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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, February 2022 (No. 155)

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EDITORIAL

Moving, moving, moving...

Tigers moving in search of new territory; gaur moving, perhaps, for better grazing; tourists moving to PAs for seeing these animals and ‘enjoying’ wildlife... this is one kind of constant movement that characterises the wildlife landscape and by extension the news carried in the *PA Update*. There is a certain voluntariness and spontaneity to this movement that seems more in the natural scheme of things and a lot of this will be seen in the pages that follow here.

There is also another kind of movement that characterises this wildlife and this PA landscape of the country – a movement of animals and also of human communities that is catalysed entirely (and aggressively so) by a set of human institutions. This issue of the *PA Update* has a good sampling of these as well: relocation of captive elephants from Maharashtra to a zoo in Gujarat, of wild tigers from one region in Maharashtra to tiger reserves across the state where their numbers are relatively low and most strikingly, of the relocation and movement of human communities from their current traditional location within protected areas.

On the one hand there could be a broader and larger philosophical underpinning where we recognise that movement and change are essential components of existence. On the other hand it is clear too, that there are different ways of looking at these different sets of movements depending on location, context and often, of the structures of power. So while wildlifers might welcome sightings of gaur in villages and cities as an indication of growing numbers, those injured in conflict incidents or farmers who have lost crops and livelihoods will find nothing attractive about the gaur. A

tiger moving a few 100 km on its own is as much an exciting journey as it can be a cause of concern, and one sees that there is no consensus even on the issue of management mediated relocation of tigers from one landscape to another.

The issue of the movement of people from protected areas in the interest of conservation is, of course, the most fraught, contested as it is on multiple grounds of traditional and human rights, exercise of power, of scientific validity, and even of the conservation benefit it brings. The history of wildlife conservation in India is full of related debates and controversies and yet the relocation juggernaut continues to roll on. This movement of people continues to be non-negotiable to a large section of the conservation community. It happens, ironically, even as we fail to deal with the larger and bigger threats of tourism, infrastructure, mining and industrialisation that are not only ripping natural ecosystems in general but are unstoppable even within the PA network.

One of the things that these movements and developments question very deeply is the idea of the sacrosanct and inviolable PA network; this in-violability and sanctity is only partial and selective. It needs to be urgently re-imagined if we are indeed concerned about our wildlife and our wilderness.

Ed's note: Hopefully readers have noticed our richly detailed new masthead. It is an effort on our part to keep the newsletter interesting not just in terms of its content but also the visual element. We would like to thank the Ashvini Menon Visual Design Studio (AMVDS) for collaborating with us on this and Siddhi Jadhav of AMVDS for the new masthead and the illustrations in this issue of the *PA Update*.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Irrigation project near Rajiv Gandhi WLS delayed because of state government: Centre

Union minister of state for forest, environment and climate change, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, said that the Centre was ready to examine Andhra Pradesh's request for conversion of forest land for construction of the Varikapudisela Lift Irrigation Project (VLIP) in Guntur if the required information was provided. The VLIP is located near Gangulakunta and Gottipalla villages of Vijayapuri South range of Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary.

In response to a query posed by Bhartiya Janata Party member of parliament GVL Narasimha Rao, the minister said in the Rajya Sabha that the state government had submitted a proposal seeking prior approval under section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act 1980 for diversion of 19.13 ha of forest land for construction and inspection path of the project in September 2021. He noted however that the Centre was yet to receive the information and clearance from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for conversion of the reserve forest.

The Integrated Regional Office (IRO) in Vijayawada processed and placed the proposal before the Regional Empowered Committee (REC) of IRO Chennai during a meeting held in the third week of September. After detailed deliberations, the REC sought additional information from the state government, and asked the state to get an approval from the standing committee of the NBWL for the project and wildlife mitigation plan. However, the additional information and

documents as sought by the REC are yet to be received from the state, said the minister. He informed the Rajya Sabha that as per available record, the state government has not submitted the plan for approval to the standing committee of the NBWL.

Source: Samdani MN. 'Lift irrigation work waits for forest clearance', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 18/12/2021.

GUJARAT

Visitors to Jambughoda & Ratanmahal sanctuaries to get insurance cover

Visitors to the Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary in Panchmahal and the Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary in Dahod will be provided with an accident insurance cover of up to Rs. 50 lakh. A decision to this effect was taken recently by the associations of locals managing the forest department's five eco campsites here. The insurance will not be provided by the government, but by the 'mandlis' of locals managing the eco campsites. This insurance will be for protection in case of a natural calamity or animal attack or insect or snake bite. Two cases for providing insurance will be considered every year.

The five eco campsites – Dhanpari at Jambughoda, Targol and Bhat at Shivrajpur and Naldha and Udal Mahuda at Ratanmahal – have been witnessing a surge in tourists in the past few years except for the last year when the pandemic brought down the number of tourists.

Source: Jay Pachihigar. 'Visitors to central Gujarat sanctuaries to be insured', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22/11/2021.

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 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 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, Karnataka Forest Force (PCCF-HoFF), 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 the *mahseer*. The idea is to create a platform for strengthening conservation efforts in association with local people, scientists, and other stakeholders.

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

KERALA

100% rise in registered wildlife-related cases in Kerala

Data obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act indicates that there has been a 100% rise in the number of wildlife related cases registered in 2020 compared to the year 2019 in the state of Kerala. The number which was 61 in 2018 increased to 151 in 2019 and doubled to 303 in 2020. As many as 156 cases were also in 2021 (till the month of August).

Most cases pertained to poaching of endangered animals and reptiles, hunting for meat, and illegal trading and possession of horns, tusks, nails, and teeth. More than 80% of the total cases registered each year are in connection with poaching of wild animals that cause extensive damage to standing crops. Besides killing the animals, depriving them of food is also an offence, as the data shows.

