a Nagzira tigress called T14. Officials were not able to locate his mother or two siblings. The tiger was killed by a train heading towards Gondia. His spinal cord was broken and his right leg was found severed but missing from the spot.

The railway line from Chandrapur to Gondia passes through many tiger bearing areas and there have been a number of animal deaths on the track here over several years. In 2018, three tiger cubs were crushed under a train in the Junona forest of Chandrapur. Two leopards, one in 2016 and the other in 2019, were similarly killed in train accidents here. One tiger was also killed and another injured on this track 12 years ago.

After the Junona incident of 2018, a committee headed by the then chief conservator of forest, Chandrapur had suggested urgent mitigation measures at several accident-prone places along the track; none, however, have materialized so far. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 5; Vol. XXV, No. 1 and Vol. XXIV, No. 6)

Source: Vivek Deshpande. 'Maharashtra: Sub-adult male tiger found dead on railway track passing through Navegaon-Nagzira Reserve', www.indianexpress.com, 09/03/2021.

The 150th specials

Much achieved, but much remains

- Meenal Tatpati



I first came across the *PA Update* in 2011 while interning with Kalpavriksh for my Master's thesis in the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary. I scanned through the archives, looking for any articles on the sanctuary as a part of my literature review and the editorials and the perspectives offered great insights to a novice on protected area issues. They also offered glimpses into the philosophy that Kalpavriksh as an organisation believed - that of inclusive conservation. The perspectives in the *PA Update* however, did not always espouse this view, and I found it remarkable that the newsletter printed and gave space to such differing opinions.

My second encounter with the newsletter was when my colleague and I were collecting data on the processes involved in declaration of tiger reserves. We were two young women visiting forest offices and navigating bureaucratic tangles trying to get a chance interview field directors or CCFs. Often, we were dismissed as students who would be wasting the department's time.

But almost invariably, when we presented the *PA Update* to the clerks or lower forest staff as part of a bunch of publications from Kalpavriksh we always carried, they would make it a point to tell us about how they regularly

Meenal Tatpati is part of the Conservation and Livelihoods team in Kalpavriksh and has involved in research and advocacy around the Forest Rights Act and its relevance in Protected Areas and in the process of Forest Clearances.

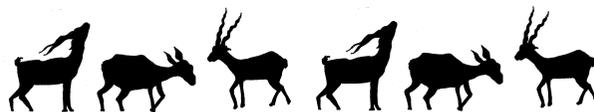
read the *Update* and how it was useful in keeping abreast with news related to protected areas all across the country. And we are quite certain that it toned down some of the resistance of the officers to talk to us! This has been our experience across protected area offices in the country be it in West Bengal, Rajasthan or in Uttarakhand. I've come to realise that the reach of this publication is quite vast, given its handiness due to its size and the short, quick excerpts of news collected from different sources.

However, a lot of the work around PAs that Kalpavriksh itself is doing is seldom reflected in the newsletter, and this is probably a shortcoming within our organisation that we haven't worked dedicatedly towards resolving. This is especially true of the work and updates around the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dweller's (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA). We hope to address this in the future, since the FRA is a reality that we all need to learn to adjust to and work together with for strengthening PA governance and management.

The other area we fall short in is the publishing of the newsletter in regional languages. Its reach will be truly phenomenal if it is produced in several languages, where it can reach local people and local forest staff. The editorial team took a step in this direction when it recently started a quarterly *PA Update* in Marathi that is focussed on developments in Maharashtra. I believe this is a tremendous accomplishment for a very small, two person team!

However, these are very challenging things to deal with, because it requires a dedicated team of people, working together in tandem, not to mention the substantial financial and time issues. And while we internally work them out, it is time to look back on a long and successful journey of the longest running newsletter dedicated to curating PA related news and analyses and congratulate the editorial team for this 150 issue.

But almost invariably, when we presented the *PA Update* to the clerks or lower forest staff as part of a bunch of publications from Kalpavriksh we always carried, they would make it a point to tell us about how they regularly read the *Update* and how it was useful in keeping abreast with news related to protected areas all across the country.



The 150th specials

Documentation and dissemination as key tools for biodiversity conservation
- Sonali Ghosh



Sonali Ghosh is
Deputy Inspector
General of Forests-
Central Zoo Authority.
All views expressed are
personal.

