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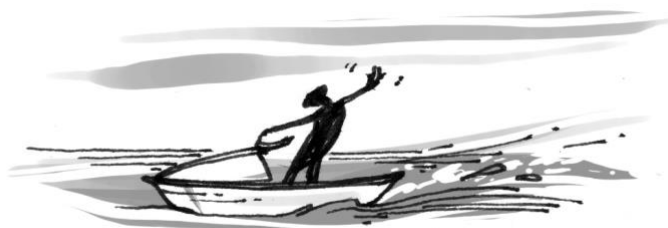
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EDITORIAL

Where should the tiger go?

There are two striking stories from Maharashtra in this issue of the PA Update that raise a number of interesting and important questions. They point at the same time to visible contradictions and hypocrisies where systemic and institutional attitudes to wildlife conservation are concerned.

On the one hand there is no dearth of claims of our commitment to wildlife, to the protection in particular of the tiger and how we have been successful in ensuring this. The drift of the narrative is that nothing will (be allowed to) come in the way where the tiger is concerned – funds won't be in short supply, monitoring and surveillance is being improved to deal with the poaching problem, more tiger bearing areas are being brought under the protected area network, the number of tiger reserves is being constantly increased and there is an aggressive push for relocation of settlements from tiger reserves. Tiger sightings in tiger reserves like the first in Buxa recently in many years are celebrated big and areas that don't have tiger populations like Kumbhalgarh in Rajasthan are being declared tiger reserves in the belief that they can support populations of the striped cat.

The two stories from Maharashtra (Pg. 8-9) appear then to challenge this narrative in very interesting ways. They indicate a visible hierarchy of preferences and commitment where in certain circumstances, the tiger and conservation related concerns are at the very bottom of the pile. We have one case in eastern Maharashtra where the push is that good tiger bearing areas should be emptied of tigers and another, where good tiger bearing areas should be emptied of forests. In the case of the Western Coalfields Limited and the Chandrapur Super Thermal Power Station (CSTPS) in Chandrapur, tigers will have no

future because the industrial activity is more important here. In the other case timber is more important than the tigers that live in the same forests. The Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra wants forests with existing tiger populations adjoining the newly created Kanhargaon Wildlife Sanctuary to be handed over so that they can be logged for timber.

The two cases are specific in their own ways but there are generalisations too that can be drawn. See for comparison the many situations all over the country (including, of course, in Maharashtra) where communities with historical inhabitations in the forests are forced to move in the name of tiger conservation. The conservation value of this displacement is often not clear, besides the equally important issue of the violation of the rights of these communities. There is no doubt, however, that people have to move because the tiger is more important.

Yet, as we see in these reports from Maharashtra, the same tiger is not important in many other situations. Industrial and commercial interests are allowed to trump everything else: tigers be damned, forests be damned and local communities are of course disposable so that's not even part of the discussion. And this process as we all know has only intensified and become more aggressive across the country in the last few years.

Today, it is the tigers of the CSTPS and the Kanhargaon forests that have no future. And if things are allowed to continue in this manner, the fate of many other tiger populations will be the same. There will be nowhere left for them to go and it will not be because of local communities who continue to face the brunt of coercive and illegal action in the name of tiger conservation.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

‘Kaiser-i-Hind’ is state butterfly of Arunachal Pradesh

Kaiser-i-Hind (*Teinopalpus imperialis*), a large, brightly coloured, swallowtail butterfly, will become the state butterfly of Arunachal Pradesh. The state cabinet headed by chief minister Pema Khandu approved the same in a meeting held in November in the Pakke Tiger Reserve.

Kaiser-i-Hind, literally Emperor of India, has a wingspan of 90-120 mm and is found in six states along the eastern Himalayas at elevations from 6,000-10,000 feet in well-wooded terrain. The butterfly is also recorded in Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and southern China.

The State Board for Wildlife had in January 2020 accepted the proposal from Koj Rinya, the divisional forest officer of Hapoli Forest Division in the Lower Subansiri district to accept the Kaiser-i-Hind as the state butterfly.

The cabinet also adopted the Pakke Tiger Reserve 2047 declaration on climate change-resilient and responsive Arunachal Pradesh aimed at lowering emissions and ensuring sustainable development.

Source: ‘Kaiser-i-Hind is Arunachal’s State butterfly’, www.thehindu.com, 14/11/2021.

DELHI

More than 300 species of moths identified in eight-year survey in Delhi

A study on insect diversity has identified 338 moth species from 32 families spanning 14

superfamilies in Delhi. 200 of these had not been reported from here earlier.

The survey was conducted over eight years using light trapping data and examining about 2,000 specimens from historical collections at that National Pusa Collection of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), one of the largest insect repositories in Asia for agricultural pests. For the study, which was recently published in *Biodiversity Data Journal*, field surveys were conducted from 2012 to 2020 by setting up light traps at IARI, Rashtrapati Bhavan and Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary.

Among the major findings were that of the Silver-striped hawkmoth and Coffee Bee hawkmoth. PR Shashank, scientist, IARI and one of the researchers of the study also said that there was no systematic study on the effect of light pollution on insects in India and that they were planning to conduct one.

Other researchers who contributed to the study include Sohail Madan, J Komal, Sanjay Sondhi, Yash Sondhi, Naresh M Meshram and SS Anooj.

Source: Priyangi Agarwal. ‘A hive of activity... 8-year survey identifies 338 moth species in Delhi’, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/10/2021.

Electric cars & guides through online booking in Asola Bhatti WLS

People visiting the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary will be provided with electric cars and guides through an online booking system. The announcement was made by environment minister Gopal Rai at the inauguration ceremony of the National Wildlife Week at the sanctuary on October 3.

The minister said that introduction of online booking system and guided tours in electric vehicles will help raise awareness about the sanctuary area as well as the need for conserving green areas.

Source: 'Asola Wildlife Sanctuary to get electric cars and guided tours', www.newindianexpress.com, 03/10/2021.

GOA

State to allow conditional culling of wild boar; environmentalists concerned

The Goa government has decided to allow conditional culling of wild boar in private cultivated lands after due assessment and authorisation by the forest department (FD) officials. The move that has been welcomed by farmers has been opposed by activists and environmentalists who fear misuse of the provisions.

The notification authorises deputy conservators of forests for North and South Goa, who are wildlife wardens, to permit controlled killing of wild boars based on farmers' complaints. The chief conservator of forests said that both the officials have been delegated powers to issue permits for hunting the wild animal after a site visit by the range forest officer, along with the farmer and a village panchayat member, and a requisite *panchanama*. In turn, the range forest officer will submit a detailed report, if the culling is warranted, to the wildlife warden, seeking his permission. The permission, which will be accorded to experienced shooters will be for a specific period, will be site-specific, and non-transferable. The animal carcass will be government property, and its disposal will be as per provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, for scheduled animals, and any breach will invite penal action.

No permission will be granted for hunting of wild boar in any protected area or government forest area. No permission will be granted for removal of a squeaker or a juvenile.