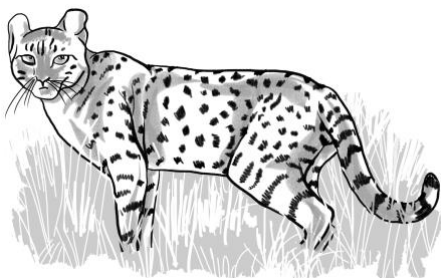
Among the registered cases, two are in connection with freeing chickens from the mouth of a python forcefully. A case was also registered for destroying the nest of a cormorant by felling the branches of a tree. Another case pertains to the death of a Hawksbill turtle that was caught in a fishing hook.

According to officials, people living adjacent to forests got more opportunities to engage in poaching because of the restrictions during the pandemic. They also noted that the presence of wild animals increased in the fringe areas of forests, leading to the rise in poaching incidents.

Source: TC Sreemol. 'Wildlife crimes rise by 100% in a year in Kerala', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com 22/11/2021.

MADHYA PRADESH

Indian Desert Cat photographed in Panna TR for the first time



The Indian Desert Cat has been photographed for the first-time in the Panna Tiger Reserve (TR). A tourist had shared the pictures taken by him of the animal in the reserve's Akola buffer zone during a night safari recently. The Indian Desert Cat finds mention in old documents of the TR, but there was no photographic record thus far.

In August 2021, a fishing cat was also spotted in the Panna TR. It was captured on a camera installed in the tiger reserve.

Source: Source: 'Indian Desert Cat spotted in MP's Panna Tiger Reserve', www.indianexpress.com, 19/12/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

Tigers to be relocated from Vidarbha to TRs across the state

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has prepared a plan to translocate tigers from the Vidarbha region to various protected areas in the state. In the first phase, tigers will be translocated to Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), in the second phase to Navegaon National Park and in third phase to the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (TR), informed the state principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) (PCCF), Sunil Limaye.

The PCCF said that there were 80 to 90 tigers in Brahmapuri at present - 60-65

adults and 25-30 juveniles and cubs. Scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have been monitoring these tigers. According to them, these tigers from the Central Indian landscape won't be able to adapt to the habitat in the Sahyadris. The PCCF said, however, that it will be worth making an effort to try this out as tigers from the Central Indian landscape were successfully translocated to other regions in the country in the past. In response to the scientists' suggestion about translocating tigers from Karnataka, Limaye said that Maharashtra already has a large number of tigers and they can be translocated to other regions in the state successfully with meticulous planning.

In Nagzira WLS, there is a scope for female tigers to establish their territories as there is only a small number of female tigers currently. In Navegaon, the FD has planned to first increase the prey population and then translocate the tigers. For the Sahyadri TR the FD has planned to release spotted deer and sambar from Katraj and Sagareshwar Zoos in an enclosure spread over 16 acres. They will be released into the wild after a year when their numbers increase and a male and a female tiger will also be released here after that.

Source: 'वाघाच्या संवर्धन स्थलांतरणासाठी वन खात्याचे नियोजन', www.loksatta.com, 02/11/2021.

Photographic evidence of tiger presence in Karanja Sohul WLS

Photographic evidence of tiger presence was recorded on a camera trap in Karanja Sohul Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Washim district on 28 November 2021. Six days later, on December 4, a tiger entered a house in Khamgaon city in Buldhana district. Both the incidents have perplexed the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) officials, who have not been able to figure out where these big cats came from. This is for the first-time that tigers have been recorded in these areas. Wildlife officials said that the stripe pattern of the tiger caught on

camera inside the sanctuary did not match with any of the tigers from either Tipeshwar or Melghat from where it was suspected to have come. The image of the Khamgaon tiger caught on a CCTV was blurred making identification difficult.

Wildlife conservationists have pointed out that the authorities should also check about the new tiger with Bor and Kawal TRs or the database of Muktai-Bhavani Conservation Reserve in Jalgaon. The authorities were also not able to confirm whether these were two different tigers or the same animals recorded in both the places that are 90 km apart.

Earlier, in June 2019 and 2020, there were two long tiger dispersals from Tipeshwar WLS in Pandharkawda. T1-C1 or Walker-I walked over 3,200 km to reach Ajanta Hills in Aurangabad and back to Dnyanganga WLS near Khamgaon travelling through eight districts. Walker-I was followed by T3-C1 or Walker-II in 2020. This tiger reached Gautala Autramghat, travelling over 2,100 km and was the first record of a tiger here in 80 years (see *PA Update* Vol. XXVII, No. 4 and Vol. XXVI, No. 3). In September 2021 another tiger from Tipeshwar was reported in Nanded's Kinwat Range. Regular movement of tigers has also been reported to Kawal TR in Telangana and to Painganga WLS in Maharashtra from here.

Wildlife Institute of India (WII) scientist Bilal Habib said that tigers moving towards Nanded, Buldhana, Akola, Washim, and Aurangabad districts from Tipeshwar use narrow roads, canals, agriculture fields, and human settlements rather than forests. This has already been mapped with the help of tiger telemetry studies.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'In a 1st, tiger enters Karanja Sohol, another a house in Khamgaon city', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/12/2021.

Increase in gaur sightings in, around Kolhapur city

Gaur sightings and related conflict incidents have increased in and around Kolhapur. In the third week of December 2021, two gaurs were seen in the city and a herd of six was similarly spotted in the villages on the outskirts. Another gaur, which was found in an injured condition after getting stuck in mud for three days at Harpawde village in Panhala tehsil, could not be rescued and died eventually.

A 21-year-old youth from Bhuyewadi was killed while a 45-year-old woman from Sonyachi Shirol village was injured in two separate attacks by gaurs. The woman was working in the fields when the incident happened. She was taken to the Radhanagari rural hospital and then to the Rajarshree Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Government Medical College and CPR Hospital in the city. She had sustained injuries to her neck and spinal cord.

Clement Ben, chief conservator of forests (territorial), said that sugarcane, corn and fresh leaves are the favourite fodder of gaur and they tend to get attracted towards them. Gaurs can be spotted in the forest areas of Radhanagari, Dajipur, Borbet, Vishalgad, Amba, Gagan Bawda, Bhudargad and Ajara in this region. The animals, he said, are coming to the villages in search of fresh fodder. He further added that the forest department is planning to propose fodder cultivating for these animals in the barren land next to the forest areas.

Source: Rahul Gayakwad & Sandeep Dighe.