I recall my time as a young ACF (Assistant Conservator of Forests) in November 2002, posted then in the Burapahar Range of the Kaziranga National Park. Other than the WLL telephone system that had just come in then, inland letters and an occasional STD call were the only means of connectivity to the outside world.

It was good in many ways as life was simpler and happier. One could devote time to reading, writing and documenting. Magazines would be welcome and that is why I would be most delighted when I would receive in the post an envelope with a neatly folded issue of the next *Protected Area Update – News and Information from Protected Areas in India and South Asia*. A handy A4 size booklet, it would come in a nice readable format with interesting eye-catching illustrations.

The cataloguing of the news stories across states, I think, is a smart way of indexing as it helps to put a geographic context to the news/stories being shared. The content being curated, was not a verbatim reproduction of the media story and had its own flavour of interpretation, giving the story a conservation context.

Times changed. The computer, the internet and the mobile came along but thankfully the *PA Update* did not go

away. Turning digital, it managed to keep pace with the times and once again I was happy to receive it, albeit in my email inbox. The print version also got a slight makeover! Or atleast that is what I thought. It became more compact and the basic layout and production seemed to ensure that costs of printing, reprinting and production remained in control. And to think of it that this has been done singlehandedly by an organization and a small team for 27 years without any interruption, and limited funding is highly commendable.

The newsletter is 24 pages long and 6 issues are produced in a year. Each issue has about 70 news reports/stories and that would be about 400 stories published in a year. Out of these, even if we estimate that each issue has 10 reports (certainly an underestimate in my opinion) of developments that can be replicated, there are at least 1500 plus conservation best practises documented in the 150 issues of this newsletter. And hey, its all available for free!

So, who is the real target audience for the *PA Update*? Forest functionaries, researchers, journalists and scholars interested to read about what's happening around them. To me it is also important to reach out to that forest guard, that young motivated forest fringe village girl who would like to contribute to the society but may not have the means. And this is what *PA Update* exactly did when they recently started the Marathi edition of the newsletter for the state of Maharashtra.

A special compilation on news from the NE that I contributed to also offered a bird's eye of developments in the region besides acknowledging the contribution of local communities to conservation.

The post-pandemic world has taught us that knowledge is the key and so is the correct dissemination of it. The *PA Update* has attained cult status when it comes to branding and a movement for wildlife conservation. I hope it will continue to do in the future with even more zeal, enthusiasm and support from its readers.

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ODISHA

Highly contagious infection claims five elephants in Karlapat WLS

Seven elephants have died of haemorrhagic septicaemia in Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the month of February. The first death - of a pregnant female - was reported on February 1 near Tentulipada village, close to Ghusurigudi nullah, inside the the sanctuary. Six more carcasses were discovered around the same spot over the next three weeks till the 20th of February.

The post-mortem report of all the seven elephants and other cattle found dead confirmed haemorrhagic septicemia. Also, a central team comprising Karikalan Matthews from the Centre for Wildlife in Bareilly, Prangyan Panda, national convener of elephant cell and Niranjan Sahoo from Odisha University of Agriculture Technology (OUAT), Bhubaneswar visited the area on February 20 and confirmed hemorrhagic septicaemia as the reason for the deaths. The pattern has led experts to suspect that the water there is contaminated with the bacteria *Pasteurella multocida* that causes the disease.

The authorities then deployed a team of 80 field officials to ensure the two herds of around 20 elephants in the sanctuary remained separated and also away from the Ghusurigudi nullah. OUAT in collaboration with the sanctuary officials also started an immunisation drive of cattle in Karlapat, Badtikraguda, Tentulipadar, Lilingpadar and Jakam villages adjoining the sanctuary and disinfected water bodies with bleaching powder to avoid further spread. They also advised nearby villages not to allow their cattle inside the forest as it is suspected that the water bodies were contaminated.

The sanctuary had 17 elephants, according to the 2018 census.

In the meantime, a livestock inspector was suspended on February 23 for allegedly neglecting surveillance work and not keeping a record of vaccinations and treatments of cattle. Environmentalists criticized the move

pointing out the deaths were on account of the collapse of government machinery and not just the responsibility of lower level officials.

