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Protected Area Update

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Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

Associate Editor: **Reshma Jathar**

Illustrations: **Ashvini Menon** (Visual Design Studio), **Shruti Kulkarni**,
Madhuvanti Anantharajan & Peeyush Sekhsaria

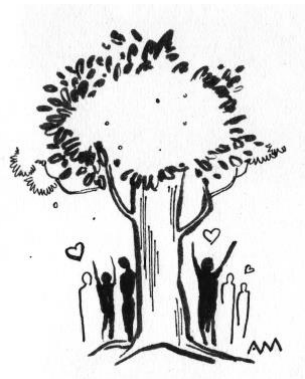
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Editorial Address: **C/o Kalpavriksh**, Apartment 5, Shri Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana,
Pune 411004, Maharashtra, India.

Tel/Fax: 020 – 25654239; Email: pseksaria@gmail.com

Website: <http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods1/protected-area-update>

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EDITORIAL

A ringside view of conservation in contemporary India

(and a new book from the *PA Update* stable)

What does the contemporary wildlife conservation scene in India look like? What are the main issues and concerns? Who are the main actors? What resources are available? What are the bottlenecks? What are our biggest failures? What have been some of the successes we should celebrate?

At first glance these questions look deceptively simple, but try answering them, better still get into a discussion even with someone who is on the same page as you on conservation, and the dilemma is not unlike understanding the true core of an onion. No amount of peeling, it seems, will reveal its true nature because, perhaps, every layer reveals as much as it conceals about the entity we seek to understand.

For over two-and-a-half decades now and counting, the *Protected Area Update* has been an effort to document and understand this contemporary conservation scenario of the country. Regular readers of the newsletter will be familiar with its central characteristics: news sourced primarily from what has already been published in the English media, tightly edited updates based on this reporting, the simple two column layout of the newsletter, the signature, quirky line drawings contributed by a pool of very talented illustrators, the regularity with which the newsletter manages to reach them and perhaps, also, the short edits that the newsletter always begins with.

Each of these edits is a companion to the news that appears in the respective issue - it could be setting the stage for the performance of this news, could be a synthesis of the news that constitutes the newsletter or works to highlight a burning/emerging issue and set the agenda for what should happen. It is in this job

of writing the editorial - over 20 years on a trot, month on month - of sifting through news for inclusion in the newsletter, of seeing the minutiae of conservation narratives, of understanding the compulsions, limitations and opportunities of the media, of seeing trends emerge, of voices and opinions heard and not heard, and of making sense of some of this - that the analogy of the onion comes very handy. There is also the possibility here of a valuable ringside view of conservation as it has unfolded in recent times.

And it is this ringside view of conservation, this kaleidoscope, that we seek to offer in *Conservation Kaleidoscope – People, Protected Areas, and Wildlife in Contemporary India*, our new book that brings together more than a 100 of the newsletter's editorials along with a selection of relevant information and news reports

The edits have been clustered here into 14 broad sections such as the geographical (protected area, state, region), thematic (linear intrusions, human rights, tourism) or key stakeholders discussed (species, the state, communities). We begin with a section called 'Law, Policy and Governance' and end with 'A Colourful Mosaic'. The others include among others, 'The Development Threat', 'The Local Context' that puts together edits based on specific areas, a small section on 'Tourism' and another on 'The Fate of the Elephant', which clusters together concerns about the national heritage animal and its habitat.

Needless to say, these are not clean groupings - there is as much divergence in the experiences as there is overlap and messiness. Conservation appears to have all the attributes of the kaleidoscope and this becomes a useful analogy and also a lens with which to look at and understand wildlife, wilderness and conservation practice in contemporary India.

(Pls see page 19 for more details of the book and to order copies)

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Researchers recommend unmanned aerial surveys for studying dugongs



A paper published in the journal *Current Science* has suggested that unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) surveys can help cover large spatial scales, reduce survey effort and time, and are cost-effective for studying dugongs. This is based on surveys, led by Sagar Rajpurkar from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), that were carried out along with others in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands within the Mahatma Gandhi and Rani Jhansi Marine National Parks (NPs). UAV surveys should be adopted as a tool by state forest departments to monitor marine fauna of conservation concern and for tackling illegal activities in the marine NPs, concludes the paper.

Lightweight drones which were less noisy and did not disturb the marine mammals were used in the survey. These were flown at a height of about 200-300m to first scan an area for dugongs and then brought down to 80-100 m to closely follow the species. Since the video resolution is high from even this height, it can be used in the future to identify individuals, track movements and monitor behaviour of individuals, said Dr. Anant Pande, one of the researchers from WII.

Though the drone is capable of flying into the sea up to 10 km, the team used it for about 2.5 to 3 km since dugongs live near the coast. However, for dolphin or whale surveys,

flying the drone from a small boat with a platform will be required.

During the survey, the team recorded mother and calf pairs of dugongs, sea turtles, spotted eagle ray, zebra shark, stingrays, needlefish, squids, and several fish shoals.

Source: Aswathi Pacha. 'In a first, small drones help study India's threatened marine species', www.indianexpress.com, 27/07/2021.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

New catfish in Brahmaputra River basin named after RFO in Mouling NP

A new catfish species identified from the Siang River in Arunachal Pradesh has been named after S Rupir Boli, a range forest officer (RFO) in Mouling National Park (MNP). Boli is a RFO of the Ramsingh range of the park and had helped in collecting the specimens during the first survey that led to this discovery.

The specimen of the catfish, which was later identified to be of the *Glyptothorax* species and named as *G. rupiri*, was collected from the Siang by a team of researchers that included Laishram Kosygin, Pratima Singh and Shibananda Rathi, all from the freshwater fish section of the Zoological Survey of India.

The paper about the discovery was published recently in the journal, *Zootaxa*. It says that the new species differs from the others in the Indian subcontinent by a combination of characters. Out of the 24 valid species of *Glyptothorax* from the Ganga-Brahmaputra and Barak-Surma-Meghna basin, the Ganga-Brahmaputra has 17. The species is presently known only from the Jambung stream, a tributary of the Siang River near Hawa Camp in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh (Brahmaputra River basin).

Source: Sumir Karmakar. 'New catfish species identified in Arunachal Pradesh's Siang river; named after forest officer', www.deccanherald.com, 22/08/2021.

DELHI/HARYANA

Delhi FD writes to Haryana to take stringent action against liquor smugglers operating inside ESZ of Asola Bhatti WLS



The Delhi Forest Department (FD) has written to the Haryana administration, asking it to identify and act

against liquor vendors operating illegally in the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) near the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). These smugglers break down the boundary wall of the sanctuary and use this shorter route to avoid police. They have been caught on the FD's camera traps.

An FD official said that smugglers bring down small portions of the Asola Bhatti WLS's boundary wall and use a shortcut to deliver liquor from Haryana to Delhi on foot or on motorcycles. The liquor vendors are operating on forest land in Haryana. Illegal construction activity and liquor sale are two major issues in that area.

In 2019, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had declared the area around the boundary of Asola Bhatti WLS in Gurgaon and Faridabad an ESZ. The villages included in the ESZ are Lakadpur (Surajkund), Pali, Mangar, Bandhwari, Gual Pahari, Balola, Gothra (Mohtabad), Badkhal, Ankhir, Mewla Mahrajpur and Anangpur.

Country liquor is manufactured at a place adjacent to the WLS in Anangpur village in Faridabad. The smugglers carry this alcohol to Sangam Vihar, which does not have a liquor store. Most of the time the smuggling happens in the early hours, and the smugglers carry knives and sickles, said another official.