'Kolhapur: As bison count rises, more animals stray near cities, say experts', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/12/2021.

Rahul Gayakwad. 'Woman injured in bison attack in Kolhapur village', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 18/12/2021.



CZA approves tiger safari & rescue centre in Chandrapur

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has approved a tiger safari and rescue centre in Chandrapur. It will come up on 210 ha reserve forest land near the Chandrapur Forest Academy. It will have a tiger safari over 44 ha and a rescue centre in 40 ha which will have a veterinary hospital, 18 cells for tigers, 12 for leopards, 12 for sloth bears, and 28 for herbivores. There will also be quarantine cells, bird and python enclosures, a workshop, housing for staff, and service blocks.

The proposal was forwarded to the CZA by the then principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) NH Kakodkar in July 2021. The master layout plan has been prepared by Ashfaq Ahmed Consultancy Services Private Limited, which had also designed the Gorewada zoo safari plan earlier.

The said plan was discussed in the 38th meeting of the CZA that was held on 16 November 2021. The approval for the project, which will be in the buffer area of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) was given on December 17 under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and subject to compliance with the Recognition of Zoo Rules 2009 guidelines.

Animals captured or rescued during conflict are shifted for treatment and then kept in captivity at Gorewada Rescue Centre in Nagpur. However, Gorewada's carrying capacity has already exceeded and hence there was a need for such a project in Chandrapur.

The TATR deputy director (core) said that the project will be attached to TATR Tiger Conservation Foundation. This will allow the foundation to run an animal adoption scheme and also accept donations for animal welfare.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'CZA clears tiger safari and rescue centre in Tadoba buffer', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/12/2021.

SC nod for relocation of Rantalodhi village from Tadoba-Andhari TR

The Supreme Court (SC) has given its nod for the relocation of Rantalodhi village from Kolsa range of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). This will add another 175.26 ha of forest to the reserve. The process for the relocation of the adjoining Karwa village is also currently underway.

The Rantalodhi relocation process was delayed as the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) had deferred the forest diversion proposal for 375 ha in compartment number 14-B at Salori village in Chandrapur district, where the villagers were to be resettled. The FAC had cited the SC order of 28 January 2019, which states that the extent of land de-reserved for resettlement shall not be more than the extent vacated by settlers in the core area. In the Rantalodhi case, the area to be given to the villagers was 375 ha whereas the TR would be getting only 175 ha. The state's chief wildlife warden, had in May 2021, moved the SC's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) strongly putting up Maharashtra's case for the diversion of the 375 ha needed for the relocation.

The court agreed with the recommendations made by the CEC and granted permission for relocating 145 families from Rantalodhi in compartment number 14-B of Salori, subject to grant of necessary permissions by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for diversion of 375 ha of forest land for non-forest use. Of the 244 families, 145 families have opted for Option-II package of Rs. 10 lakh per family, where resettlement has to be done by the government agencies, while the other 99 families have chosen Option-I, where they will move out with a one-time cash payment.

The TATR field director welcomed the SC order saying that though the area TATR is getting is less, Rantalodhi's biotic pressure was spread over five compartments. If one

considers cattle grazing, fuelwood, and non-timber forest produce collection, the impact is in a 2.5 km radius from the village.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'SC paves way for Rantalodhi relocation, tigers get more space in Tadoba', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/12/2021.

'Maharashtrachi Girishikhare' award for Kishor Rithe

Kishor Rithe, member, state board for wildlife, has been awarded the 'Maharashtrachi Girishikhare' award for his contribution to forest and wildlife conservation in the last three decades.

Rithe, a computer engineer-turned-wildlife conservationist, set up Nature Conservation Society, Amravati and Satpuda Foundation through which he has been working in Central India for wildlife conservation and welfare of villagers living on the fringes of national parks, sanctuaries and tiger reserves.

Source: "'Maharashtrachi Girishikhare' award for wildlife conservationist Kishor Rithe", www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/12/2021.

MAHARASHTRA/GUJARAT

Maharashtra FD to shift its captive elephants to Reliance facility in Gujarat

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has decided to send at least 12 captive elephants kept at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and Gadchiroli to Gujarat. It plans to send them to a rescue centre managed by Reliance's Radhe Krishna Elephant Welfare Trust in Jamnagar. All the six elephants at Tadoba's Botezari camp were to be shifted by

end December 2021, and six elephants from Gadchiroli — three from Patanil in Allapalli, and three from Kamlapur in Sironcha division were to be shifted by January 2022.

There are 20 captive elephants with the FD in Vidarbha. These include seven in Kamlapur, three in Patanil under Allapalli division, six in Tadoba, and four in Melghat, which are being used for tourism purposes.

Reliance Industries is setting up a zoo on 280 acres near their refinery at Moti Khavdi near Jamnagar. It will house 100 different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Earlier, in November 2021, one leopard and three sloth bears were sent to Reliance's proposed zoo from Dr. Prakash Amte's 'Animal Ark' at Hemalkasa in Gadchiroli. The animals were transported after transit pass from the FD and requisite permissions from the Central Zoo Authority.

On sending elephants, the PCCF said that these elephants are not used for any forestry work and lakhs of rupees are being spent on their upkeep. After the Tadoba elephant killed an employee recently, the TATR management had been contemplating shifting these elephants to a good centre. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and 'Project Elephant' allowed the FD to shift them to the rescue centre.

While officials have welcomed the decision, resentment is brewing among local people for the attempt to shift the Kamlapur elephants. Many people from Gadchiroli and neighbouring Telangana visit the elephant camp for tourism, thus providing direct and indirect employment to locals.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Tadoba, Gadchiroli tuskers to be shifted to Reliance centre in Gujarat', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 18/12/2021.

ODISHA

Similipal TR gets two sniffer dogs

Two sniffer dogs will now assist the patrolling squads of Similipal Tiger Reserve (TR).

Maya and Drona - the two canines of the German Shepherd breed aged around 1.5 years, were inducted recently into the squads after six months of training in wildlife protection at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)'s National Dog Training Centre in Chandigarh. Three Similipal staff have also been trained in handling the dog squad. The dogs have been given to the TR by TRAFFIC India, a non-government organisation.