Two low-ranking forest officials were also suspended earlier in February in relation to the deaths of two elephants in a train accident while senior officials were spared.

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Who to blame for haemorrhagic septicemia in elephants? Odisha suspends a livestock inspector', www.downtoearth.org.in, 25/02/2021.
Amjad Badshah. 'Six elephants die of haemorrhagic septicaemia in a fortnight in Odisha's Karlapat Sanctuary', www.downtoearth.org.in, 15/02/2021.

TELANGANA

TSMDC files contradictory information about Eturnagaram WLS & ESZ to get green clearance for mining

The Telangana State Mineral Development Corporation (TSMDC), in its environment impact assessment (EIA) report for a proposed sand mine on river Godavari in Eturnagaram of Mulugu district, has claimed that no sanctuary or ecologically sensitive area exists within 10 km of the site. However, the 'Form-2' application filled by TSMDC for seeking environmental clearance, mentions that the mining site is located just one km away from the wildlife corridor of Eturnagaram WLS and 2.2 km away from its ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ).

One of the terms of reference that the TSMDC has to comply with is that it should clearly indicate the location of any existing national parks, WLSs or wildlife corridors within 10 km of the mine. If a WLS or an ESZ exists within 10 km of a proposed mining project, the TSMDC will have to seek clearance from the National Board for Wildlife and the state forest department.

Source: V Nilesh. 'No sanctuary near mine site, says Telangana mineral body', www.newindianexpress.com, 08/03/2021.

UTTAR PRADESH

Hi-tech equipment to deal with human-tiger conflict situations in, around Pilibhit TR

Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities have been provided with equipment and kits for conducting rescue operations to avert human-tiger conflict in and around the reserve. The TR has 65 tigers according to the last census, and now at least 10% of the tigers are moving into rural areas due to various reasons, including a space crunch in the reserve.

Forest patrol staff will now have a smart stick that is equipped with a powerful stun gun to protect themselves from wild animals in case of a face-off. A small electric shock from the stick is enough to momentarily confuse the animal, giving time to the personnel to escape. The shock will not cause any permanent damage to the wildlife, informed the deputy director of PTR. The stick also comprises a spot light, throbbing light and pathway light with adjustable focus to facilitate night patrolling. Its other features include rechargeable batteries, a phone charging port and a panic button that triggers a loud hooter to scare away animals.

A 100 kukaris (a kind of machete) to remove dense shrubs during patrolling, five snake rescue kits with tongs, hooks, hand-protecting gloves and long boots will also be distributed among the patrol staff.

Reserve authorities have also received one double barrel tranquilizing gun to load two darts at a time. A pair of drone cameras have also been made available to assist the field teams in their work. In addition, a pair of tents each with a capacity to accommodate eight people will enable staff to stay the night at sites frequented by wild animals that stray out of the forest.

The reserve will also have two rescue vehicles, including a one that is equipped with an automatic cage loader, a veterinarian chamber, portable oxygen cylinder and other wildlife rescue material. The second vehicle is

fitted with a powerful camera at its rear side to display the pictures in the driver's cabin. One motor boat will be deployed on the 22-km stretch of the Sharda Sagar dam area and one rafting boat will be used for rescue work in river Sharda and its feeder canals, said the deputy director.

Source: 'PTR gets equipment, kits to conduct rescue ops', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/03/2021.

Joint team of forest, railway officials and WII inspects track through Pilibhit TR for gauge conversion

A joint team of officials of the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (TR), North Eastern Railway (NER)'s construction division and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have inspected a seven-km stretch of the meter gauge railway track passing through the core area of Mala forest range to assess how to protect wildlife if trains are run on this line after its conversion to broad gauge. No trains currently run on this track.

Two years ago, the Railways had applied for permission from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for the conversion of track to broad gauge in the Pilibhit-Mailani section. The NBWL set up a three-member committee comprising deputy director of the reserve, a senior WII scientist and deputy general manager, Rail Vikas Nigam Limited. It has been asked to file a report on the requirements of the reserve for the safety and unhindered movement of the wildlife around the railway line within two months.

15 camera traps have been installed along the railway line to monitor the frequency of wildlife movement to help the expert team to assess the need for underpasses for the wildlife and other safe options. The NER has also been advised to maintain a speed limit of 20 km per hour while passing through the core area. This will be checked with auto sensors and the PTR authorities will

also require from NER a written guarantee of maintaining the assigned speed limit, the violation of which will result in the imposition of penalties.