Source: 'Act against illegal liquor vends in eco-sensitive zone near Asola Bhatti sanctuary: Delhi to Haryana', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/07/2021.

GUJARAT

FD to set up three breeding centres of prey species

In an attempt to mitigate human-animal conflicts by increasing the prey-base in forests for wild animals in forests, the Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has planned to set up three breeding centres for ungulates, jungle fowl and hare in Sabarkantha, Dahod and Bhavnagar districts. The initiative is part of the Project for Ecosystem Restoration in Gujarat (PERG) to be funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which has sanctioned a soft loan worth Rs. 905 crores to the FD for nine years' duration.

PERG, expected to begin this year, includes restoration of various ecologically sensitive regions such as coastal areas, grasslands, wetlands and degraded forests.

As per FD officials, major human-animal conflicts in Gujarat are observed due to leopards, lions, sloth bears, crocodiles, blue bulls and wild boars. The breeding centers are an attempt to improve the habitat of wild animals.

As per the FD data, different wildlife circles of Gujarat have witnessed a total 116 cases of human deaths, 679 cases of human injuries, and 21,273 cases of injuries or deaths of cattle in incidents of human-animal conflicts between 2016-17 and 2020-21.

Source: Parimal A Dabhi. 'Gujarat: To mitigate man-animal conflicts, forest dept to set up three breeding centres', www.indianexpress.com, 28/07/2021.

HARYANA

60 butterfly species recorded in Rewari district

60 butterfly species were recorded in Rewari district by the state forest and wildlife department on September 28, coinciding with

the 'Butterfly Month' observed from September 5 to October 4.

The day-long survey, aimed at assessing butterfly diversity in the Aravali region, was conducted across 10,000 ha of Khol block comprising ten villages - namely Palra, Ahhrod, Bassduda, Khol, Manethi, Bhalki, Majra, Nandha, Balwari and Khaleta.

Haryana State Biodiversity Board and non-government organization, Nature First, contributed to the survey conducted under the leadership of principal chief conservator of forests and chief wildlife warden of the state. 60 experts from across the country including, Delhi, Mumbai and Faridabad, took part in the survey and expressed satisfaction at the identification of the large number of species in a single day in a semi-arid region.

The outcome of the survey will form the basis for observing the impact of habitat disturbance and climate change on the ecology of the region. It will also help in chalking out management strategy for the conservation of butterflies and moths. A booklet of all butterfly species recorded with photographs in the survey will be published, informed divisional forest officer of Rewari.

Source: Ashok Kumar. '60 butterfly species identified in Haryana', www.thehindu.com, 29/09/2021.

HIMACHAL PRADESH/ UTTARAKHAND

Invasion of brown trout threatens native Himalayan snow trout: study

A study published recently in *Journal of Applied Ecology* has noted that the exotic brown trout is threatening the native Himalayan snow trout by restricting their distribution and movement in high-altitude river basins. The study notes that that the Himalayan snow trout prefer the river mainstem or the downstream segment for survival. However, the invasive brown trout is

forcing the native species to move upstream towards headwaters or the source of the river.

This is concerning as the headwaters can, at best, only provide sub-optimal habitats, not sufficient to support the entire life of native snow trout, said Aashna Sharma, from Wildlife Institute of India, who co-authored the research paper.

The researchers, including those from Panjab University in Chandigarh, used intensive surveys and geostatistical network models for the study. Watersheds of Asiganga in Uttarakhand and Tirthan in Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh were used as experimental sites to run these models. The researchers compared snow trout in two stream networks with and without invasive species, for assessing differences in their spatial distribution.

The brown trout is an exotic species, which is highly promoted due to its popularity for recreational angling and food delicacy. The fish was introduced under the British rule.

Source: 'Exotic brown trout threatening native Himalayan fish species: study', www.indianexpress.com, 25/09/2021.

KARNATAKA

Forest & revenue to conduct joint survey for relocation of Chengadi villagers from MM Hills WLS

The Chamarajanagar district administration has ordered a joint survey of the reserve forest near Vaishampalya in Hanur division of the MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary for relocation and rehabilitation of the people of Chengadi village. Chikkallur village was originally suggested for the rehabilitation but Vaishampalya near Hanur is being considered now as it is more feasible, informed the deputy conservator of forests, MM Hills.

The deputy commissioner has sought a comprehensive report of the survey by the forest and revenue departments, besides an analysis of the pros and cons of the area

identified for the relocation. The revenue department has also been directed to rectify any anomalies and refine the records pertaining to the extent of landholding by individuals and the families identified for relocation.

Though nearly 200 tribal families living in Chengadi village have periodically sought their relocation, the demand gained official traction in 2018 after which the state government issued an official order notifying the relocation in 2020. But the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the exercise.

The rehabilitation entails acquisition of 178.9 ha of land and the state government has sanctioned Rs. 35 crores for the purpose. A project consultant has also been roped in to provide inputs for the new model village in which the construction will be eco-friendly, emphasis would be on tapping green energy and rainwater harvesting, apart from promoting community farming.

Once implemented, the exercise would be a model for similar rehabilitation schemes proposed of a few more remote villages such as Padusalanattha and Tokkere in the region.

Source: 'Joint survey ordered for rehabilitation of residents of Chengadi village', www.thehindu.com, 02/08/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

Wildlife crime cell opened in Nagpur

The wildlife wing of the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has opened a wildlife crime cell at Van Bhavan in Nagpur. The cell will provide real-time data to officials on past and present cases in the entire state. With centralized data in place, the cell will be able to look into backward and forward linkages and monitor all cases.

At present officials register preliminary offences but there is no data available centrally to know whether these cases are being taken to the logical end. The crime cell will compile all such data and a deputy conservator or divisional forest officer rank

officer with some staff from Maharashtra Zoo Authority will look after the cell. The data will have to be filled by officials at a range level. A meeting will be held every month to review the cases and division officials will be asked to explain reasons for deviation.

At present, Kerala is the only state where such a cell is in operation since 2017, with the support of the non-government organization Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).

Though Melghat Tiger Reserve in Amravati has a crime cell, it operates as a cyber cell on the lines of the police department by providing leads on wildlife criminals.

The wildlife wing is reportedly in the process of procuring a software — HAWK (Hostile Activity Watch Kernel) — for centralized information management system. The WTI is customizing this software for Maharashtra.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Wildlife crime cell begins in city, to provide real-time case data', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22/09/2021.

Roads passing under SGNP exempt from EIA, EC; NP under threat from several road projects

Two infrastructure projects having twin tunnels — Goregaon-Mulund Link Road (GMLR) and Thane-Borivali Link Road (TBLR) — which will pass under the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), are expected to begin construction within the next year. Both the projects have been exempted from carrying out a precautionary environmental impact assessment (EIA) study.

Publicly available documents, however, show that this was not the case initially. Both the projects had separately applied to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2017, seeking environment clearance (EC) for 'Category-A' projects under the EIA notification. However, both the projects were

subsequently delisted or rejected by MoEFCC on identical grounds that the roads are not state or national highways, and hence do not require an EC.

This move is within the ambit of the law as road building as an activity is not covered under EIA Notification, 2006. But given the unique nature of these projects – the first ones wherein tunnels are being proposed under a protected area anywhere in the country – experts and environmentalists have been insisting on applicability of ECs, in addition to clearance by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

GMLR

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had first applied to MoEFCC seeking EC for GMLR on 29 June 2017. The twin tunnels will pass through SGNP for a length of 4.7 km and will occupy about 21 ha of subterranean area under the SGNP.