Environment activists have, however, said that the FD has failed to identify almost half of Goa's forests till date, and reduced eco-sensitive zones of wildlife sanctuaries from 10 km to one km. Also, large-scale mining is

allowed in the western ghats; massive infrastructure projects are crisscrossing the state and industries, airports, real estate and large institutions are coming up in forests and on plateaus. Edward Rodricks, former honorary wildlife warden, expressed concern that the state has enacted many laws, but they are not always implemented and can be misused.

Source: Paul Fernandes & Nida Sayid. 'Goa frames rules to allow limited killing of wild boars', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/11/2021.

GUJARAT

FIR against 12 unidentified persons for lion show in Gir

The Gujarat Forest Department has recently registered a first information report (FIR) against 12 unidentified persons after a video showing a group of people gathered to watch an illegal lion show went viral. A lion is seen killing and feasting on a cow that was tied to a pole and used as a bait at a village in the Gir forests. The incident occurred on November 8 in a village in the Devaliya range.

Three persons were detained for questioning. The accused have been booked under various sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, including sections pertaining to hunting.

Earlier in 2021, a court in Gir Somnath had sentenced six people to three years in jail for harassing an Asiatic lion by organising a similar show.

Source: 'Gujarat: 12 booked for illegal 'show' that lures lion with cow as bait', www.science.thewire.in, 22/11/2021.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

First systematic population assessment of snow leopards in J&K

The Jammu and Kashmir Department of Wildlife Protection (J&KDWP) has formally launched the first-ever snow leopard assessment in the union territory. The survey is part of the nation-wide population assessment of snow leopards being carried out as per the protocols laid down by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The assessment will cover potential areas in Kishtwar and adjoining forests in Jammu as well as Gurez, Thajwas and Overa Aru in the Kashmir region. In both these regions, the survey team comprising project research fellows, project assistants, field assistants and departmental staff will carry out camera trapping, photography, transect walk and scat sampling in potential snow leopard

habitats in a systematic manner. The survey will be carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Mountain Environment, Baderwah Campus (Jammu University), Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture, Science & Technology, National Development Foundation, Wildlife Trust of India and the Nature Conservation Foundation.

The J&KDWP plans to complete the survey in May-June next year to ensure inclusion of the data in the national database likely to be released by the central government in October.

Estimates put the population of animal in India at around 500 with about 60% of the population being in Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir at an altitude of about 3,000 m. The rest are found in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: 'Maiden snow leopard population assessment launched in J&K', www.hindustantimes.com, 10/11/2021.



Siddhi Jadhav, AMVDS

KARNATAKA

State's first marine sanctuary at Honnavar in Uttara Kannada

Karnataka's first marine sanctuary will come up at Honnavar in Uttara Kannada. The sanctuary is expected to be inaugurated in January 2021. The Karnataka State Board for Wildlife has approved the creation of the sanctuary. Former chief minister BS Yediyurappa had announced in the 2020-21 budget that the state's first marine eco-park will be established in Uttara Kannada at an expenditure of Rs. one crore.

The creation of the sanctuary is aimed at strengthening the focus on the conservation of marine animals, including Olive ridley turtles which breed along the coast in places like Honnavar and Kundapur. The jurisdiction of the sanctuary will cover both the beaches and marine areas. A formal notification for the same is yet to be issued.

The principal chief conservator of forests and head of Karnataka Forest Force also announced that the forest department (FD) will organise a series of new festivals for strengthening the focus on the conservation of a variety of fauna, other than tigers, lions, elephants, and flora. All of these will be held before March 2022. There will be a frog festival on the backwaters of the Sharavathi, a turtle festival at Honnavar, a wolf festival in Koppal with a focus on the conservation of the wolf, fox, and hyena and a grass festival at Belagavi.

The FD has already organised festivals of birds, bees, butterflies and Mahseer fish. The idea is to create a platform for strengthening conservation efforts in association with local people, scientists, and all other stakeholders.

Source: 'State wildlife board has approved the creation of the sanctuary', www.thehindu.com, 19/11/2021.

FD proposes five-star hotel in ESZ of Sharavathi Valley Lion Tailed Macaque Sanctuary

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has proposed a five-star hotel near the Jog falls, in the deemed eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of Sharavathi Valley Lion Tailed Macaque Sanctuary.

The office of the deputy commissioner and chief executive officer of the Jog Management Authority has sought diversion of 0.8536 ha of forest land in Nadawada Talakalale village, Shivamogga district, for the project. There is also a plan for building a ropeway between the two banks of Sharavathi river in front of the Jog falls. The tentative civil cost for the development of the hotel and ropeway has been estimated at Rs. 75 crore and Rs. 20 crore, respectively.

The Karnataka government had in June 2014 sought the approval of the central government for the diversion of 0.4046 ha forest land at the same location for tourism development and an ayurvedic centre. The proposal was rejected by the Centre on the ground that it was not site-specific and also not in the interest of conservation of forests.

While the FD has recommended the hotel in lieu of an existing public works department's guest house, the state government is yet to approve it. However, the state government has also decided to develop the Jog falls and its surrounding areas with a dedicated transit hub, grand entrance, retail outlets, view decks and central islands.

Source: Aksheev Thakur. 'Karnataka: Experts oppose proposal to divert forest land for construction of five-star hotel near Jog Falls', www.indianexpress.com, 07/10/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

Advisory for TATR field staff and officials after tiger kills guard

The management of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) has issued a 16-point

advisory to its field staff and officials following the killing of woman forest guard Swati Dhumne by the tigress Maya (T-12) in the core area of the reserve on November 20.

The field staff has been asked to remain in groups of 20 while taking up fire-line and wildlife habitat management works. The forester concerned has been asked to guard this group of workers, and range forest officers have been asked to provide a vehicle for them. The guards and van majoor have been advised to retreat if they see a carnivore that poses danger to life or fresh pugmarks while patrolling. Officials have been told to give weapons to staff who have been trained to handle them.

The staff has also been asked not to venture in tigress Maya's territory on foot and not to get down from the vehicle. The special tiger protection force jawans have also been asked not to go close to the animals in conflict without proper planning. The employees have been asked to restrict movement on two-wheelers through the core area and henceforth no staff will accompany non-government organizations (NGOs) or forest officials without the permission of the field director or deputy director (core). If the staff accompanies them, entire responsibility of their safety will be of the said NGO and officials.

On June 3, earlier in the year too, a TATR wildlife vet was seriously injured in a tiger attack in Doni after a rescue operation went haywire.

Deputy director (core) said that rehabilitation of protection huts has been going on for the past 3-4 years. Some huts have been shifted to the fringes for better monitoring. Secondly, instead of a 'beat' as a unit, now a 'round', which comprises a group of beats, will be a unit so that work can be done in groups. State wildlife board member Bandu Dhotre said that to counter insecurity among staff working with 'round' as a unit is safe. He further pointed out that in order to avoid such incidents in the future, all the vacant posts need to be filled. Of the post of 70 forest guards in Tadoba, 27 are lying vacant.