Source: 'Proposal to restart train movement through PTR', www.daijiworld.com, 08/03/2021.

The critically endangered list



White-bellied Heron, optimistic estimates put it at less than 50 in India and 250 globally (Reference photo by Tshering Tobgay).

The critically endangered list



Caracal, some estimates put their population at less than 50 in India (Reference photo by Dharmendra Khandal).

The 150th specials

'The arrival of the *PA Update* is always welcome...'

- Renee M. Borges



Renee M. Borges
teaches at the Centre for
Ecological Sciences,
Indian Institute of
Science, Bengaluru.

For someone who is not on social media and is a veritable Luddite where the internet is concerned, the arrival of the *PA Update* was always welcome. It helped me connect to the latest happenings in the field of conservation, offered a feel of the pulse of India's environment and helped me gauge whether certain areas were healthy, needed gradual restorative care or urgent conservation intervention. I learnt about the efforts made by determined groups throughout the country, their trials and vicissitudes, their triumphs and successes, big or small. Later, even when it went electronic, I was still happy to receive it in the printed format, and continue to look forward to its arrival in the post.

The *PA Update* has served as a chronicle of the times. In the past, when one wanted to examine the state of the pre-independence environment, a good source may have been the Gazetteer of British India. Here one could assimilate facts and figures and draw direct or indirect conclusions because there was no concept of environmental protection then, other than what existed in royal hunting grounds. Such facts, in any case, were rarely reported in the gazetteer. The *PA Update* on the other hand gives us regular factoids and vital pieces of information and if one is interested in any particular state or even a wildlife sanctuary in a more contemporary context, one has only to flip through

the issues and all important events in the protected areas and surrounds would be available.

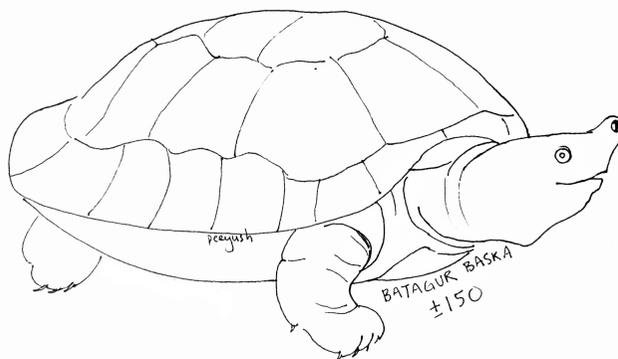
Such a chronicle is an very important for present and future generations. Ecologists and conservation biologists are greatly benefitted by understanding the history of natural areas since in this history may lie an explanation for current events or predictions of future happenings. This is why the *PA Update* is so important. Some may argue that it only provides capsules of information and few details. I would say that this is more than enough. In some ways the newsletter pre-dated the capsular bytes of information that now beam into our phone constantly (the very same bytes that I resist as a Luddite), and that most of us use as starting points for further investigation.

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The *PA Update* with its nation-wide coverage and additional occasional information on cross-border issues such as those with Nepal and Bangladesh has served the environmental sector well. It has a unique niche and is unrivalled in the country. It has never wavered in presenting and faithfully reporting accurate content. It has been established on a solid foundation of fact and passion and will assuredly perform its vital function for the south Asian environment for years to come.

The *PA Update* team at Kalpavriksh is to be congratulated for holding the torch for India's environment in so many ways, and especially on the occasion of this 150th issue of the *PA Update*.

The critically endangered list



***Batagur baska*, Northern River terrapin** is considered functionally extinct in the wild (Reference photo by Peter Praschag).