In September 2017, BMC had complied with certain conditions laid down by the expert appraisal committee (EAC) and submitted additional details as part of this regulatory process. The terms of reference (ToR) were obtained in January 2018. It was only in April 2018 that the matter was delisted by MoEFCC, essentially exempting it from EC and thus an EIA as well.

Documents show that this was done at BMC's behest. In the minutes of their 187th meeting – held on April 12, 2018 – EAC noted, "As the proponent did not provide correct information at the time of submission of online application, the ministry considered the proposal and issued ToR. However, now the proponent has informed that the said project does not require prior EC because it is only a development plan road of BMC and does not even form part of any expressway or state/national highway."

The exemption has also allowed BMC to skip certain essential conditions and studies which had otherwise been imposed by MoEFCC. These include a public hearing, a cumulative impact assessment of all the projects being planned within, around and

through SGNP and a separate study on the project's impact on Tulsi and Vihar lakes, which are about a kilometre away from the tunnels' proposed alignment.

However, an official with BMC's bridges department pointed out that the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has been appointed to conduct a three-year study of the project's impact at the instruction of NBWL, and that possible impact on the aquifers of Tulsi and Vihar lakes have been duly considered.

TBLR

A similar sequence of events can be observed in the case of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)'s TBLR project, which is around 8 km in length and runs parallel to GMLR, towards the northern end of SGNP.

The project had sought EC from MoEFCC in November 2017, when it was being executed by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC). At the time, MoEFCC pointed out: "As per the information furnished by you the present proposal is not national highway / expressway or state highway. Hence, the present proposal is not admissible under EIA Notification, 2006."

In response, MSRDC insisted that the project should be considered under the same. It had pointed out that the applicability of EC is justified as the project alignment is passing through SGNP and traverses 153 m away from Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and 900 m away from the boundary of Karnala Bird Sanctuary and also falls within the protected radius of Matheran eco-sensitive zone.

Cumulative impact assessment is necessary

However, MoEFCC declined to accept this justification, and ToR for the project was never eventually granted. In September 2018, MSRDC swapped the project with MMRDA and instead took over the construction of the Virar-Alibag multi-modal corridor, which will also pass through SGNP.

Environmentalists and citizens have argued that instead of piecemeal clearances,

authorities need to assess the cumulative impact of both the link roads on the larger ecology of SGNP. They pointed out that the Virar-Alibag multi-modal corridor and the Delhi-Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) dedicated freight corridor will also pass through SGNP and while ECs for those have been granted separately, there has been no attempt to find out what the combined effects of these developments will be.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, No. 1, Vol. XXVI, No. 5, Vol. XXV, Nos. 4 & 1 and Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3 & 2).

Source: Prayag Arora-Desai. 'Tunnel projects near Mumbai's SGNP made U-turn on green nod?', www.hindustantimes.com, 23/08/2021.

Smooth-coated otters sighted in Navi Mumbai



A pair of smooth-coated otters was spotted and photographed by birdwatchers S Ramprasad and Sanjeev Balsara in Navi Mumbai's

Kharghar creek on August 13. Photographs were later corroborated by researchers at Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). The species is listed as 'vulnerable' as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list of threatened species globally and, is protected under Schedule 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The presence of this species has been documented in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts earlier. In 2017, the census of smooth-coated otters conducted by the state mangrove cell and Ela Foundation, Pune, pegged their population at around 500. It had found between 437 and 591 otters across 12 creeks in Sindhudurg. The study had also identified threats to the otter's habitat such as sand dredging, water pollution from pesticides, and industries leading to high turbidity in some

creeks where they hunt for fish. In 2019, a pair was seen in Roha, Raigad district.

Navi Mumbai-based NGO, NatConnect Foundation, has been campaigning for the creation of a biodiversity protection plan for 20 areas across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region including the Kharghar creek. A representative of the organization said that this sighting is all the more reason for authorities to take stock of and find measures to protect such wildlife.

Source: Prayag Arora-Desai. 'Smooth-coated otters spotted in Kharghar creek in Navi Mumbai', www.hindustantimes.com, 13/08/2021.

ODISHA

NGT asks Odisha to notify 14 elephant corridors

The Eastern Zonal bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) passed an order mid-August, asking the Odisha government to notify the 14 elephant corridors in the state that have been identified by Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, a non-profit trust. The notification will have to be done within a period of two months.

The NGT order comes in the wake of rising elephant deaths in Odisha since 2001. As against 33 elephant deaths per year on an average between 1990 and 2000, 46 yearly deaths were reported on an average between 2001 and 2010, which has further increased to 76 average annual elephant deaths since 2010. (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, Nos. 4 & 3 and Vol. XXV, No. 6).

Wildlife Society of Odisha, an NGO, had moved the NGT alleging that though the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) had submitted details of elephant corridors in Odisha to the forest and environment department in the state in 2012 for identification of 14 corridors with a total area of 870.61 sq. km, no action was taken for their formal notification. The NGO stated further

that the state had spent Rs. 20 crores in improving the corridors, but it had not issued a formal notification to secure them legally.

The elephant landscape has changed dramatically in the last two decades with Keonjhar district, which had 112 elephants in 2002, left with only 40 now due to large scale mining, and Dhenkanal district, which had 81 elephants in 2002, now has 169, due to green area fed by Rengali irrigation canals. Similarly, 70 odd elephants from the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary have migrated to Ganjam, Nayagarh and Cuttack districts, with many being killed by trains and electrocution in Ganjam.

Mining activities for minerals like coal, iron ore, bauxite, and manganese among others in Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Angul have left little space for elephants while illegal stone and morrum quarries too have disturbed the elephant habitats and movement paths.

Source: Debabrata Mohanty. 'NGT asks Odisha government to notify 14 elephant corridors, ecologists cheer', www.hindustantimes.com, 18/08/2021.

Odisha enhances compensation amount to encourage relocation from PAs

The Odisha Government has enhanced the compensation amount to encourage relocation of villages and human settlements besides easing the process for forest dwellers willing to move out of the protected areas (PAs) by just intimating the gram sabha. Under its revised relocation guidelines, each family will now be entitled to a financial assistance of Rs. 15 lakh for relocation from PAs and inaccessible forest areas. Financial support provided to such families under the existing State Relocation Policy 2016 was Rs. 10 lakh.

The forest department (FD) has also decided that individual families moving out without availing the rehabilitation package too can get an incentive of Rs. five lakh. The decision to incentivise individual families has been incorporated for the first time for this

purpose. Besides, these families will no longer have to seek consent of the gram sabha. They can just inform the body and shift.

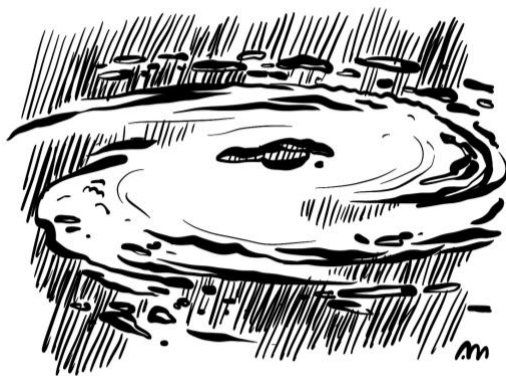
The government has under the fresh guidelines also extended this incentive and assistance to families willing to be relocated from "inaccessible forest areas" including the locations connecting wildlife habitats.

The FD had faced difficulties in relocating families from Jamunagarh village in the core of Similipal Tiger Reserve. Of 63 families in the village, all but three have moved. In Satkosia, around six villages are yet to be relocated. However, finding alternative suitable land for relocation of the entire settlements is a major challenge.

At least 819 forest families in the state reside within the core and buffer areas of PAs of which around 420 are from within Bhitarkanika National Park.