It is hoped that the dogs will help track poachers, find hidden guns, snares as well as other wildlife articles and incriminating materials.

A sniffer dog had been brought to Similipal five years back. It died eventually of age-related ailments, following which the reserve did not have any other such sniffer dog.

Source: 'Dog squad to sniff out poachers in Similipal Tiger Reserve', www.newindianexpress.com, 13/12/2021.

Lambipali village relocated from inside Debrigarh WLS; process on for three other settlements

Around 80 people of 42 families of Lambipali village in the Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) were relocated on 17 December to a place under the Tangarpali panchayat located five km from the sanctuary (*PA Update* Vol. XXVII, No. 6). The new settlement has also been named Lambipali. The process for relocation of three other settlements - Kurumkel, Bhutuli and Rengali - is also currently on.

The village of Lambipali that was established in 1908 did not have proper road

connectivity, drinking water and health facilities. The villagers were also unable to undertake cultivation due to a high density of wildlife, forcing them to migrate in search of livelihoods.

The wildlife division conducted a series of community mobilisation programmes in August 2021 to make them aware of the government policy for relocation and compensation. The villagers expressed willingness in a gram sabha and a survey was conducted in September. Around 80 people of 42 families were found eligible for relocation and getting benefits of a Rs. 15-lakh package, informed the Hirakud Wildlife Divisional Forest Officer.

The villagers then worked as masons and labourers to complete construction work at the new colony within a month. Community toilets, a separate bathing ghat for women, water facilities including filters and proper drainage and electricity are among the amenities that have been provided at the new location.

Source: 'Forty-two families relocated from Debrigarh sanctuary in Odisha: Officials', www.devidiscourse.com, 19/12/2021.
'42 families bid adieu to Debrigarh sanctuary, own a place few km away', www.newindianexpress.com, 19/12/2021.

RAJASTHAN

No relief to FD on stay on construction inside Todgarh Raoli WLS

The Rajasthan High Court, on 8 December 2021, rejected the application of the Rajasthan Forest department (FD) for vacating its stay on construction activities inside Todgarh Raoli Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The stay had been ordered in August 2021 when the FD was constructing a road connecting Vanpath

Gomthada and Goram Mandir in the sanctuary using funds provided by the District Mineral Foundation Trust.

The December order stated that the court was not inclined to vacate the stay on the proposed work of the guest room, of forest path from Gomthada to Goramghat, the forest path from Gomthada to Goram temple and the Sulabh complex at Jogmandi.

A public interest litigation had been filed by wildlife conservationist and lawyer Rituraj Singh, where it was alleged that the project was being undertaken by the FD due to the political pressure from the sitting member of legislative assembly who had promised such a path to the temple to the voters of his constituency. The petitioner pointed out that pathways leading to religious sites inside the forest are a cause of concern.

At present, there is no motorable road to the Goram temple. The project will make the path leading to the temple motorable and, thereby, allow more devotees to enter the forest and go to the temple in vehicles, the petitioner said.

Source: 'No high court relief to forest department for work inside Rajasthan's Todgarh sanctuary', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 09/12/2021.

TAMIL NADU

State FD to establish six sniffer dog units

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) will soon be establishing six sniffer dog units at an estimated cost of Rs. 74 lakh to help deal with wildlife related crimes. Two of the six units will be set up with native breeds of Tamil Nadu like Chippiparai or Kombai.

Tamil Nadu has a wildlife conviction rate of less than 3% because of lack of supporting evidence. This move is aimed at tightening the conviction noose.

The government will purchase puppies, construct kennels, groom and vaccinate animals. They will be trained by experts to sniff animal bones, skins, ivory and red sanders at critical forest areas in Chennai region, and western and southern Tamil Nadu. Besides, the FD will build a customised vehicle, so that the squads can be mobilised soon to the crime scenes.

A senior forest official said that the chances of tracking down the suspects are higher if sniffer dogs can reach the crime scene within 24 hours.

Source: Ram Sundaram. 'Forest dept to establish six sniffer dog units to prevent wildlife crimes', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/12/2021.

HC asks Centre, Railways to act immediately to prevent elephant deaths in railway tracks



A division bench of Madras High Court directed the Centre and the Railways, in early December, to come up with a proper plan to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks and protect them. The court also appointed senior advocate PH Arvind Pandian as *amicus curiae* to assist the court in the issue.

The order was passed while hearing a batch of public interest litigations filed since 2016 to check elephant poaching and deaths due to train accidents. When the pleas came up for hearing, the petitioners informed the court

that in the last five years alone over 13,000 elephants have been killed in such incidents.

Earlier, pointing to a detailed order passed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in July, advocate Pandian said that the NGT had directed the Central Monitoring Committee constituted by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to take measures to prevent such deaths, particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The NGT directed the committee to conduct a joint meeting with Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Southern Railways in this regard within one month. But nothing has been done so far, he added.

Source: 'Stop elephant deaths or face action: Madras HC warns railways, Centre', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/12/2021.

UTTARAKHAND

Wildlife rescue centre at Corbett NP

A wildlife rescue centre is being developed over an area of 30 ha in the Dhela zone of the Corbett National Park (NP). A staff of 30 including a veterinary surgeon, a physician and an anaesthesia expert will work at this centre.

The total cost of the project is about Rs. 19 crores, out of which a sum of Rs. 10 crores has already been spent. The part of the centre ready so far is being used for treatment of tigers, leopards and elephants. After completion the centre will also be able to provide treatment to bears, snakes, birds and other wildlife. At present, five leopards and two tigers are being treated at the centre.

Source: OP Agnihotri. 'State's biggest wildlife rescue centre coming up in Corbett', www.dailypioneer.com, 13/12/2021.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

WII signs MoU with Doon University for collaborative PhD programme

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Doon University (DU), Uttarakhand, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a collaborative PhD program. The MoU was signed by the registrar of WII, Dr. Monali Sen, and the registrar of DU, Dr. MS Mandrawal.