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

ODISHA

Removal of illegal prawn gherries resumes at Chilika; 349 ha cleaned on 1st day of drive

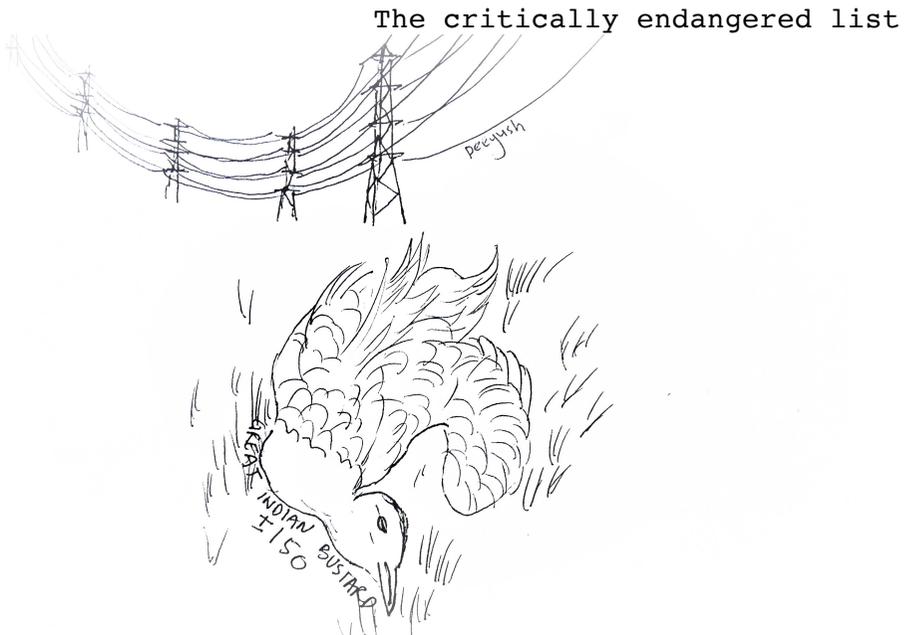
The Odisha government started on February 28, 2021, to evict illegal prawn gherries (enclosures) from Chilika Lake. Around 349 ha were cleared on the first day of the drive carried out by the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) with the help of at least 20 labourers and a dozen boats. Senior police and revenue officers were also present during the drive that was started from Krushna Prasad tehsil in Puri district and targeted at clearing about 40 sq. km of the gherries.

The Supreme Court had, on April 3, 2017, asked high courts in 15 states to take up the issue of conservation of 26 important

wetlands in the country. Two of these wetlands - Chilika and the Bhitarkanika National Park are in Odisha. The Odisha High Court then issued orders to the state government on January 22, 2019 to evict prawn farms from these two wetlands. 160 sq. km of gherries were evicted in the year 2018-19.

The Irrawaddy dolphins found in the lake have been able to swim freely after the eviction of gherries; they were sighted in Ganjam district's Rambha area of the lake for the first time in three decades.

Source: Hrusikesh Mohanty. 'Odisha starts evicting illegal prawn gherries in Chilika', www.downtoearth.org.in, 01/03/2021.



Great Indian Bustard, about 100 individuals based on some recent estimates (Referene photo by Rajasthan FD)

Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. Impact of Forest Fire Frequency on Tree Diversity and Species Regeneration in Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest of Panna Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India

Author(s): Tapas Ray, Dinesh Malasiya, Radha Rajpoot, Satyam Verma, Javid Ahmad Dar, Arun Dayanandan, Debojyoti Raha, Parvaiz Lone, Praveen Pandey, Pramod Kumar Khare and Mohammed Latif Khan

Keywords: Forest fire, Fire frequency, Diversity, Regeneration, Central India

Summary: 7873 individuals of 45 tree species and their regeneration status were recorded by sampling 40 plots laid in different fire frequency classes in Panna Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh. Species diversity declined with increasing fire frequency. Certain fire-tolerant species showed increased dominance in such areas.

Link:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10549811.2020.1823853>

2. Conservation opportunities and challenges emerge from assessing nuanced stakeholder attitudes towards the Asian Elephant in tea estates of Assam, Northeast India

Author(s): Divya Vasudev, Varun R. Goswami, Prity Hait, Pragyan Sharma, Bhavendu Joshi, Yogita Karpate, Parvathi K. Prasad

Keywords: *Elephas maximus*, Human-wildlife interactions, Landscape-scale conservation, Perspectives, Production landscapes, Stakeholder engagement

Summary: In Assam's Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape, 2252 people from 17 tea estates were interviewed to assess nuances in stakeholder attitudes and underlying beliefs towards the endangered Asian elephant.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989419302173?via%3Dihub>