Source: 'Odisha raises assistance for relocation from sanctuaries, tiger reserves', www.newindianexpress.com, 30/07/2021.

Cyclone Yaas affects saltwater crocodile nesting at Bhitarkanika NP



Around 2,500 hatchlings were found in 84 nests of saltwater crocodiles at the Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) this year. In 2020, the corresponding numbers were 103 nests and 3,000 hatchlings respectively. Forest officials said that the drop could be attributed to inundation of large stretches of the park and

the tidal waves experienced during cyclone Yaas in May 2021.

It was observed that many nests that the animals build with mangrove twigs, leaves and mud on high ground to ensure they remain dry and get direct sunlight were inundated and damaged by the tidal waves.

The Union environment ministry, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, had started a crocodile breeding and rearing project in Dangamal within the NP in 1975. The saltwater crocodile population here has grown as a result from 96 in 1974 to 1768 in 2021. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 1 and Vol XXV, No. 5)

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Around 2,500 crocodiles born in Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park', www.downtoearth.org.in, 23/08/2021.

RAJASTHAN

Arindam Tomar re-appointed as CWLW; others transferred as well

The state government has re-appointed Arindam Tomar, a 1989-batch Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer, as the chief wildlife warden (CWLW) of the state. Tomar will take charge from Mohan Lal Meena. This is the second time Tomar has been appointed as CWLW. On 1 November 2020, he was transferred as additional principal chief conservator of forests (APCCF development) after Meena replaced him as the CWLW.

Rajeev Kumar Goyal (IFS Rajasthan 1988) has been given additional charge as the chairman of Rajasthan Biodiversity Board. He will also work as PCCF, project formulation & coordination. Arijit Banerjee (IFS 1991) will be the new APCCF, information technology. Anand Mohan (IFS 1996) will be the new member secretary for Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board. He replaced Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj (IFS 1994, who has been transferred as APCCF, protection and nodal officer.

In three tiger reserves - Sariska, Ranthambore and Mukundra Hills - one probationary IFS officer each has been appointed on assistant conservator of forest. Similarly, one probationary officer has been appointed in the Desert National Park.

Source: 'Rajasthan: Arindam Tomar back as chief wildlife warden, new roles for 14 officers', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 02/08/2021.

TAMIL NADU

State government asks Centre to move Neutrino Observatory project outside TN

A delegation from Tamil Nadu (TN), led by Lok Sabha MP TR Baalu, has demanded that the Union government drop the India Neutrino Observatory (INO) project proposed in the tiger corridor in Theni district. The demand was made to the Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal in New Delhi, ahead of the Prime Minister (PM)-chaired PRAGATI (Pro-active Governance and Timely Implementation) review meeting scheduled in September end.

Reportedly, the Centre has been trying to push through the project by putting pressure on the state despite Chief Minister MK Stalin himself having written to the PM saying the project cannot be permitted at the proposed site. Baalu said that the Centre cannot force the project on TN and TN government has clearly conveyed to Goyal that the state will not give permission for the project, and the reasons behind it.

The basic science project idea that was conceived more than two decades ago cannot proceed without the consent of TN Pollution Control Board and approval of National Board for Wildlife. Currently, the proposal is before the State Board for Wildlife, chaired by CM Stalin.

According to the state forest department, the project site falls inside the

Mathikettan-Periyar tiger corridor. It's a very narrow strip of land which serves as the only link between the Periyar Tiger Reserve (TR), Mathikettan Shola National Park (NP), Anamalai TR, Eravikulam NP and the Srivilliputhur Megamalai TR for the movement of tigers.

INO project director Gobinda Majumder said in a statement that the project comprises 26.825 ha of revenue land above ground and 4.62 ha of land underground comprising the tunnels and lab caverns. The facilities on the surface are restricted to the 26.825 ha of revenue land and lie completely outside the reserve forest. Forest officials have, however, said that the tiger corridor already demarcated is only notional and that the corridor used by tigers may include the adjacent revenue lands as well; any disturbance will affect tiger population in several critical habitats of Western Ghats.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'TN team asks Centre to drop neutrino observatory project', www.newindianexpress.com, 29/09/2021.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

India to conduct first scientific estimation of elephants in 2022

The first scientific estimation of the elephant population in India is to be carried out in 2022. The announcement was made, on Elephant Day (August 12), by Bhupender Yadav, Union minister of environment, forest and climate change. The ministry has released protocols that will need to be followed during the census. The assessment will be conducted in three phases: ground surveys, analyses of remotely sensed data and camera traps. Camera trapping will be conducted along with DNA analysis of dung samples.

The last census that was carried out in 2017 had concluded that there are more than

27,000 elephants in the country. However, the methods were not necessarily scientific and can be thought of more as a headcount than an actual census. Therefore, a scientific population estimation will be conducted by following methods used for tigers and leopards, said SP Yadav, member secretary, National Tiger Conservation Authority and head of the Central Zoo Authority.

The 2017 census was a synchronized exercise and according to it elephants are found in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Southern Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Northern Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

According to the report, the figures in 2017 were lower than the last census estimate from 2012, which had estimated between 29,391 and 30,711 elephants. However, experts believe comparisons cannot be made as different states employed different techniques in the 2012 census.

In response to questions raised in the Lok Sabha recently, the MoEFCC said that in 2020, 87 elephants and 359 people died due to human-elephant conflict while in 2019-20, 19 elephants and 585 humans had died.

Yadav, along with minister of state Ashwini Kumar Chaubey, also released the fourth edition of the Elephant Division's quarterly newsletter *Trumpet*. The newsletter highlights the various conservation regimes that have been adopted by the state forest departments along with other institutions and organisations.

Source: 'India to conduct first scientific estimation of its elephant population in 2022', www.firstpost.com, 18/08/2021.

NBWL to levy 2% of cost for projects inside PAs, ESZs & wildlife corridors; to meet monthly to fast-track project clearances

The standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has decided to levy 2% of the proportionate cost of projects falling inside protected areas (PAs) and eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) on user agencies for impact mitigation measures, wherever required. The amount collected as a tax will be spent on mitigation measures within the same PA, ESZ and wildlife corridor.

The decision which was taken in NBWL's 64th meeting held on August 7 has not gone down well with wildlife experts.

Praveen Bhargav, a former member of the NBWL, said that endangered wildlife now faces a double whammy of fragile habitats getting fragmented and excess money causing cascading impact in PAs due to wide-ranging construction and earthmoving activity using bulldozers, which will be passed off as mitigation and habitat improvement work. Further, he pointed out that already, there are such negative impacts after the release of Rs. 50,000 crores CAMPA fund.

Another former NBWL member Kishor Rithe said that the decision is the same which was taken when he was on the board in 2012-13. The Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife is following it since 2014. The standing committee now needs to look beyond and increase the levy to 5-7% in order to discourage infrastructure projects in PAs, ESZs, and corridors.

States/union territories impose costs at different rates for mitigation measures. The ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) received requests that the cost imposed should be based on the proportion of the project lying within the PAs or the ESZs rather than the total cost of the project. MoEFCC has also received requests that instead of imposing costs on project proponents, they may be asked to implement mitigation measures.

MoEFCC secretary RP Gupta suggested that the conditions should prescribe mitigation measures to be carried out by the project proponent instead of restricting the cost to a certain percentage of the project cost. However, another official pointed out that if the project proponents are allowed to carry out mitigation measures inside PAs, it will cause interference in the management of parks.

GEER Foundation has called for framing guidelines for fixing impact cost of the projects and suggested that the amount recovered from the project proponents should be deposited in state CAMPA accounts and annual plans of operations may be prepared and sanctioned for withdrawal of funds and execution of mitigation plans.