As a part of the MoU, both organisations shall make provisions to share their respective research and development facilities to promote academic and research interaction in multiple areas of cooperation. Surekha Dangwal, Vice-Chancellor, DU, said that while the university cannot give WII an affiliation it can give its PhD seats. The MoU is about collaborative research work, which will be funded by WII while the university will give PhD degrees under the name of DU. At least two students will be provided an opportunity to get a PhD this year and the number will be increased over time.

Talks for bringing the WII's MSc course under the Delhi-based Academy of Scientific & Innovative Research are also said to be ongoing.

The alma mater of WII had started an online petition a couple of months ago, addressed to the Prime Minister's Office, against the disengagement plans of the Centre, highlighting how the institution had played a vital role in safeguarding the wildlife of the country. The WII was set up by the Union government in 1982 and was recognised by the Saurashtra University in Gujarat in 1988.

The Centre had been asking the institute to become independent for funds. A report by the Centre's finance section had recommended disengagement by the

government with a three-year timeline and a gradual reduction of funding of 25% each year.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'WII and Doon University sign MoU, to offer PhD courses', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/12/2021.

Wildlife sniffer dogs for multiple states, RPF

Fourteen young wildlife sniffer dogs, also known as 'Super Sniffers', along with their 28 handlers will soon join the forest force in different states and also the Railway Protection Force (RPF). They are part of the latest cohort to have passed out from the Basic Training Centre at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (BTC-ITBP) camp in Panchkula, Haryana. This is ninth batch to be trained since the launch of TRAFFIC and WWF India's wildlife

sniffer dog training programme in 2008. 88 wildlife sniffer dog squads have been trained here to date.

Three of the 14 dogs will go to Maharashtra – one each to the Amravati, Gondia, and Pandharkawda forest divisions, two each will go to Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Odisha, and one each to the Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments. Two sniffers will join the RPF to help curb the smuggling of wildlife contraband through the extensive railway network.

TRAFFIC's India office head Dr Saket Badola said that the sniffer dogs trained under the programme have so far assisted the agencies in over 400 wildlife crime cases.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Soon, 14 new sniffers to join India's wildlife dog force', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 23/11/2021.



OBITUARIES

MK Prasad – a multi-faceted scientist-activist

Prof MK Prasad is no more. And I feel a sense of loss and sadness because he represented, like many of his compatriots, a compassion and gentleness of thought and action that is rare to come by today. I had the good fortune of meeting him when he was involved with the Integrated Rural Technological Centre (IRTC) in my home town of Palakkad, way back in 2000.

I was not sure of what to expect from this famous man – his name being synonymous with Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) and the Silent Valley movement – when I went to meet him to discuss community efforts at conservation of natural resources. His warm smile put me at ease immediately and I knew that I could freely discuss my ideas to which he responded with equal enthusiasm. He showed me the IRTC centre and spoke about how the centre had helped rural lives via the use of science and technology.

His love for science and his faith convinced him that science when communicated in a simple language and manner, has the ability to mobilise the public to shun superstitions and apply their logic and reasoning in everyday matters. This was central to the successful people's science movements that Kerala has been famous for. Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad or KSSP as it is more popularly known was the brain behind this movement that sought to popularize science among the public.

Founded in 1962 by a group of science writers and teachers whose interest in science evolved into making science more meaningful for society, KSSP decided to transform into a people's movement in 1974 and adopted

'science for social revolution' as its motto. It was Prasad's article in 1977 in KSSP's science magazine – *Sastragathi* – describing the beauty of Silent Valley and pleading that it be saved from submersion due to the hydro-electric project planned across Kunthi river, that sparked the now famous Silent Valley protest and brought the KSSP to be involved in it.

What was remarkable about this protest was that a fierce environmental debate that went on for a decade, involved not just scientists, academics and environmentalists, but also citizens who were not even affected by the hydro project. KSSP sustained the protest through all possible means - through the involvement of citizens from all walks of life, exhorting them to write letters to the editors of newspapers, holding seminars to educate the public and gather support to save the Valley, conducting awareness programmes, and finally filing petitions and appeals in court and other high offices. History was made subsequently when Silent Valley was notified a national park in 1984 through the sustained public pressure that had been catalysed by KSSP.

Prasad worked relentlessly to translate scientific research produced in laboratories and research institutes that was inaccessible to the public and make it a useful and applicable tool to simplify people's lives and uplift them from poverty. He believed in the immense value of science in improving the social, environmental and economic aspects of society. To that end, he worked tirelessly along with his colleagues in KSSP for the Literacy Mission (1986-90), ensuring that his home district, Ernakulam, became the first to achieve 100% literacy. That, I believe, is the mark of a true scientist!

- **Roshni Kutty** is currently pursuing her PhD with ATREE, Bangalore. Her interests lie at the intersection of development, conservation and social justice.

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Chandra Singh Negi: A young grassroots conservationist

Chandra Singh Negi passed away at a young age of 38 years in Haldwani on 2 February 2022. Chandar – as he was affectionately called - worked with WWF-India for over the past decade on issues of wildlife conservation and human-wildlife conflicts in the Corbett landscape of Uttarakhand.

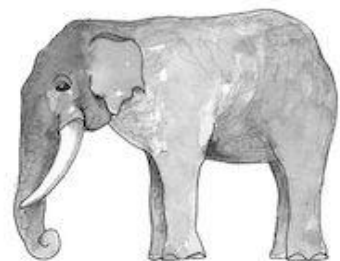
Both of us met in early 2018 and were soon tasked with organising capacity building programme on forest fire management for the frontline forest staff and community leaders in the forest fringe villages of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Over the next three years, we worked closely on implementation of a human-wildlife conflict mitigation project in the Southern Corbett landscape. The forest fringe communities including the Van Gujjars living in the landscape bear significant loss – human casualties, crop loss and livestock depredation - due to acute human-wildlife conflicts here. He worked tirelessly to mobilise the local communities, organised village level consultations, took initiatives for enhancing livelihoods of the farmers through cultivation of buffer crops, engaged with about 50 local youth to effectively manage human-wildlife conflict incidents in the villages and helped in timely resolution of grievances of the affected families through coordination with concerned forest officials of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Chandar's concerted efforts have led to considerable success in mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts in the Corbett landscape in more than 50 villages that include Patkot, Dhela, Kheripur, Makonia, Dabru, Tandanala, Dhara, Raninangal, Chorgalia Lakhanmandi, Bichua and *Gujjar deras* inside the Amangarh Tiger Reserve. He was instrumental in implementing technological interventions (solar fence and early warning system) for safeguarding crops, successfully

piloting the cattle insurance programme for timely settlement of insurance claims, running the interim relief scheme with a partner organisation, providing vital ex-gratia support to beneficiaries in the event of death or severe injuries due to wildlife attack, helping rural women to access clean energy through subsidised LPG connections and regularly carrying out cattle vaccination camps to sustain the animal husbandry based livelihoods of the Van Gujjars.