However, Gadchiroli honorary wildlife warden Uday Patel has expressed concerns over some of the points in advisory saying that they are contradictory and that shifting of protection huts from sensitive areas is not advisable considering the poaching threat. Also, relaxation in patrolling itself is against the National Tiger Conservation Authority's guidelines; instead, he said, more vehicles can be deployed. He further pointed out that the advisory says 'no' to night patrolling but management has no problem with night tourism. He also pointed to the need to understand why tigress T-12 had turned violent and whether VIPs and tourists might be impacting tiger behaviour here.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Work in groups, retreat if you come across dangerous animal', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/11/2021.

Remove resident tigers from industrial area of Chandrapur district: SBWL

The 11-member technical study group constituted by the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has recommended the removal of tigers from Western Coalfields Ltd. (WCL) and Chandrapur Super Thermal Power Station (CSTPS) as tigers in these areas are leading to a high number of human-tiger interactions and sightings.

In the past five years at least six tigers have been consistently present and breeding in the CSTPS area, which is also used by 10,000 people — employees and their families — who work and reside here. CSTPS is connected to the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve through a corridor of coal mines that are thickly covered with *Prosopis* plant species and provide a hiding space for the tigers. The area also provides a prey base — cattle and wild boar — a thick tree cover and a nullah that suffices the basic needs of the tiger population.

The 11-member committee was formed during the 15th SBWL meeting held on

7 August 2020 to suggest plans to reduce human-tiger conflict in Chandrapur district. The committee's suggestions were approved in the SBWL meeting on 12 October 2021.

The committee's report broadly divides the tiger bearing areas of Chandrapur district into four zones and suggests separate measures for each zone for management purposes. Zone-I includes contiguous forest patches with an area of co-existence, eco-development and wildlife management. Zone-II has been classified as degraded and smaller forest patches for safe passage for non-breeding tigers and no habitat enrichment. Zone-III includes small patches interspersed with villages where tiger density is low. Zone-IV has areas like WCL and CSTPS where tiger presence has to be discouraged.

Recommendations of the committee include the following:

- tigers from the industrial areas should not be released into the wild; instead, they should be transferred to zoos or tiger safaris; breeding of tigers should not be allowed in zone-IV and operation should be carried through active collaboration with CSTPS, WCL and other relevant industry authorities
- prepare a separate wildlife management plan for Gadchiroli forests to improve the habitat for wildlife and augment prey populations; currently, naturally dispersing tigers are not able to settle in this region despite the presence of good forest cover
- conservation translocation on a case-by-case basis such as where the young tigers that disperse into small forest patches spread through villages, and where tiger density and human-tiger interactions are low but crop depredation is high; they can be translocated in the central Indian landscape or other tiger-worthy sites and be radio-collared
- initiate the process of conservation translocation of a few breeding females from fringe areas in Chandrapur district to potential habitats

- increase the compensation and make an advance part payment of Rs. 25,000 to the family in case of grievous injury due to the attack
- in case of permanent disability, increase the compensation to Rs. 7.5 lakh and commensurate at 50 per cent of the human death amount; at present, it is Rs 5 lakh.

The principal conservator of forest (wildlife) confirmed that these tigers will not be translocated to Sahyadri and will be translocated only in the similar/central Indian landscape.

A total of 9,442 human-wildlife conflict incidents were reported from 2005 to March 2020 from the Vidarbha region. Of these, human-tiger conflict incidents made up approximately 58 per cent of the total incidents. The incidents in Vidarbha peaked between 2015 and 2018 while the total number of attacks (232) on humans by tigers peaked between 2017 and 2019. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXVI, No. 5)

Source: Sanjana Bhalerao. 'Maharashtra Wildlife Board suggests removal of tigers from industrial areas', www.indianexpress.com, 15/10/2021.

FD to transfer 287 sq. km forest to FDCM in lieu of Kanhargaon WLS

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has agreed to transfer 287 sq. km forest to the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) in lieu of 256 sq. km area it had handed over for the proposed Kanhargaon Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) (see *PA Update* Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5 & 2).

The principal chief conservator of forests, head of forest force (PCCF-HoFF) G Saiprakash held a meeting on October 11 in Chandrapur to discuss the issue with officials. They were asked to identify reserve forest patches adjoining the existing FDCM area in the district. The PCCF-HoFF had sought a report about the proposed area for FDCM and had asked officials to identify some

compartments in the Ballarshah range. The FDCM has identified a little over 287 sq. km spread across 134 compartments. Of this, 30 sq. km area (19 compartments) is in Dhaba range under Central Chanda division in Chandrapur, and 257 sq. km (115 compartments) in Allapalli division under Gadchiroli circle.

However, Chandrapur officials are opposed to diverting the Dhaba area to FDCM. Central Chanda's 90% revenue from logging operations comes from Dhaba which also has two adult tigers and cubs and is also a corridor, said the officials.

Opposing the move, Gadchiroli honorary wildlife warden Uday Patel said that instead of handing over 30 sq. km area from Dhaba to FDCM, its leftover area of 75 sq. km surrounding Kanhargaon should immediately be included in sanctuary, without which the new protected area is incomplete. The said area is a bottleneck formation and has maximum perennial streams used by wildlife.

Wildlife conservationist Prafulla Bhamburkar said that FDCM's monoculture plantations (mainly teak) for generating revenue are now outdated. Old, dense mixed forests having cultural heritage values are now more important to maintain biodiversity, as well as for ecological balance. Bandu Dhotre, member, State Board for Wildlife member echoed the view.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'FDCM wants 287 sq. km lush forests in lieu of Kanhargaon', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/10/2021.

'The Biodiversity Map of Mumbai' showcases 90-plus species

'The Biodiversity Map of Mumbai', made recently by artist and cartoonist Rohan Chakravarty, includes 90-plus species of plants and animals found in the metropolis. This includes mangrove species, the Atlas moth, Greater flamingo, and the Asian palm civet among others. A mottled Bombay sea slug

Goniobranchus bombayanus graces the title of the map. Also included are other species that have been named after parts of Mumbai, such as the scorpion *Lychnas aareyensis*.

The map has been created for a campaign called 'Biodiversity by the Bay', initiated by the Ministry of Mumbai's Magic, a youth collective for climate action. The motive behind creating this map is to make young Mumbaikars pause and think about how they share space with the biodiversity.

The map also includes two of Mumbai's important indigenous communities, the Warli and the Koli. It also has a special section on 'Intertidal Wildlife Hotspots' on the basis of the work done by a non-government organization, Marine Life of Mumbai.

Source: Benita Fernando. 'Biodiversity map puts spotlight on Mumbai's rich flora, fauna', www.indianexpress.com, 29/09/2021.

PUNJAB/MADHYA PRADESH

25 gharials sent from the Chambal hatchery to the Beas Reserve in Punjab

Twenty-five gharials – nine males and 16 females – were recently sent from the Chambal gharial hatchery in Morena district to the Beas Conservation Reserve in Punjab as part of the gharial reintroduction project here. The reptiles were transported in boxes to Chhatbir zoo in Chandigarh, where they will be kept for a year. After acclimatisation, they will be released in the Beas river.