A section of former principal chief conservators of forest said that it is a pity that NBWL is on a project-clearing spree without even studying them; the money if deposited in CAMPA will lead to misuse as it is happening now. They pointed out that instead of doing afforestation works, CAMPA money is being used to procure machines and implement construction activities.

As per the MoEFCC notification of 22 July 2014, the NBWL Standing Committee ordinarily meets once in three months. However, now it has been proposed to conduct meetings every month to minimize the number of pending cases and avoid project delays.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'NBWL allows devpt inside PAs and ESZs with 2% levy', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 24/08/2021.

MP has the highest leopard numbers: census report

With 3421 leopards in the wild, Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of leopards in the country followed by Karnataka at 1783 and Maharashtra with 1690 leopards. The numbers are from the report *Status of Leopards, Co-predators and Megaherbivores in India, 2018* by the Wildlife Institute of India, that was

released at the end of July. The report revealed that there are 12,852 leopards spread across tiger reserves in the country.

Source: Amit S Upadhye. 'Karnataka records second highest leopard population in country', www.newindiaexpress.com, 02/08/2021.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH

Cinnamon morph of rare Asiatic golden cat camera trapped in Sylhet division

A systematic camera-trap survey, the first of its kind in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh has recently recorded the Asian golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) in the forest reserves of Habiganj and Moulvibazar districts. These forests are connected to Tripura Hills in India. Northeast Bangladesh Carnivore Conservation Initiative (NBCCI), a carnivore-research group formed by early-career zoologists of Bangladesh, made the discovery.

Other than the regular golden coat colour, there are five other coat morphs of the Asian golden cat. So far, the nominal golden, grey, and melanistic morphs have been recorded in Bangladesh. This is the first discovery of cinnamon (reddish dark brown) morph in the country.

The Asian golden cat is the only polymorphic wild cat of Asia — the fact came into the spotlight only in 2019 from a camera-trapping study in Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, India that had recorded six morphs in a single forest. The species is extremely rare. There are less than 10 reported occurrences of the cat in Bangladesh. In addition to the habitat loss, poaching for is a serious threat to the species.

Biologist Dr. Reza Khan first collected a golden cat skin in 1982 from the Hill Tracts of Chattogram. The only existing study on the

golden cats of Bangladesh was carried out by Dr. Monirul H Khan, professor of zoology, Jahangirnagar University. The 2008 work discussed bushmeat hunting in the hill tracts as a threat to the cat. Ronald Halder, a bird-watcher, also had a brief encounter with the cat while on a bird-photography trip in Bandarban district. Now, nearly a decade later, Creative Conservation Alliance (CCA), a conservation NGO, camera-trapped the species from Sangu-Matamuhuri reserve forests.

There have been only a couple of records from the Sylhet division. In 2009, a melanistic golden cat was killed purportedly as a 'black panther' in a village of Sylhet district bordering Meghalaya. In 2017, another study recorded the species from the forests of Moulvibazar.

The survey of NBCCI has also revealed that the region has a diverse and distinct community of terrestrial mammals. The study found more than 10 carnivore mammals, and a rich prey assemblage including the brush-tailed porcupine, a species that is poorly studied across its range, and recorded here for the first time.

These discoveries have highlighted the importance of the trans-border forests of Habiganj and Moulvibazar as forest complexes where tea gardens play a crucial role as a wildlife corridor.

Source: Muntasir Akash. Camera-trap study reveals rare wild cat in northeastern Bangladesh', www.tbsnews.net, 29/09/2021.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Four landscapes in northeastern China can support viable tiger populations: study

A study published recently in the journal *Biological Conservation*, has noted that four major forested landscapes in northeastern

China – Laoyeling, Zhang-Guangcailing, Wandashan and the Lesser Khinghan Mountains - may be able to support more than 300 Amur tigers including 119 breeding females. The study was carried out by scientists from Northeastern Forest University in Harbin, China, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), UC Davis, Amur Tiger National Reserve, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and a few others

To achieve the goal of 300-plus tigers in China, the authors say that large prey species such as red deer and wild boar need to be restored along with extensive land-use planning, improving connectivity of habitat, reducing negative human impacts, and extensive international cooperation. In addition, a feasibility assessment is needed for reintroduction of tigers from other sources as a means of speeding recovery in landscapes without breeding females.

As many as 500 Amur tigers roamed throughout northeast China as recently as the 1930s. However, by 2000, due to loss of habitat and prey combined with poaching, there are no more than 12~16 Amur tigers found along the border with Russia. Since then,

the Natural Forest Protection Project halted logging over much of the region and led to the relocation of forest workers out of the region. The creation of nature reserves, improved anti-poaching efforts, and compensation for human-tiger conflicts have further helped to ease the pressures on tigers in northeast China.

Camera trap surveys from 2013 to 2018 detected a total of 55 individual tigers in the four forest landscapes in northeast China, with an increase from seven individuals in 2013 to 33 individuals in 2018. During this same period, at least 20 cubs were born in the region.

Amur tigers are distributed across 47,813 sq. km in four major landscapes, but the vast majority are found in the Laoyeling Landscape, where the Chinese government recently created the Northeast Tiger Leopard National Park along the border with Russia. At 14,600 sq. km, this park represents the largest protected area for tigers in the world.

Source: ‘Good Tiger News: Northeast China Is Home to 55 Amur Tigers’,
www.newsroom.wcs.org, 26/07/2021.

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

NATIONAL NEWS

Another veterinary drug, Nimesulide, threatens vultures in India

Another veterinary painkiller drug, Nimesulide, has been causing the death of vultures in India, suggests a new study published recently in the journal *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*. The study has recommended that the drug should be banned by the Indian government. Nimesulide appears to act similar to Diclofenac in exerting toxic effects on vultures.

The study involving White-rumped vultures is part of a government-funded project titled, ‘National Centre for Surveillance and

Monitoring of the Impact of Environmental Contaminants on Ecosystem Components with a special focus on Birds in India’. It has been authored by experts from the Division of Ecotoxicology, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History and Jivdaya Charitable Trust.

In two separate incidents in Gujarat in 2019, four White-rumped vultures were found dead – two in Sanand while two others were found in the Wild Ass Sanctuary. A detailed study concluded that they were exposed to

Nimesulide through carcasses of cattle they consumed before death.

The central government has set up eight breeding centres for vultures and has plans to set up eight more under the National Vulture Conservation Action Plan (2020-25). But there have been different studies that note that the government has not been successful in checking the use of veterinary drugs toxic to vultures. Despite the ban in 2006, Diclofenac still accounts for 10-46% of all painkiller drugs offered for sale for livestock treatment in India, suggesting weak enforcement of existing regulations. Further, another legally available veterinary drug, Aceclofenac also rapidly metabolises into Diclofenac after being administered to cattle.

Rhys Green, a professor at Cambridge University and chairman of Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE), said in a statement that the new study provides compelling support for the case that the licence for veterinary use of Nimesulide should be withdrawn immediately. Chris Bowden, SAVE's programme manager in India, said that the decline in vulture population has led to the massive increase in the feral dog population because of the easy availability of cattle carcasses. India has the highest incidence of rabies in the world and of the 20,000 rabies deaths each year, 96% are a result of dog bites. Therefore, it is vital to rule out every possibility that is harmful to the vulture. He further pointed out that the recent ban of veterinary Ketoprofen by the Bangladesh government is a good example, and one that India should replicate for the veterinary products Nimesulide, Aceclofenac and Ketoprofen as well as other drugs where the safety is not yet established.