Chandar was highly regarded by the staff of the Corbett Tiger Reserve and also respected by community members for his effective coordination between the forest department and the local communities. He belonged to a family of limited financial means from Kotdwar and was financially sustaining his family members through his work. With his passing away from Acute Pancreatitis, the Corbett landscape lost a passionate young grassroots conservationist. I sincerely hope that his legacy will continue to inspire many rural youth to serve the cause of nature conservation in the Terai Arc Landscape.

- **Janmejaya Mishra** is a development consultant and policy researcher presently pursuing PhD in Public Policy at the Centre for Policy Studies at IIT Bombay.
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IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

NATIONAL NEWS

Centre seeks relief from putting transmission cables underground for GIB conservation

The Centre, in mid-December, sought modification of the Supreme Court (SC)'s 19 April 2021 order for putting underground power transmission cables in vast areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat for protection of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). The argument is that this is technically not feasible, is cost intensive and will be a huge setback to India's international commitment to move steadily towards renewable energy.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta requested Chief Justice of India NV Ramana for an urgent hearing on the Centre's plea citing a recent report of a technical group comprising experts from transmission and power sector and members from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in the matter.

The Centre said that the cost will work out to Rs. 12 crore a km and the aim could be achieved by installing bird diverters. It said GIBs could get effective protection from electrocution by installing bird diverters, as was used on the Gwalior-Jaipur line by Power Grid Corporation to protect vultures and in Bhuj-Banaskantha line to protect flamingos and cranes. The Centre pointed out that no bird collision with overhead power cables was reported from these two areas after the installation of bird diverters.

Further, the Centre said that the SC's April judgment has vast adverse implications for the power sector in India and energy transition away from fossil fuels. India has set a target to achieve installed renewable energy capacity (excluding large hydro) of 175 GW by 2022 and 450 GW by 2030. It submitted that the area sought to be debarred in Rajasthan and

Gujarat is 80,688 sq. km whereas the GIBs dwell in only 1% of this area. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3 & 1; Vol. XXV, Nos. 6 & 5 and Vol. XXIV, No.1).

Source: Dhananjay Patra. 'Bustard order will hit green push, SC told',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
14/12/2021

IUCN Red List status change for five birds in India

The Finn's weaver bird *Ploceus megarhynchus* which until now was listed as "vulnerable" in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List has been up-listed to the "endangered" category.

The Lesser florican has also been moved to "Critically Endangered" from the "Endangered" category. The two are part of a group of five birds in India and 27 worldwide whose categories have been changed recently by the IUCN. The other three in India - Nicobar Imperial-pigeon, Green Imperial-pigeon and Mountain Hawk-eagle – have been moved from "Least Concerned" to "Near Threatened" category.

Both the Finn's weaver and Lesser florican are victims of shrinking grasslands. The Finn's weaver bird, numbering less than 500 in India is primarily found in the Terai grasslands in Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh (UP), apart from a few pockets in Assam. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), had for the last four years, been working to get an update in the bird's IUCN listing.

The UP government funded conservation project for Finn's weaver bird in Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary was to begin in April 2020 but got delayed because of the Covid-19 outbreak. In April 2021, the country

was in the midst of second wave of Covid-19 when the birds were to be bred in captivity in specially made aviaries. The BNHS is now hoping to start the program in April 2022.

Source: Sandeep Rai. 'Finn's weaver now uplisted as 'endangered' bird in IUCN updated list, 4 other birds of India in status reshuffle', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/12/2021.

MAHARASHTRA

State wildlife board seeks action against illegal fishing in Jayakwadi

The Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife has taken up the issue with the state government of what it has identified as rampant illegal fishing and wetland farming in the Jayakwadi Bird

Sanctuary, In a letter addressed to state environment minister Aaditya Thackeray, the board has demanded official intervention, including pushing for the Ramsar tag for the sanctuary.

The fishing using fuel-driven boats along with the wetland farming is posing a grave threat to not only the birds at Jayakwadi but the overall biodiversity, the letter has said. The principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), in his official reply, said that he has alerted the forest department officials about the fuel-driven boats in the sanctuary.

Source: Prasad Joshi. 'Violations at Jayakwadi bird sanctuary: Wildlife board seeks govt intervention', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17/12/2021.



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Conservation Kaleidoscope
People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India