The reintroduction project in Punjab initiated in the year 2017 by the state forests and wildlife preservation department in association with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India with the aim of releasing 100 of these reptiles here in four years.

In phase-1 of the project, 47 juvenile gharials were released in the Beas conservation reserve in three batches - 10 on December 25, 2017, 15 on January 31, 2018, and 22 on March 15, 2018 - in Amritsar and Tarn Taran districts

(PA Updates Vol. XXV, No. 1 and Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3& 1)

There were 2,176 gharials as per the latest census done in the Chambal sanctuary earlier this year. In an annual exercise every year, gharial eggs are collected from the Chambal river and brought to the hatchery in Morena district.

Source: Deshdeep Saxena. 'More Chambal gharials feel at home in Punjab sanctuary', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/11/2021.

ODISHA

Families from four villages in Debrigarh WLS agree to relocation

Villagers of Kurumakel, Bhutuli, Rengali and Lambipali, currently located within the Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) are reported to have agreed to be move out from the sanctuary, the divisional forest officer (DFO), Hirakud wildlife division informed recently. The villagers expressed their consent in the Palli Sabha (gram sabha) on August 12 and October 8, 2021. Each family will be given Rs. 15 lakh and 10 decimal land.

The families were displaced during the construction of the Hirakud dam in the 1950s and rehabilitated in these four villages within the Debrigarh sanctuary. Now, 70 years after their forefathers were relocated, the villagers are ready to move out of the forests, keeping their best interests in mind, said one of the villagers.

At present, the villages lack road connectivity, means of livelihood, electricity, health facilities and education. The same will be provided to them in the rehabilitation colony, which will be in a residential area, said the DFO.

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Odisha to relocate 420 families from Debrigarh wildlife sanctuary in Bargarh district', www.downtoearth.org.in, 21/10/2021.

TAMIL NADU

Forest and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau to be set up in four cities

The Tamil Nadu Forest and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (TNFWCCB) will be set up with four offices in Coimbatore, Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Chennai. The headquarters will be in Chennai. The order for the same was issued recently by Supriya Sahu, secretary, environment and forests. The announcement regarding setting up of TNFWCCB was made in the state legislative assembly on 3 September 2021. The government has sanctioned funds for preparing a detailed project report to take this forward.

The purpose of setting up the bureau is to combat forest and wildlife crime through a well-designed institutional network of trained forest personnel, gather information related to wildlife crime and illegal trade including trans-boundary trade, coordinate with various national and international organisations to access information and intelligence with the view to reduce and control forest and wildlife crime.

It would also create a state-level forest and wildlife crime databank to assist investigating agencies, develop and implement various standard operating protocols relating to forest and wildlife crime, create a cadre of well-trained officials from among the government departments, improve investigation quality for better appreciation of evidence, contributing to better investigation and control of illegal wildlife trade and build informant networks among local communities that live in close proximity of forest and wildlife habitats.

Source: B. Aravind Kumar. 'Wildlife Crime Control Bureau to be set up in Tamil Nadu', www.thehindu.com, 09/11/2021.

Drone cameras to track illegal miners in Gudalur range connecting Mudumalai TR to Wayanad

Drone cameras will be deployed to track and identify illegal miners in the Pandalur range in Gudalur if the forest department (FD) receives any intelligence of illegal gold miners entering the region. Miners who have dug over 5,000 individual mines in Devala and surrounding regions in Gudalur in order to find miniscule amounts of gold embedded in the rocks put themselves as well as wildlife at risk from falling and getting trapped inside the mines.

Recently, an elephant calf was rescued by the forest staff after it fell inside one of the mines. A short while later an adult elephant was found dead after falling inside one of the mines. Its death is believed to have been covered up by the miners. Both these incidents highlight threats to wildlife due to the presence

of mines along the crucial wildlife corridor used by elephants to move from Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and Gudalur to Nilambur and Wayanad in neighbouring Kerala.

One of the problems faced by the FD is that the miners flee on hearing the approach of any vehicle or forest staff. Therefore, the drone cameras will be useful in identifying the individuals by getting a bird's eye-view of the surrounding landscape, said a senior forest official.

On November 8, the forest staff detained four persons who are believed to have been preparing to dig a new mine in Cherambadi range. The four men were let off after a cumulative fine of Rs. 40,000.

Source: 'Drone cameras deployed to identify illegal miners', www.thehindu.com, 18/11/2021.



Siddhi Jadhav, AMVDS

TELANGANA

More than 200 road kills on highway inside Amrabad TR since 2017

The Telangana Forest Department (FD) has recorded 208 wildlife road kills since 2017 on the 85 km stretch of the Srisailem highway through the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR). 58 of the animals killed were primates, including 26 (more than 12%) being Rhesus macaque.

The macaques are left here after being caught from municipalities and panchayats. Unable to survive in the wild, the monkeys hang around the highway feeding off morsels thrown by travellers and occasionally coming under the tyres of the passing vehicles. Together with Bonnet macaques, langurs and other primates, they occupy the second place in the number of road kills, only after reptiles.

Snakes and other reptiles constituted 97 of the casualties with red sand boa being the most frequent at 11. Other common victims of highway accidents include monitor lizards,

langurs, civets, spotted deer, wild pig, and porcupine.

Each forest range officer has been asked to fill out a proforma at the end of every month with data about wildlife casualties, and a social media group has been started where forest watchers and officers are expected to post information about each road kill with geographical coordinates. After the system was put in place, a total 59 road kills were reported during the month of October alone this year.

Vehicles speeding at 80 to 120 km per hour are to be blamed despite presence of signboards along the highway indicating the speed limit of 30 kmph inside the tiger reserve. Despite the high incidents of road kills, proposals have been made for widening of the road further, which as of now stands rejected by the FD.

Source: Swathi Vadlamudi. 'Srisailem highway stained crimson with wildlife roadkills', www.thehindu.com, 14/11/2021.



Siddhi Jadhav, AMVDS

UTTAR PRADESH

Crop diversification initiative in Pilibhit to promote co-existence with tigers

The mission 'crop diversification with a life-saving purpose' that the Pilibhit district administration launched a year ago is reported to have encouraged farmers living in the villages around the jungle to seek avenues for enhancing their income while co-existing with tigers.

The focus has been to persuade sugarcane farmers in the area to shift to equally remunerative alternative crops that are agro-climatically suited to the Terai environment. These include among others crops such as *haldi*, *laahi*, *sarson*, *matar*, *chana*, soyabean, mentha and lemon. The reason is that sugarcane fields provide tigers with a semblance of their natural habitat and there have been a number of cases of tiger attacks on farmers here in recent years. In the last five years, 15 humans were injured and 21 lives were lost in human-animal conflict in Pilibhit. Twelve of these 21 deaths were in sugarcane fields of farmers who went for irrigation or harvesting the crop.

The campaign has resulted so far in diversification of around 2,099 ha (3.5%) of cane area. As per the annual GPS survey for 2020-21 conducted by the cane department, the cane coverage that was 1,04,213 ha in 2020-21 was down to 1,02,114 ha for the year 2021-22.