Diclofenac has long been established as the prime reason for wiping out 99% of the vulture population in India in the 1990s. Later two more veterinary drugs – Aceclofenac and Ketoprofen – were found to be toxic for vultures. While Diclofenac is banned for veterinary use, a proposal to ban the other two drugs is already under consideration by the

Indian government, said Vibhu Prakash, vulture scientist and deputy director at Bombay Natural History Society. Further, he said, that the Bareilly-based Indian Veterinary Research of India has already been entrusted the task of conducting safety tests of four other veterinary drugs, including Nimesulide. The other three are Ibuprofen, Anlagen and Paracetamol.

Source: Vivek Gupta. 'Now, another veterinary painkiller is accelerating extinction of vultures in India', www.scroll.in, 14/07/2021.

Thol, Wadhvana in Gujarat and Sultanpur, Bhindawas in Haryana, get Ramsar tag

Four wetlands, two each in Gujarat and Haryana have been recognised as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. These include Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Wadhvana wetlands in Gujarat and Sultanpur National Park and Bhindawas WLS in Haryana. This increases the number of Ramsar sites in India to 46.

Every year nearly 50,000 migratory birds belonging to over 100 species arrive at Sultanpur. It is also home to a number of rare and endangered species of resident birds. Bhindawas WLS is a freshwater wetland. More than 80 species of migratory and more than a hundred resident species have been recorded here. Both Sultanpur and Bhindawas also form an important part of the ecological corridor and the flyways for a number of migratory birds.

Thol Lake WLS lies on the Central Asian Flyway and more than 320 bird species can be found here. The wetland supports more than 30 threatened waterbird species. Wadhvana wetland provides wintering ground to migratory waterbirds, including over 80 species that migrate on the Central Asian Flyway. They include some threatened species such as Pallas's fish-Eagle, Common Pochard, and Dalmatian Pelican, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and Ferruginous Duck.

Source: ‘Sultanpur, Bhindawas in Haryana get Ramsar sites tag’, www.dailypioneer.com, 18/08/2021.
‘Four more Indian wetlands get Ramsar recognition; matter of pride, says PM Modi’, www.indiatoday.in, 14/08/2021.

ASSAM

Local residents’ group photo-documents deterioration of Deepor Beel; local citizens honoured

About six years ago, dairy farmer Pramod Kalita formed an informal group of 25 members to document the deterioration of the Deepor Beel wetland. The group pooled money for three digital single-lens reflex cameras and went about clicking the elephants, trees, birds, boats, a massive garbage dump and warehouses and a railway track skirting the wetland. Recently, on the occasion of the India's 75th Independence Day, the group held a photo exhibition on the road along the southern edge of Deepor Beel showing the tragic tale of a once-rich and much larger wetland.

Fewer elephants come to the wetland than two-three decades ago because the wetland has lost or is losing at least five aquatic plants and reeds the animals gorged on. The number of fishermen has come down from 850 to some 100 because the water is contaminated with seepage from the garbage dump on the wetland's eastern side and Guwahati's sewage, observed Kalita. To make things worse, picnic spots, snacks shops and eateries along the road have contributed to the littering of the wetland.

Five environmental organisations — Midway Journey, Earthful Foundation, Fridays for Future, Climate Front India, North East Development Agency and Xondhan — cleared and segregated the trash around the photo exhibition road. They also honoured friends of elephants, the elderly residents of villages in the vicinity, who keep a watch on the pachyderms during their movement between the elevated Rani Reserve Forest and Deepor Beel. The elephants have to cross the railway

track and the road alongside to reach the wetland. Romila Boro, Hareswar Tumung and Bijoy Rabha were each given a framed artwork depicting elephants negotiating the killer track.

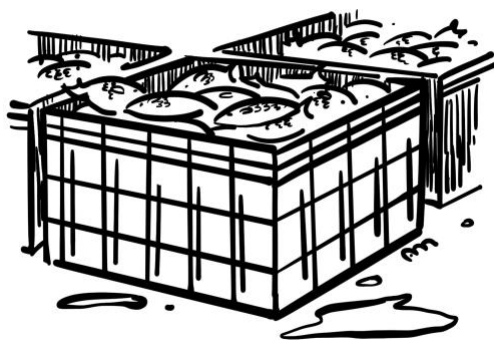
Romila Boro is the widow of Koliya Boro, one of the earliest conservationists of the area who was run over by a speeding train on a rainy night in 2014. He was trying to stop the train to save an approaching herd of elephants.

There were 75 villagers guarding some elephant routes in a 1.5-km stretch. Almost all left as the forest department paid too little as an honorarium. After Boro's death, only three are remaining, said Bijoy Rabha. The third, who could not make it for the felicitation, is Lakhindor Teron. He has been amnesiac and incoherent after surviving an accident two years ago. A car hit him while he was ensuring passage for a herd of elephants.

Source: Rahul Karmakar. ‘Assam villagers tell wetland's tragic tale through photos’, www.thehindu.com, 15/08/2021.

TAMIL NADU

Fishing harbour proposed inside Kaliveli IBA puts ecology & livelihoods at risk



The Tamil Nadu government has proposed a modern greenfield fishing harbour with 12,000 tonnes per annum capacity and all supportive amenities like auction halls and landing centres in the Kaliveli backwaters in Villupuram district.

Kaliveli is South India's second largest brackish-water lake after Pulicat, is an

Important Bird Area (IBA) and a wetland recognized by the National Wetland Conservation and Management Programme. Earlier this year, the Villupuram administration issued a first declaration under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 to declare Kaliveli wetlands as a bird sanctuary. The area hosts over 30,000 ducks, 20,000 to 40,000 migratory shorebirds and 20,000 to 50,000 terns in the winter. The Grey-tailed Tattler, a rare migratory wader, has been recorded only here and in the Pulicat across the country. Building a harbour inside this region will be disastrous, say conservation biologists and environmentalists.

Also, Kaliveli lagoon has been the traditional fishing ground for folk who use non-motorised country-boats. Around 65,000 people, mostly from marginalised communities are dependent on this lagoon for their livelihood; the project would disrupt it.

The Coastal Regulation Zone clearance application submitted by the fisheries department before the State Coastal Zone Management Authority reveals that a navigation channel is proposed to be developed in the Kaliveli backwaters to create a permanent approach channel for the fishing vessels. This would be achieved by clearing the sandbar between the Kaliveli waters and the sea. Besides, a navigation basin is proposed within the backwaters. To prevent sedimentation of the navigation channel, two retaining walls are planned on the northern and southern sides of the channel.

Moreover, north of the proposed fishing harbour site is the 17th century Alamparai Fort built at Kadapakkam during the Mughal era. The state archeology department has taken up work to renovate the fort. According to the department relevant rules suggest that 100 m from the fort is a 'no development zone' and areas 100 to 300 m from the fort are regulated, where only certain kinds of activities are permitted.

As per the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, the preparation of terms of reference (ToR) is a mandatory prerequisite for the commencement of preparation of the EIA report. The official documents reveal that the State EIA Authority issued ToR on October 17, 2020, while EIA report was already completed on June 4, 2020, which was used to conduct a public hearing in 2021. A closer analysis reveals that the rapid EIA report prepared prior to issuance of ToR was copy pasted and produced as the final EIA report, which is a clear violation of EIA Notification.

In the meanwhile, the environment Secretary is reported to have said that she was not aware of the project.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'Proposed harbour a threat to Kaliveli ecosystem?', www.newindianexpress.com, 02/08/2021.



New!!!