3. Philopatric and natal dispersal of tigers in a semi-arid habitat, western India

Author(s): Randeep Singh, Puneet Pandey, Qamar Qureshi, Kalyanasundaram Sankar, Paul R. Krausman, Surendra Prakash Goyal

Keywords: Bengal tiger, Dispersal distance, Motion-sensitive cameras, Natal area, Philopatric, Ranthambhore

Summary: The natal dispersal pattern of Bengal Tigers (*Panthera tigris tigris*) was studied by tracking 29 cubs using motion-sensitive cameras and intensive searches from April 2005 to June 2011 in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan. The cubs were tracked from birth till they established independent territories.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140196320302196>

4. A checklist of mammals with historical records from Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya landscape, India

Author(s): Thangsuanlian Naulak, Sunita Pradhan

Keywords: Biodiversity hotspot, Eastern Himalaya, Research trends, Updated checklist

Summary: An updated checklist of mammals of the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya landscape was prepared reviewing literature from 94 publications, spanning 178 years (1841 to 2019). Out of the 173 historically recorded species, 168 species are currently present.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/6062>

5. Navigating paved paradise: Evaluating landscape permeability to movement for large mammals in two conservation priority landscapes in India

Author(s): Anisha Jayadevan, Rajat Nayak, Krithi K. Karanth, Jagdish Krishnaswamy, Ruth DeFries, K. Ullas Karanth, Srinivas Vaidyanathan

Keywords: Animal movement, Central India, Human Land-use, Landscape permeability, Linear infrastructure, Western Ghats

Summary: Movement and dispersal of five wide-ranging species in the Western Ghats (elephant, gaur, leopard, sambar and sloth bear) and four in Central India (gaur, leopard, sambar and sloth bear) were simulated to evaluate landscape permeability. The movement of each species was compared in response to land-use, land-cover, infrastructure and human population.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320720306716?via%3Dihub>

6. Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* Linnaeus, 1758 (Mammalia: Carnivora: Canidae) distribution pattern and feeding at Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, India

Author(s): Nagarajan Baskaran, Ganesan Karthikeyan, Kamaraj Ramkumaran

Keywords: Diet composition and preference, Spatio-temporal variation in diet, Southern India

Summary: The distribution pattern, diet composition and prey preference of Golden Jackal was assessed through systematic field survey between December 2013 and June 2014 in Tamil Nadu's Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary. Direct sightings and indirect evidence of the animal were recorded in 41 locations. As per scat analysis, 19

different food items were present in the jackals' diet.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/4489>

7. A multi-species occupancy modeling approach to access the impacts of land use and land cover on terrestrial vertebrates in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Western Ghats, India

Author(s): Sameer Bajar, Saunak Pal, Mrugank Prabhu, Pinal Patel, Rahul Khot, Deepak Apte

Keywords: Land-use, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Vertebrates, Western Ghats

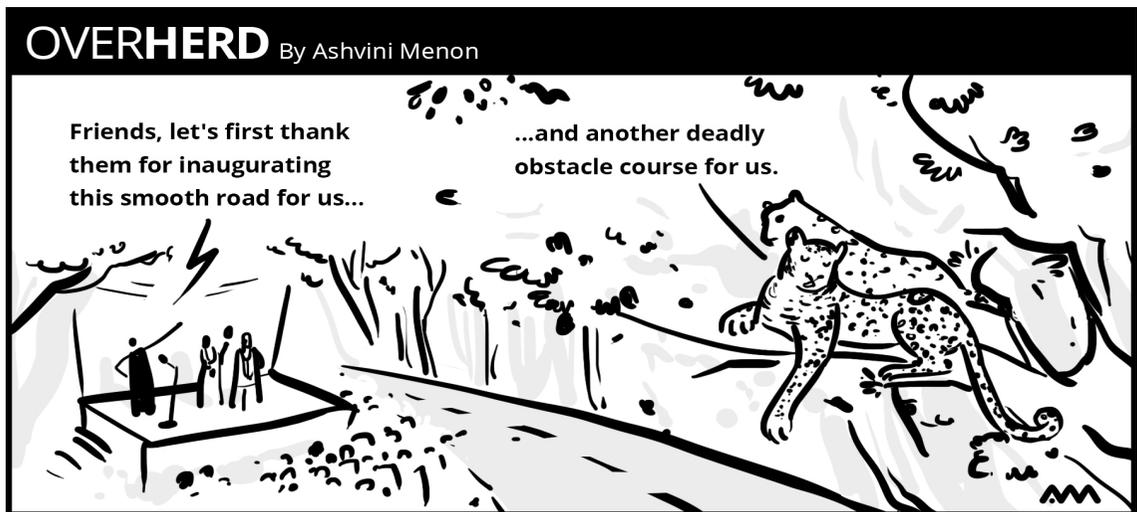
Summary: Different habitats in the MMR were sampled between December 2015 to January 2017 by multiple sampling methods to quantify target vertebrate taxa - amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and assess the effect of various land-use and land cover on different species.