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- 2) Human Rights in Protected Areas
- 3) The Development Threat
- 4) The Linear Infrastructure Nightmare
- 5) The Local Context
- 6) At the State Level
- 7) Specific Geographies
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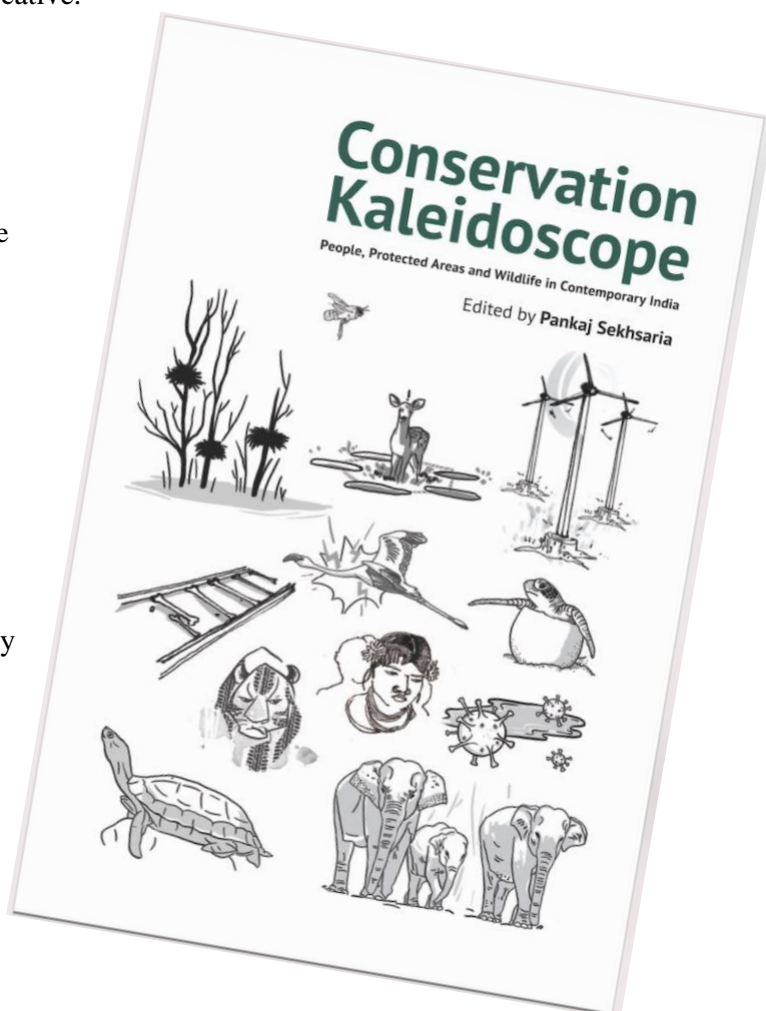
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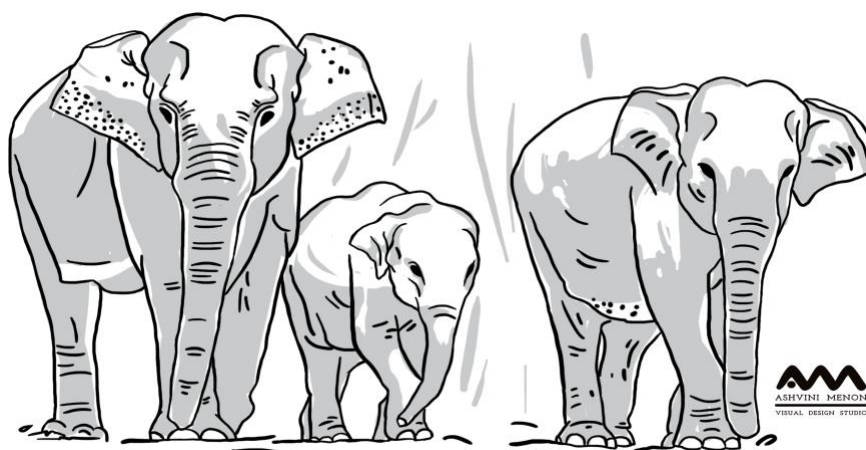
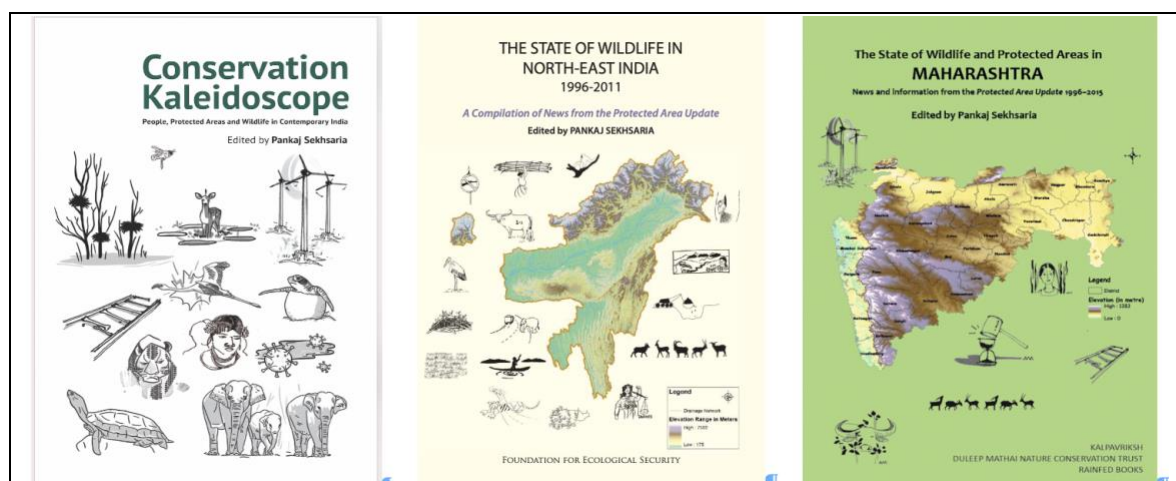


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Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. Nematode community structure along elevation gradient in high altitude vegetation cover of Gangotri National Park (Uttarakhand), India

Author(s): Priyanka Kashyap, Shahid Afzal, Anjum Nasreen Rizvi, Wasim Ahmad, VP Uniyal and Dhriti Banerjee

Keywords: Nematode, soil, biodiversity, elevation gradient, Gangotri National Park

Summary: An analysis of 60 soil samples collected randomly along elevation gradient (3000–5000 m) revealed that the nematode community comprised 58 genera. Nematode trophic group, diversity composition, and the nematode indices varied with elevation. With higher altitude, the diversity of soil nematodes decreased.