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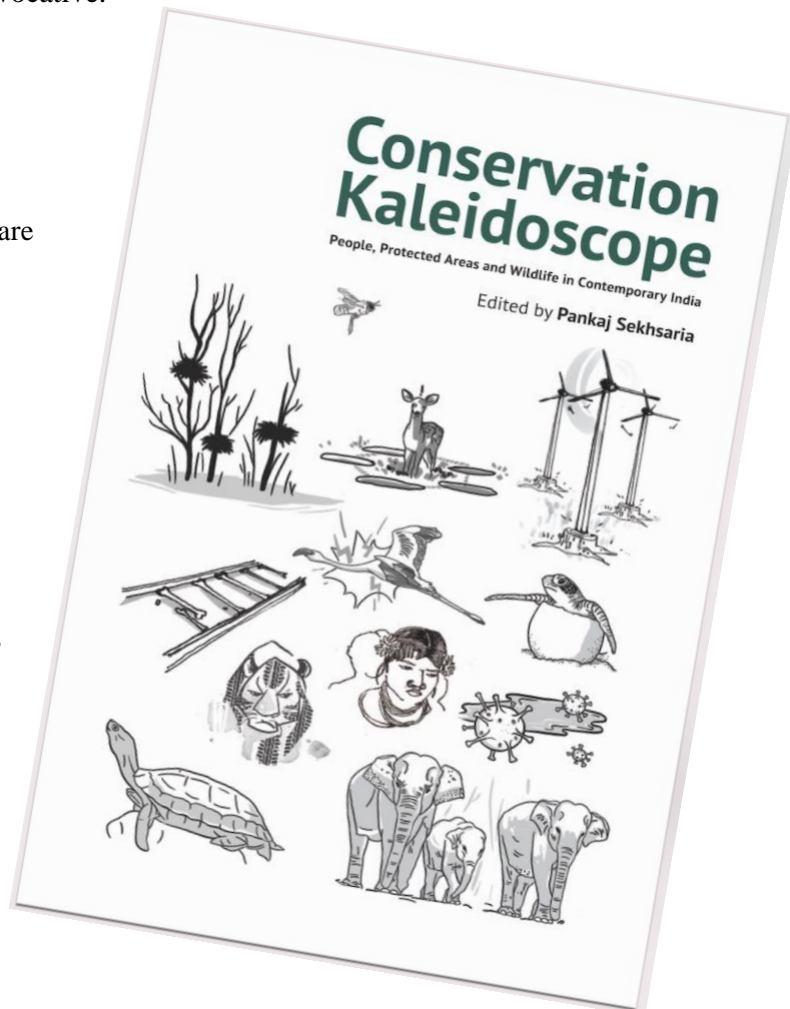
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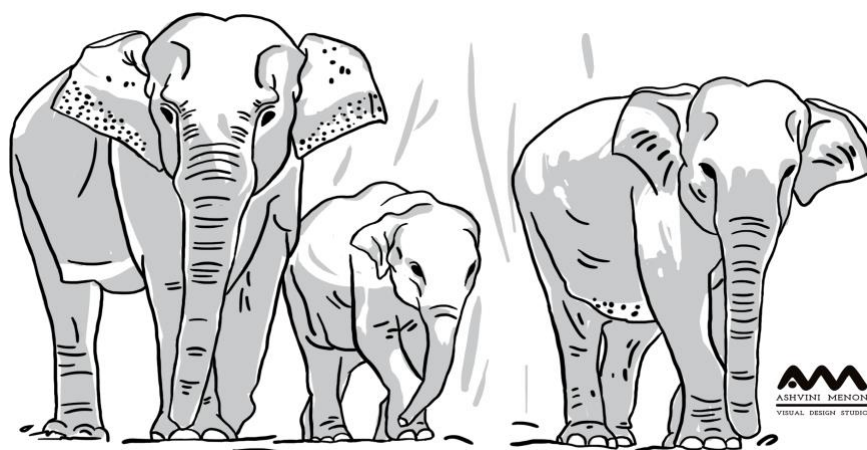
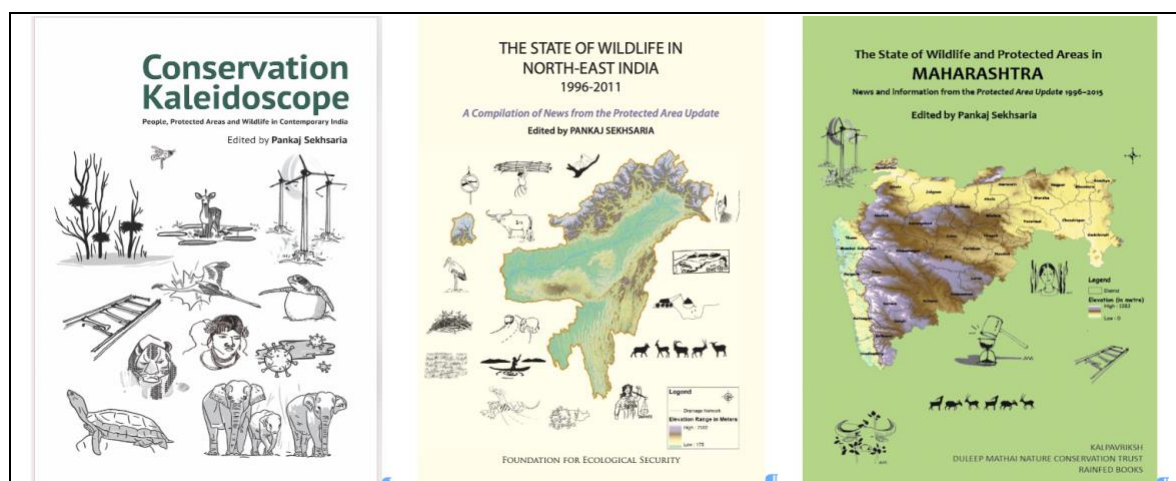


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Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. *Garcinia sibeswarii* (Clusiaceae), a new species from Assam, India

Author(s): Peerumuhammed Subaida Shameer, Jatindra Sarma, Narayanan Nair Mohanan, Ajima Begum

Keywords: *Garcinia*, Assam, North East India, Eudicots

Summary: In Assam's Dulang Reserve Forest, a new species of flora namely *Garcinia sibeswarii* has been described. **Link:** <https://doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.507.2.7>

2. Willingness to pay for biodiversity conservation in Dachigam National Park, India

Author(s): Mohammad Younus Bhat, Arfat Ahmad Sofi

Keywords: Biodiversity, Contingent valuation method, Dachigam National Park, Logit regression model, Willingness to Pay

Summary: A contingent valuation survey conducted across four months in Kashmir's Dachigam National Park estimated the Willingness to Pay for biodiversity conservation by the households. The residents were willing to pay Rs 245.57 on an average to improve the park's attribute via water rates. Such research can aid in management of the landscape.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1617138121000698>

3. Status of tree diversity of the Jaldapara National Park in West Bengal, India

Author(s): Chandra Ghosh, Sumita Ghatak, Kishor Biswas, AP Das

Keywords: North Bengal, Threatened flora, Vegetation, Duars, Angiosperms, Phytodiversity

Summary: In West Bengal's Jaldapara National Park, floristic surveys conducted between 2016 and 2018 in winter, pre and post monsoons recorded 294 species of wild and cultivated trees.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666719320300613>

4. Temporal interactions and moon illumination effect on mammals in a tropical semievergreen forest of Manas National Park, Assam, India

Author(s): Urjit Bhatt, Bhupendra Singh Adhikari, Bilal Habib, Salvador Lyngdoh

Keywords: Facilitation, Mesopredator release, Moon phase, Suppression, Tropical forest

Summary: Time-related overlap and effects of moon cycle of 36 mammal species recorded on camera traps revealed a high degree of overlap between most sympatric carnivores and a low overlap between different body-sized carnivores. It also discusses the correlation of animal's activity with moon phases.