Link:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0240989#abstract0>

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

Email: sproutsenvtrust@gmail.com



The 150th specials

Whither PAs? whither the *PA Update*?

- CR Bijoy



CR Bijoy is an independent researcher engaged in resource conflicts and governance.

This collation of news and information from protected areas in India and South Asia, in its 27th year of uninterrupted publication and its 150th issue reflects passion, discipline and simply a lot of time and hard work. But then to what ends?

How much ever we decry the anthropocentric view of human imagination, thoughts, knowledge, decisions and actions, the fact still remains that that is so and will be so; even when it comes to PAs. PAs remain mere enclaves to humour the few even as all the exciting things that the world of technologies and money can offer are gobbled up. The affluent enclaves are transformed and re-transformed in every possible conceivable way as fast and wild as one's imagination can fly. PAs, and more of them, now fully aid and justify neoliberalism unleashing the aggressive force of financial capital in its pursuit for growth, profits and power. PAs are embedded in the delusion that what matters is only what happens inside, and not outside. Even inside they are focused on those very few select privileged species that the market finds fanciful.

There is no way anyone can have the expertise for conserving nature, protecting wildlife and managing forests - this is something beyond human capabilities and control (at

So what constitutes the news and information from PAs? Rather, what should constitute news and information on PAs? To what ends? Should it remain a mere reporting from the media, mostly the popular narrative that is being woven around what the affluent and the conservation aristocrats want? Should not the narrative emerge from ground truthing, the voice of those who populate the PAs, whatever the species might be? But then where is the channel for these voices?

least for now and in the foreseeable future). Yet, such pretensions provide justification for the hegemonic forces to extend and strengthen their hold over PAs. Of course, at the very best, one can manage one's activities - what to do where, how and when. That's it.

The forces of hegemony of course, go beyond, and manage the activities of those 'others' who are the powerless. But then how can they determine and control the activities of other species to suit their needs? The frontiers of science are being extended and harnessed. In the meanwhile, the forces of nature are churning up changes so fast that large-scale upheavals are indicated while these hegemonic forces leverage themselves for their strategic gains, even in disasters. The haggling amongst governments for economic advantages in the climate talks since 1992 is the greatest evidence of this leveraging. And that too when the threat that the climate crisis poses is cataclysmic.

So what constitutes the news and information from PAs? Rather, what should constitute news and information on PAs? To what ends? Should it remain a mere reporting from the media, mostly the popular narrative that is being woven around what the affluent and the conservation aristocrats want? Should not the narrative emerge from ground truthing, the voice of those who populate the PAs, whatever the species might be? But then where is the channel for these voices?

In a democracy where the rule of the law is the arch of existence, can the laws be the framework and filter through which the media reports be extruded to extract how PA governance takes place or does not take place, and the outcomes? Who will protect the PAs from whom, from what and how? Would that be yet another door of perception? Are PAs safe in the hands of democracy or the conservationists? Or rather, how to protect the PAs from the conservationists just as how to save the world from the economists, or is it capital and the market?



FROM THE ARCHIVES - 10 years ago
PA Update 90, April 2011

ASSAM

Rebels kidnap WWF volunteers in Manas TR; released subsequently

About 20 suspected militants of the anti-talks faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) abducted six World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) –India volunteers at gunpoint from the Labanyapur area of Ultapani reserve forest which falls under the Manas Tiger Reserve. The incident took place in the first week of February at a place that straddles Kokrajhar and Chirang districts in the western part of Assam. It is near the India-Bhutan international border.