Fencing the entire perimeter of the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve is a mammoth project which moves only a few notches each year as per the availability of resources; also, several efforts by the forest department like asking villagers to resort to *haanka* (lighting the fire, beating drums and dhols) to scare away the animal, moving in groups to their fields for irrigation or manuring or identifying the signs of tiger's presence nearby are carried out intensively in these villages but in vain. This forced the administration to intervene, analyse and make other efforts to reduce such

occurrences considering an increasing number of human-tiger conflicts in the district.

Source: Brajendra K Parashar. 'Man-tiger peaceful co-existence: Pilibhit district administration coaxes farmers to switch from cane to other cash crops', www.hindustantimes.com, 25/10/2021.

UTTARAKHAND

IFS officer quits probe in Corbett TR

A week after being appointed as the investigating officer to probe alleged illegal constructions and tree felling in Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR), Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Sanjiv Chaturvedi quit the probe on November 9, citing contradictory statements of senior government officials over his appointment.

Head of Forest Force Rajiv Bhartari had appointed Chaturvedi as the investigating officer on November 2 following receipt of a site inspection report on October 22 by a committee constituted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The committee had prepared the report after visiting the site between Pakhrau Forest Rest House (FRH) and Kalagarh FRH in the reserve.

In his letter to Bhartari, Chaturvedi said, "In my career I have conducted unbiased and lawful probes into hundreds of corruption cases... Those probes have earned the appreciation of institutions like the CBI, the CVC and parliamentary panels. But never did my very appointment to probe a case evoke the kind of nervousness, fear, confusion and apprehension as in this case."

Chaturvedi also enclosed a copy of a Hindi newspaper report which quoted the chief wildlife warden JS Suhag stating that the matter - the right to conduct an inquiry - falls under his jurisdiction.

Source: Avaneesh Mishra. 'Forest officer quits Corbett investigation', www.indianexpress.com, 10/11/2021.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

NGT does have *suo motu* powers: SC

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court (SC) said that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) does have *suo motu* powers and can take up environmental issues on its own. The order came even as the Centre said that NGT does not have such powers.

The SC, in early October, was considering a batch of appeals on the question whether the NGT has the power to take notice of press reports or even seek response from the government (or government bodies) on preventing damage to the environment without any application being filed before it. Holding that any other interpretation would go against public good and render the environmental watchdog “toothless” and “ineffective”, a three-judge bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar, Hrishikesh Roy and CT Ravikumar said that it is vital for the well-being of the nation and its people, to have a flexible mechanism to address all issues pertaining to environmental damage and resultant climate change so that we can leave behind a better environmental legacy for our children, and the generations thereafter.

The question whether NGT has *suo motu* power was raised by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, which was slapped with a fine of Rs. five crores by the NGT for not setting up sewage treatment plants. The NGT had passed its order in October 2018 in response to a news report. A similar subsequent exercise of *suo motu* power was challenged by the Kerala government in a case relating to shifting of stone quarries from residential areas.

The SC bench declared, “It is accordingly declared that the NGT is vested with *suo motu* power in discharge of its functions under the NGT Act.” Adding a rider, the bench added, “The exercise of *suo motu*

jurisdiction does not mean eschewing principles of natural justice and fair play. In other words, the party likely to be affected should be afforded due opportunity to present their side, before suffering adverse orders.”

In its 77-page judgment, the SC said that given the fallout of the climate crisis where adverse environmental impact may be egregious, but the community affected is unable to effectively get the machinery into action, a forum created specifically to address such concerns should surely be expected to move with expediency, and of its own accord.

Source: Abraham Thomas. ‘NGT can take up environment issues on its own: Supreme Court’, www.hindustantimes.com, 08/10/2021.

Jal Shakti Ministry releases rescue guide for Ganges River Dolphins

The Jal Shakti Ministry on November 1 released a guide for the safe rescue and release of stranded Ganges river dolphins (GRDs). The document has been prepared by the Turtle Survival Alliance, India Program and the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department Government of Uttar Pradesh.

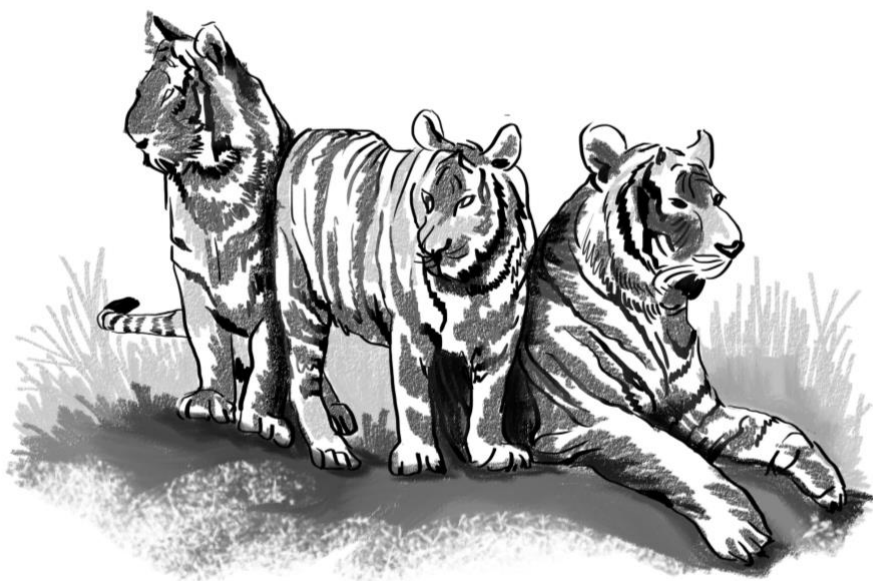
The manual, endorsed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)’s Cetacean Specialist Group, has details of identification of the species and on-site and off-site operations. The off-site operations include permit and equipment while on-site involves crowd control, capture and handling, transfer, transport and release. GRDs often accidentally enter canal channels in northern India and get entrapped, and die as they are unable to swim up against the gradient, eventually getting stressed and harassed by the locals.

The document states the GRD faces many threats in the Ganga Basin. Dwindling populations can be attributed to wide-scale habitat degradation from pollution, hydroelectric and development projects and industrial run-off as well as accidental deaths

via entanglement in fishing nets or by villagers from curiosity, opportunistic poaching for meat and oil in certain pockets of the country.

The guide was also simultaneously released via local fishermen at the Ghaghra river, a prime habitat where most of the rescued dolphins have been released in the past few years.

Source: Shiv Sahay Singh. 'Ministry releases guide for safe rescue, release of Ganges River Dolphins', www.thehindu.com, 01/11/2021.



Siddhi Jadhav, AMVDS

SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

Tiger census in Nepal

The National Tiger Survey was launched in Nepal from 5 December 2021 at the Chitwan National Park. It is being conducted by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation with help from personnel from the armed police forces, police, park staff,

forest staff, and wildlife experts. The final results are expected in three months' time.