Link:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/btp.12917>

5. *Bromus husainii* (Poaceae: Bromeae), a new species from Valley of Flowers National Park, Uttarakhand, India

Author(s): Rekha Yadav, Dileshwar Prasad, Shailja Tripathi, Shubham Jaiswal, Priyanka Agnihotri

Keywords: Bromeae, Morphology, Taxonomy, Gramineae

Summary: The authors described and illustrated a new species of Poaceae namely *Bromus husainii* from Uttarakhand's Valley of Flowers National Park.

Link:

<https://www.biotaxa.org/Phytotaxa/article/view/phytotaxa.516.1.5>

6. Ethnozoological use of primates in northeastern India

Author(s): Deborah Daolagupu, Nazimur Rahman Talukdar, Parthankar Choudhury

Keywords: Biata tribe, Hoolock Gibbon, Mizoram, traditional medicine

Summary: A literature review of existing resources found that seven out of 11 primates are used in ethnozoological practices. Various body parts (blood, brain, etc.) of primates such as Hoolock gibbon, and Capped Langur are used to treat 38 different ailments.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/6873/8006>

7. Seasonal diets of Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) in the Khangchendzonga National Park, Eastern Himalaya India

Author(s): Rakesh Basnett, Awadhesh Kumar, Anurag Vishwakarma, Barin Kumar Boro

Keywords: Asiatic black bear, feeding ecology, conservation, Khangchendzonga National Park, Sikkim, scat analysis

Summary: Thirty-two plant species were identified by analysing the scat of Asiatic black bears in and around the Khangchendzonga National Park. Animal matter such as ants, livestock and chicken was also found.

Link:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00222933.2021.1899324>

8. A new species of *Parasopubia* (Orobanchaceae) from the southern Western Ghats, India

Author(s): Divya Korappara Venugopal, Santhosh Nampy, Ayilliath Kuttiyeri Pradeep, Dani Francis, Vishnu Mohan, SR Sasi

Keywords: Critically Endangered, Idukki, Mathikettan Shola National Park, Orobanchaceae, *Parasopubia raghavendrae*

Summary: The authors describe *Parasopubia raghavendrae*, a new species of Orobanchaceae from Mathikettan Shola National Park, Kerala. It is only known from the aforementioned site and Critically Endangered as per IUCN evaluation criteria.

Link:

<https://rjb.revistas.csic.es/index.php/rjb/article/view/523>

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

Email: sproutsenvttrust@gmail.com



MEGHALAYA

GUJARAT

Lesser Florican population declines in Gujarat

According to the latest survey by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the population as well as distribution of the Lesser florican has gone down drastically in Gujarat. While 141 individuals were sighted in Gujarat in 1999, only 54 were sighted in 2010. In 1999, the birds were found in 12 grassland areas in the state. This number has come down to five habitats in 2010.

Of the 54 individuals counted, 26 floricans were found in the Blackbuck National Park (NP) in Velavadar. The second largest population, 22, was found in the Naliya grasslands in Bhuj and the remaining five sightings were in the Rampur area of Dahod district. There was no sighting of the Lesser florican in the districts of Junagadh, Jamnagar and Rajkot, areas from where they had been reported in previous surveys. It has been reported that the grasslands at Naliya are being rapidly encroached upon for cotton cultivation, causing a huge loss of habitat for both bustards and local herdsmen.

In the 2010 study, 59 grasslands across India were surveyed, which include those surveyed in 1999. Gujarat leads the nation in terms of Lesser florican population. The state is followed by Rajasthan (18) and Madhya Pradesh (12). In 1999, Gujarat had reported 141 birds while Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had reported 63 and 34 individuals respectively. The present survey was aimed at updating the 1999 study of the bird and its habitat in North-Western India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh), that had been conducted by the late Dr. Ravi Sankaran.

Source: Vijaysinh Parmar, 'Drastic decline in numbers of Lesser Floricans', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/08/11.

Survey on Western Hoolock Gibbon in Garo Hills

Samrakshan Trust has initiated a study on the Hoolock Gibbon in the Balpakram Baghmara Landscape through research, community based conservation action and increased involvement, of the Forest Department and the Government. The landscape includes the Balpakram NP the Siju WLS and the Baghmara Reserve Forest.

Two sets of data one for the monsoon and the other for winter will be collected from Baghmara RF and detailed information on presence of the Hoolock Gibbon will be collected from across the landscape during winter i.e. between October and February.

Source: 'Survey on Western Hoolock Gibbon presence in Garo Hills', *Green Footprint* Newsletter, June-July 2011

Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011

The Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011 was presented to the Baghmara RFO of Balpakram NP Division and the Garo Students' Union - Ruga Unit for their contribution towards curbing hunting and combating wildlife pet keeping in South Garo Hills.

CG Momin, the Baghmara RFO, and his staff have been carrying out field trips to combat illegal wildlife trade, rescue wild animals, and in their subsequent rehabilitation. They have also booked a number of culprits for wildlife offences. The Garo Students Union, Ruga unit, led by Matgrik Marak, got the award for their role in numerous conservation activities and also for raising their voice against haphazard coal mining in the region.

This is the 2nd year that the awards are being given. They were initiated in 2010 by the Samrakshan Trust on their 10th foundation day.

Source: 'Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011', *The Shillong Times*, 07/09/11.
'Foresters, students bag Garo hill prize', *The Telegraph*, 08/09/11.

PERSPECTIVE

And then they came for the coast...

As someone who has spent 90% of his life less than 10 km from the coast, I am worried. It is not the rising sea levels that might drown Mumbai in 2050, nor the reloaded IPCC reports of 2021 that apparently have all-new information. It is the sheer disregard towards the coast of this country and the oceans of the world. The disregard towards the front liners (our coastal communities) that are already facing climate change, and the willful ignorance of how the globalised economy in the current form can never protect them, or us.

Like plastic in the nostrils of turtles was not enough, from Kandla to Kanyakumari, from Agatti to Andamans - the pressure on our coasts is only increasing day by day. The various coastal communities like fishers and those engaged in fishing allied activities, toddy tappers, farmers and people who rely on small-scale tourism cannot be ignored as their livelihood is a critical part of working on coasts. Blue flag beaches are being celebrated today at the same time as the blue economy is being shoved down people's throats.

While the coastal road project in Mumbai may have seen about 10-20 protests over the years, barely 100 km away from the financial centre, a port that was shelved in 1998 has re-emerged. It would involve the concretization of at least 2,000 hectares of the sea and strangling of the 30-year-old Dahanu Taluka Environment Protection Authority. Wadhwan was chosen as the site for the port because of its connectivity to the western line network that will facilitate the Delhi-Mumbai Freight Corridor project (which is supposed to cause damage to not only the Sanjay Gandhi National Park but also the forest divisions of Thane and Dahanu and create a water crisis due to the enormous industrial requirements).

Such corridors are being built across the country, ravaging not only protected areas but protected rituals, culture and knowledge too. India's 7,517 km long coastline needs everyone to stand up. It is the duty of not only the nine coastal States and 1,382 islands. It requires everyone - activists and researchers and also consumers and conscious citizens.

It is now time to realise what we are doing to our coast, it is now time to ask the right questions to the right people. As sooner or later, it will affect us all.

- **Yash Marwah** is a writer and communications strategist. He is the co-creator of Let India Breathe - an environmental communications collective.

Email: letindiabreathe.in@gmail.com

For private circulation/Printed Matter

To

From: **Kalpavriksh**, Apt. 5, Sri Dutta Krupa,
908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004