Link:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-05472-9>

2. Forest Fire Risk Zone Mapping of Eravikulam National Park in India: A Comparison between Frequency Ratio and Analytic Hierarchy Process Methods

Author(s): Pradeep GS, Danumah Jean Homian, Nikhil S, Prasad Megha K, Patel Nilanchal, Mammen Pratheesh C, Rajaneesh A, Oniga Valeria-Ersilia, Ajin RS, Kuriakose Sekhar L

Keywords: Analytical hierarchy process, fire risk zones, frequency ratio, GIS, Western Ghats

Summary: The authors have prepared a fire risk zone map using two methods namely Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and Frequency Ratio (FR). A comparison of results, derived by using seven factors, proved that AHP (72%) was more effective than FR (24%) for forest fire risk zone mapping. It can be used to plan preventive and mitigation measures.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.5552/crojfe.2022.1137>

3. New distribution record of globally threatened Ocean Turf Grass *Halophila beccarii* Ascherson, 1871 from the North Andaman Islands highlights the importance of seagrass exploratory surveys

Author(s): Swapnali Gole, Prasad Gaidhani, Srabani Bose, Anant Pande, Jeyaraj Antony Johnson and Sivakumar Kuppasamy

Keywords: Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dugongs, epifauna, habitat conservation, macrobenthos, seagrass associates

Summary: Collection of seagrass samples via on-foot explorations during low tide in the upper intertidal zone of Pokkadera recorded four seagrass species and eight seagrass-associated macrofaunal groups. The authors report a new distributional record of *Halophila beccarii*, a Vulnerable seagrass species, from this region.

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.7719.14.1.20406-20412>

4. *Sporobolus tetragonus* (Poaceae: Chloridoideae), an addition to the flora of South India

Author(s): Swamy J and S Arumugam

Keywords: Grasses, Eastern Ghats, new record, rediscovery, Telangana

Summary: *Sporobolus tetragonus* Bor is a grass rediscovered and seen for the first time from Kinnerasani Wildlife Sanctuary, Telangana. It was last collected from the Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand.

Link:

<http://rheedea.in/storages/submission/file/1627536395.pdf>

5. Space Use by Woolly Wolf *Canis lupus chanco* in Gangotri National Park, Western Himalaya, India

Author(s): Ranjana Pal, Anshu Panwar, Surendra Prakash Goyal and Sambandam Sathyakum

Keywords: Camera trap, food habit, grazing pressure, generalised linear mixed models, genotyping

Summary: Camera trapping for four years in summer and winter seasons in Gangotri National Park disclosed variations in activity patterns within seasons and preference of high elevation, less steep plateau habitats, by woolly wolf. Scat analysis also revealed a less diverse diet.

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2021.782339>

6. Species richness, diversity, structure, and distribution patterns across dominating forest communities of low and mid-hills in the Central Himalaya

Author(s): Vinod, C Joshia, Deepa Bishta, RC Sundriyal and Harshit Pant

Keywords: Species Diversity, Tree Density, Dominance, Himalayan Region, Subtropical Forest, Temperate Forest

Summary: A phytosociological analysis by random sampling recorded a total of 110 plant species, belonging to 53 families in Nainital and Haldwani forest divisions, Uttarakhand.

Species richness and regeneration varied with forests wherein herbs (52%) dominated over trees (27%) and shrubs (21%).

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24749508.2021.2022424>

7. Macrolichens of Mathikettan Shola NP, Western Ghats: A Preliminary Investigation with some new Records

Author(s): Aswathi Anilkumar, Stephen Sequeira, Arun Christy and SM Arsha

Keywords: Biodiversity, lichens, Kerala, Idukki, new reports, Saxicolous

Summary: An analysis of lichen specimens collected during a survey in various parts of Mathikettan Shola National Park (MSNP) identified 55 macrolichen species of which two were new to peninsular India and five were new to the lichen flora of Kerala State.

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.7117.14.1.20400-20405>

This section has been collated by Anand Pendharkar and Aradhya Sardesai (SPROUTS Environment Trust, Mumbai). **Email:** sproutsenvttrust@gmail.com



PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XVIII No. 1

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Any citizen entitled to move Green panel: NGT

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MoEF seeks hike in funds for two wildlife schemes

Virtual fencing to protect forests, wildlife

51 tigers died in 2011

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PERSPECTIVE

Van Gujjars: At the crossroads of conservation and livelihoods in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh

The nomadic Van Gujjars are one the most prominent yet marginalized forest-dwelling communities living in and around protected areas – the Rajaji and Corbett National Parks (NPs) and Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Uttarakhand and Shivalik Forest Division and Amangarh Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh. A socio-economic survey conducted among the community of the Shivalik Forest Division in 2018-19 found that livestock rearing is the only livelihood they are engaged in; a family earns about Rs. 7500 per month on an average from the sale of milk (approx. 243 liters per month sold at Rs. 31 per liter). If expenses incurred in procuring fodder (*Khal* and *Chokar*) from private traders and for veterinary care are considered, not much is actually earned, leading families to often fall into a debt trap. The survey also found that nearly 52% of the Van Gujjar families migrate to the upper Himalayan regions in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh in search of grazing for the livestock every summer (mid-March) and return back to their *deras* by the end of October.

One of the big socio-economic challenges the community faces is related to their location, deep inside the forests, their dependence on forest resources and their relationship with the forest department (FD). These include among others, occasional harassment from the FD, impact of human-wildlife conflicts – death of livestock and constant threat to life from tigers, elephants and leopards, significant delay in getting compensation, non-renewal of their grazing permits and complete apathy of the administration in settling their rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. Proper relocation and rehabilitation too has not happened barring a few cases such as Gendikhata and Pathri in Haridwar district.

The FD, many conservation organizations and wildlife research institutions continue to perceive the Van Gujjars as a major threat to wildlife conservation in the protected areas in the Terai Arc Landscape. A few non-governmental organizations and human rights activists working for their development believe that social activism and judicial interventions are the only solutions for the issues of Van Gujjars. On the other hand, the political parties feel that they are insignificant for their electoral gains.

That as the case may be, it is important to recognize that the Van Gujjar community is at the crossroads of conservation and livelihoods and continue to struggle for justice and for full rights as dignified citizens of the country.

- **Janmejaya Mishra** is a development consultant and policy researcher pursuing a PhD in public policy at the Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies, IIT Bombay. He would like to thank Pankaj Sekhsaria, Soumya Bakshi, Prajakta Hushangabadkar, Sher Singh Bisht, Bhuwanchand Upreti and Ranendra Bisht for their valuable inputs for this piece.

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