From 121 tigers eleven years ago, the number has swelled to 235 during the census conducted three years ago. The highest number of tigers — 93 — was counted in Chitwan, followed by 87 in Bardiya, 21 in Banke, 18 in Parsa and 16 in Shuklaphanta,

Source: 'Nepal close to doubling tiger population in 2022, as census begins from Dec. 5', www.financialexpress.com, 03.12.2021

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

ASSAM

Researchers request state government to seek Ramsar tag for Chandubi Lake

Deepak Kumar of the United Nations Development Programme and Guwahati-based researcher Moharana Choudhury, who have assessed the economic value of Chandubi Lake, which is also an important bird area (IBA), have requested the Assam government to send a proposal to the Centre to designate the lake as a 'Ramsar Site'.

Chandubi is a perennial lake formed as a post-catastrophic consequence of tectonic submergence of forests during the massive earthquake of 1897 in Assam. It also reflects a cultural ecotone of two bordering states - Assam and Meghalaya. The lake is located at the foothills of the Garo Hills and is close to the Borduar reserve forest to the north and the Mayong Hill reserve forest to the south. River Kulsi, a southern tributary of the Brahmaputra, links downstream to Chandubi.

Source: Rokibuz Zaman. 'Ramsar Site tag sought for Chandubi lake', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 05/10/2021.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Migratory birds ringed at Pong wildlife sanctuary

Staff of the Hamirpur Wildlife Division conducted a five-day bird ringing exercise in the Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary as part of which 140 birds of 29 species were ringed in the last week of November. The birds were captured with the help of 19 mist nets.

Spread over an area of 24,000 hectares across Jawali, Dehra and Fatehpur

subdivisions in lower Kangra district, the Pong Lake was created in 1975 when the Pong Dam was built on the Beas River.

Source: Rajiv Mahajan. 'Migratory birds at Pong wildlife sanctuary ringed', www.tribuneindia.com, 03/12/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

BNHS forced to stop study of bird flight patterns at Panje wetland

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has been forced to stop its survey of bird flight patterns at the 300 ha Panje wetland as part of a CIDCO assignment to study its impact on flights at the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA).

Over 1,50,000 migratory and resident birds are seen at the wetland annually and changes in their flight patterns due to drying up of the wetland could pose bird-hit threats to the flights at airport, BNHS and environmentalists have warned. BNHS had therefore supported the NatConnect Foundation's idea to conserve Panje Wetland as a biodiversity park.

BNHS teams, media persons, nature photographers and local fishing community have, however, been stopped from entering the wetland by Navi Mumbai Special Economic Zone (NMSEZ) security, said NatConnect Foundation in its mail to chief minister (CM) Uddhav Thackeray. They have also sought the CM's immediate intervention in the matter. The NMSEZ security cabins at Panje are illegal and the state government had asked the project executive officer and CIDCO to demolish them way back in November 2020. Yet, the cabins are intact and so is the security, the foundation pointed out in its communication.

In yet another attempt to sabotage the wetland, certain unidentified people set fire crackers to chase away the migratory birds, informed Nandkumar Pawar, head of Shri Ekvira Aai Pratishtan. He claimed that the probe into the more than a month-old offence case was very slow despite video proof of two uniformed men with identity cards indulging in the act of scaring away the birds.

Source: Vijay Singh. 'Navi Mumbai: BNHS forced to halt Panje wetland bird study, greens' plea to Maharashtra CM to step in', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/10/2021.

Lesser florican rescued by FD in Nannaj; released in GIB sanctuary

A female Lesser florican was rescued by the forest department (FD) in Solapur in the beginning of November.

A resident of Nannaj noticed the bird taking shelter near his home seemingly to escape stray dogs. He informed the FD office at Nannaj, which sent a rescue team from the FD and a non-government organization

Wildlife Conservation Association (WCA). The bird was taken to the district veterinary hospital as it had a minor injury on its wing.

After examining the bird and administering first aid, the district veterinarian's office issued a certificate stating that it was fit to be released back into the wild. It was then tagged with a metal ring bearing a unique ID number and released in the Great Indian Bustard Bird (GIB) Sanctuary the same afternoon.

Four years ago, a Lesser florican was also seen near the district police headquarters in Solapur. A female bird of the same species was last seen in Maharashtra in August this year, when it was photographed at the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.

A report by the Wildlife Institute of India in 2018 had estimated their population in the wild to be not more than 264, indicating a decline of about 80% over the last two decades.

Source: Prayag Arora-Desai. 'Endangered lesser florican rescued in Maharashtra's Solapur', www.hindustantimes.com, 04/11/2021.



Siddhi Jadhav, AMVDS

New!!!