The abducted volunteers were identified as Gautam Kishore Sarma, Pranjal Saikia, Syed Naushad Zaman, Sharavan Goswami, Tarali Goswami and Pallavi Chakrabarty. Except for Pallavi who is from Shillong, the rest are from Assam. The volunteers were working in the area for about a month and were expected to finish their work in a couple of days when the incident occurred. Four forest staff who accompanied the volunteers were, however, left free by the abductors. The needle of suspicion pointed towards the proscribed anti-talks faction of NDFB, which had recently sent feelers to the state government on its intention to hold peace talks. It has a strong presence in Ultapani and its adjoining areas along the international border.

Security forces said the abduction could be a retaliation against the anti-insurgency combing operation in the area, which is about 60 km from Kokrajhar, the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The abductors also reportedly refused to talk till the combing operations were withdrawn.

BTC deputy chief Kampa Borgoyari and BTC executive member James Basumatary also visited Ultapani in a bid to secure the release. BTC deputy chief Kampa Borgoyari was also said to have contacted the abductors and appealed for the safe release of the abducted volunteers.

Several conservation NGOs in the northeast had demanded the safe and early release of the abducted volunteers. In a joint statement, WWF-India, Wildlife Trust of India, Aaranyak, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Dolphin Foundation and EcoSystems-India, said the volunteers were students from the region who were engaged in tiger population estimation work in Manas Tiger Reserve as a part of an all-India exercise.

Ultapani, a 34-km drive from National Highway 31, is known for the presence of a wide diversity of life, including the golden langur. In July last year, four SSB personnel including an assistant commander were ambushed and gunned down by the anti-talks NDFB faction in a forested area near the Bhutan border in Chirang district. The anti-talks faction was also involved in the abduction and subsequent release of Maharashtra forest official V S Bardekar. He was abducted from a village in Arunachal Pradesh and later released at Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district of Assam.

The six volunteers were eventually released unharmed. The three women volunteers were released on February 9, while their male colleagues were released about a week later.

Source: ‘Rebels kidnap WWF volunteers in Manas’, Times New Network, 08/02/11.

‘Militants release WWF volunteers in Assam’, www.assamtribune.com, 17/02/11.

PERSPECTIVE

On the rights of rivers

In 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court (HC) ruled that the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, and the glaciers Gangotri and Yamunotri are ‘legal persons’ with all rights, duties and liabilities of a living person. Then in 2018, the same court granted rights equivalent to that of a living person to the entire animal kingdom and in March 2020, the Punjab and Haryana HC declared the Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh city to be a living entity.

This granting of rights to rivers and the rest of nature is part of a recent trend seen world wide: via the constitution of Ecuador in 2008; in the 2009 resolution of the United Nations General Assembly declaring April 22 as ‘International Mother Earth Day’; in New Zealand in 2014, recognising the Te Urewera National Park as a legal entity and in 2017 granting legal personhood status to the Whanganui River ecosystem and in January 2019, whereby the Dhaka HC first recognised the river Turag and then all rivers in Bangladesh as living entities. Several towns in the US too have made by-laws that recognize the rights of nature.

Indigenous people around the world have respected the rest of nature as part of their worldviews, as part of living. Many philosophers, eco-feminists, eco-spiritualists too have argued for the need of attitudinal shifts to respect natures’ rights rather than just legal measures. For this, we need to fundamentally challenge the extractive growth model, centralised political governance and the anthropocentric legal system.

These judgements in India for the first time recognised that the rest of the nature is living. Apart from the potential of transforming the colonial and property-oriented judicial system, these judgements

might help explore contested articulations of the relation between humans and the more than-human, between culture and nature, between development and environment that are central to our current crises.

Ordinarily granting rights (as a legal person) would mean that a suit could be brought in the name of the river, injury can be recognised, and polluter can be held liable for harming and the compensation will be paid that would benefit the river. The Uttarakhand HC judgements never got into such crucial details and these were subsequently also stayed by the Supreme Court of India

What these judgements have nevertheless catalysed is a South Asia wide alliance representing the interests of free-flowing and healthy rivers, and their dependent communities. There is a long way to go, but it certainly a very welcome start.

- **Shristee Bajpai** is a member of Kalpavriksh. She helps in coordinating the Vikalp Sangam process and Global Tapestry of Alternatives.
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