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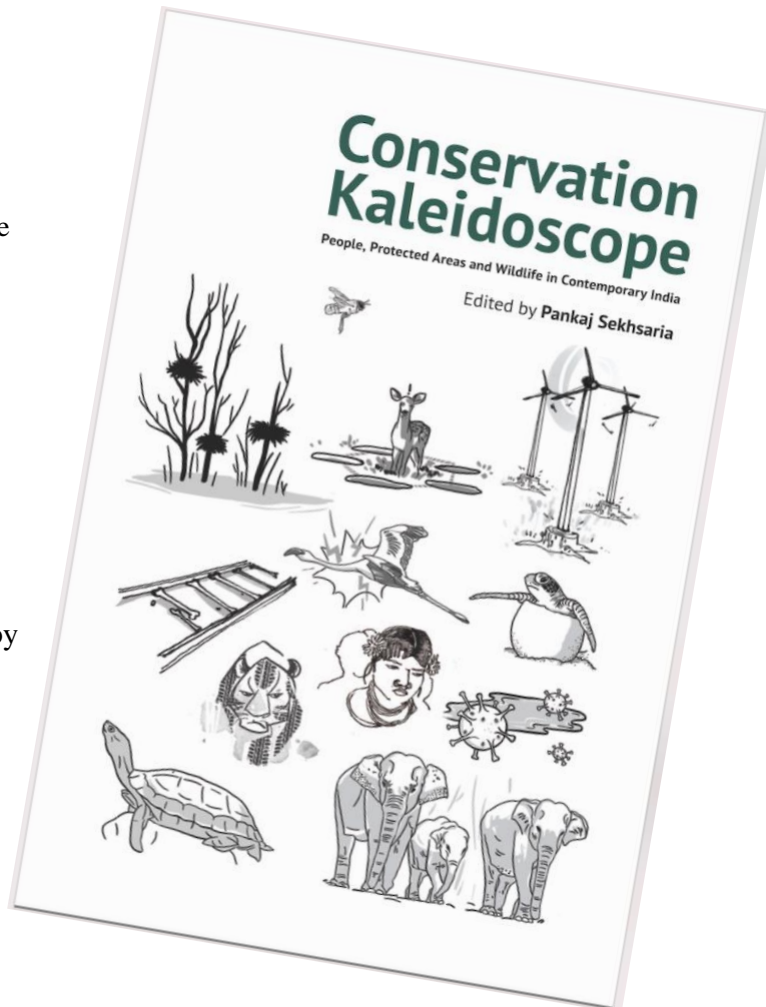
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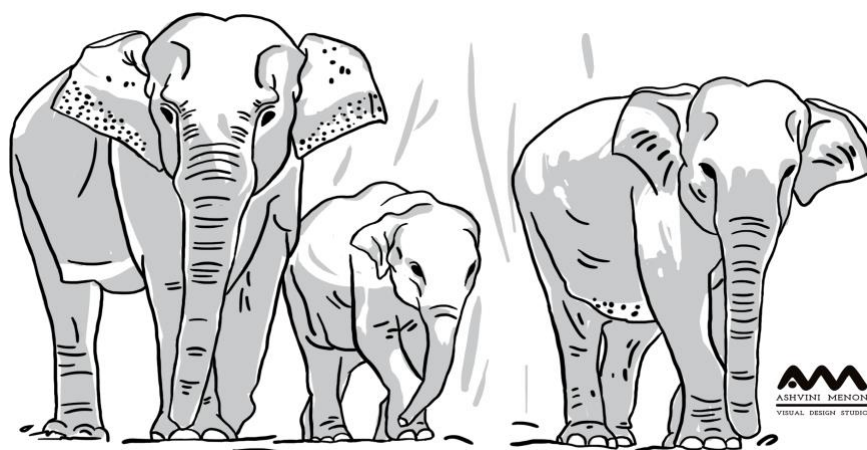
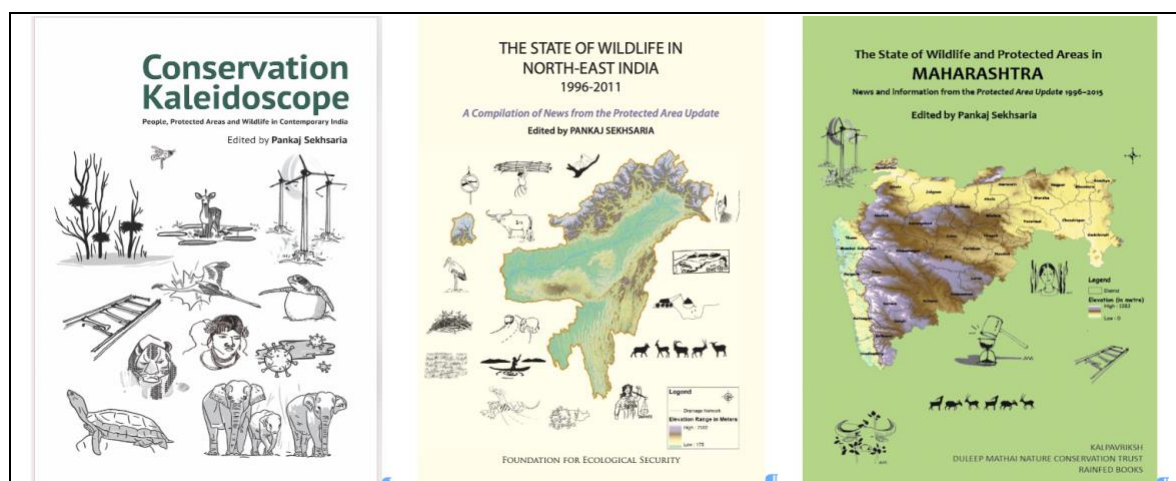


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Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. Satellite-Based Fraction of Absorbed Photosynthetically Active Radiation is Congruent with Plant Diversity in India

Author(s): Tanoy Mukherjee, Lalit Kumar Sharma, Vineet Kumar, Amira Sharief, Ritam Dutta, Manish Kumar, Bheem Dutt Joshi, Mukesh Thakur, Chinnadurai Venkatraman, Kailash Chandra

Keywords: Dynamic Habitat Index, Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectro - radiometer, FAPAR, Plant richness, Indian biogeographic region

Summary: A dynamic habitat index (DHI) based on Fraction of Absorbed Photosynthetically Active Radiation (FAPAR) was used to evaluate the vegetation greenness pattern across different ecosystems in India. The study suggests the use of DHI components to distinguish biodiversity hotspots. Thus, providing baseline information for monitoring biodiversity in large areas.

Link: <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-4292/13/2/159/htm>

2. Greater one-horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) behaviour during high floods at Kaziranga National Park and the Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam

Author(s): Deba Kumar Dutta, Pranab Jyoti Bora, Rabin Sharma, Anupam Sarmah, Amit Sharma, Jitendra Kumar, KS Dekaraja, Rohini B Saikia, Andrew Halliday

Keywords: Translocation, Indian Rhino Vision 2020, climate change, protected area management, adaptive behaviour

Summary: Focal sampling of a translocated lone sub-adult female Greater one-horned rhinoceros (GOH) in Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) and scan sampling of GOH adults, sub-adults and calves in Kaziranga National Park (KNP) were carried out to record and compare their behaviors during the high flood periods of 2016 in BWS and 2017 at KNP. Based on the results, it offered recommendations for translocation.

Link: <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/447>

3. An inventory of geometrid moths (Lepidoptera: Geometroidea: Geometridae) of Kalakad - Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve

Author(s): Geetha Iyer, Dieter Stünig, and Sanjay Sondhi

Keywords: Agasthyamalai, Biodiversity, Heterocera, KMTR, Moth Diversity, Southern Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu

Summary: A 4yr (2012-2016) field (non - collection based) study, documented 260 geometrid moths, identified to various hierarchical levels of taxa and one new genus for southern India, in the Agasthyamalai hills of Kalakad - Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/7105/8125>

4. Scientific contributions and learning experiences of citizen volunteers with a small cat project in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai

Author(s): Shomita Mukherjee, R Nandini P V Karunakaran and Nayan Khanolkar

Keywords: Citizen science, conservation, feedback survey, Rusty-spotted Cat, SGNP

Summary: Thirty five citizen volunteers were trained to collect scat samples, place camera traps and analyse data in a 2yr (2017–2019) project on small wild cats in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai. Nineteen of the 35 Volunteers responded to a feedback survey (questionnaire) to gauge the impact of the program on their interests and knowledge. Most indicated an increase in their knowledge about wildlife research, conservation issues and small wild cats. This paper discusses the value of research projects where citizens can actively participate and learn semi-technical skills.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/index.php/JoTT/article/view/7595/8129>

5. Seasonal diet composition of Himalayan goral (*Naemorhedus goral*) in Kajinag National Park, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Author(s): Jahangir Ahmad Dar, Mustahson F. Fazili, Bilal A. Bhat, Ishfaq Nazir Wani and Riyaz Ahmad

Keywords: Browse, diet composition, graze, Himalayan goral, Kajinag National Park, Jammu & Kashmir

Summary: In Kajinag National Park, 61 plant species were recorded from assessing plots between 1900–3600 m a.s.l. altitudes in various seasons from 2018 to 2020. This variation and availability correlated with the diet composition of Himalayan goral. The animal consumed herbs in spring, grasses in summer and autumn and shrubs in winter to forage and/or survive.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1515/mammalia-2020-0151>

6. A cryptic new species of rupicolous *Hemidactylus* Goldfuss, 1820 (Squamata: Gekkonidae) allied to *H. aaronbaueri* Giri, 2008 from the northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra, India

Author(s): Akshay Khandekar, Tejas Thackeray, Ishan Agarwal

Keywords: Reptilia, basalt, biodiversity hotspot, morphology, rock geckos, species complex, taxonomy, Western Ghats

Summary: A cryptic new species of large-bodied rupicolous gecko, viz. *Hemidactylus tamhiniensis* sp. nov. is described from Tamhini

Ghat, part of northern Western Ghats in Maharashtra.

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.5020.3.2>

7. Monitoring vegetation loss and shoreline change due to tropical cyclone Fani using Landsat imageries in Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary, India

Author(s): Manoranjan Mishra, Celso Augusto Guimarães Santos, Richarde Marques da Silva, Narendra Kumar Rana, Dipika Kar and Nihar Ranjan Parida

Keywords: Land use change, DSAS, SAVI, Environmental monitoring, Coastal zone, Geospatial analysis

Summary: Two Landsat 8 images before & after cyclone Fani in 2019 were used to analyze coastline oscillations, land use & land cover (LULC) change, an impact of the cyclone in Odisha's Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary (BKWS). Such studies are useful to determine the impacts of a disaster and for ecological restoration.

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11852-021-00840-5>

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

Email: sproutsenvttrust@gmail.com



KARNATAKA

Greater Talacauvery NP opposed as it may displace more than two lakh people

The Mangalore Centre of the Malenadu Joint Action Committee has opposed the proposed Greater Talacauvery National Park as it would displace more than two lakh people. The project proposal is to combine the Brahmagiri (181.5 sq km), Talacauvery (105 sq km), Pushpagiri (102 sq km) Wildlife Sanctuaries, and other protected forests (800 sq km) to create the national park.

It has been estimated that 2.20 lakh people in 120 villages in Karnataka and northern Kerala would be displaced if the proposal comes through. It is feared that over 50,000 people would be displaced in Dakshina Kannada, while the number to be displaced in Kodagu would be about 68,000. Several villages in Chikmagalur, Hassan, Shimoga, Uttara Kannada, and Udupi districts would also be affected.

A statement issued by the committee said that the promises of rehabilitation cannot be trusted as the people did not enjoy land rights on their present holdings. Also, the tribals who were displaced from the Kudremukh forests had never been rehabilitated properly. It also pointed out that the proposal to have an elephant corridor was ill-conceived. There were dams built in the forest area which were in the elephant corridor and obstructing the movement of pachyderms.

Source: 'Greater Talacauvery project may displace 2.20 lakh people', *The Hindu*, 12/10/11.

Community forest rights for Soligas in the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary

Community Forest Rights (CFRs) under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers

Forest Rights Act (FRA) – 2006 were distributed to 25 Gram sabhas of Soliga tribals in the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary (BRTWLS). The rights were given on October 2, 2011, by the District Commissioner, Mr. Amar Narayan and the MLA, Mr. C. Puttarangashetty. This is the first case in the country where CFRs have been accepted in a protected area under the provisions of the FRA.

The sanctuary had been declared a tiger reserve in January earlier this year, a move that had been strongly opposed by the Soligas and a section of rights activists and wildlife conservationists. Following the acceptance of the CFRs now, as much as 60% of the reserve, which includes parts of the core area, will be under the management of the Soligas. CFRs in three of the five ranges of the reserve have been accorded and the community is now applying for its extension to the remaining two ranges as well.

The Soligas are also working on a proposal to jointly manage the tiger reserve with the state using their traditional knowledge. They have proposed a three-tier management structure: a hamlet-level forest management committee (deriving its legal backing from FRA), three taluka-level committees and one at the sanctuary level. While the village-level committee will have representation of all adult members of the hamlet, the taluka-and sanctuary-level committees will have representations of village committees, the forest department and civil society groups. The Soligas in consultation with civil society have also proposed that village-level committees should have the power to penalise members who breach the committee-designed rules, but offences of criminal nature would be reported to the forest department or to the police.

Source: Kumar Sambhav S. 'Finally, community forest rights', *Down to Earth*, 31/10/11

PERSPECTIVE

Mining the Earth's Last Untouched Frontier

The term “deep-sea mining” refers to exploration and exploitation of mineral resources lying in the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdictions. According to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea, this “Area” and its resources (found between three -six km depth) are the “common heritage of mankind”. Rights of states or state-sponsored entities are contractual rights and corresponding contractual obligations including environment-related obligations have to be fulfilled. The UN has declared 2021-30 as the decade of “Ocean Science for Sustainable Development”. However, existing activities affecting our oceans and the trends of the policies and programmes portend a bleak outlook.

Three types of resources are being targeted –

1. Polymetallic nodules that are rich in cobalt, copper, iron, lead, manganese, nickel, zinc, iridium, uranium, palladium, thorium, and gold;
2. Polymetallic massive sulphides deposits that are rich in copper, iron, zinc, lead, silver, gold, barium, arsenic, and antimony and
3. Cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts are known to contain a variety of metals such as iron, manganese, cobalt, nickel, copper, platinum, zinc, barium, molybdenum, strontium, and cerium.

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) has already permitted 31 deep-sea mining exploration contracts to 22 contractors (including the Government of India) amounting to a total area of 1.3 million sq. km. India's 15-year contract is for the exploration of Polymetallic nodules (already extended for five years) and Polymetallic Sulphides in the Indian ocean.

The Government of India in its 2019 vision at 75 considers Blue Economy as one of the ten core dimensions of growth and this year approved Rs. 40.77 billion INR (5.5 billion USD) for the ‘Deep Ocean Mission’ with the primary objective of the mission as deep-sea mining.

It is quite well known that the ocean regulates our climate, and the ocean floor has a lot of carbon stored in it. Any disturbance in the deep sea could trigger the release of carbon and can adversely affect the climate. Around 600 marine experts, civil society groups, fishing industries, ocean dependent communities and companies such as BMW, Volvo, Samsung, Phillips, Google and most recently Microsoft, have called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining. The IUCN World Conservation Congress too passed a motion calling for a moratorium on deep-sea mining recently.

The bad news is that Nauru, the Pacific Island nation, in June 2021, has activated the ISA's “two-year rule”, a sub-clause that compels the ISA to allow deep-sea mining within two years even if the mining regulations have not been finalised. The ISA has not yet produced a clear regulatory framework. We are all aware how even on land the mining activities are harmful and often unregulated. It will be a disaster and without any safeguards and non-destructive assessment, there is an urgency to call for an outright ban on deep-sea mining.

- **Sreedhar Ramamurthi** is an earth scientist and the Managing Trustee of Environics Trust, working with the mining affected communities.

- **Saswati Swetlena** is the National Coordinator of Mineral Inheritors Rights Association (MIRA), a national coalition that works on transparency & accountability of extractive sector governance.

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