

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected
areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XXVIII, No. 3

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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, June 2022 (No. 157)

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Elephants in the media

The elephant, we all know, is a large charismatic animal that ranges across large landscapes in different geographies of India. It also has a cultural identity that is quite unmatched in this densely peopled country. Does reporting in the media then do justice in terms of width and depth to the issues affecting this magnificent animal? One can only hazard a guess, but a quick overview of nearly 30 years of the *Protected Area Update* suggests a mixed picture.

Two things can be said with some certainty. For one, the elephant does not seem to receive the kind of interest and coverage that the tiger does in spite of its larger numbers and more varied interactions with its human counterparts. The other, quite expectedly, is the focus on conflict in the reporting that does happen. The clutch of elephant related stories that appear in this issue therefore present an interesting picture. For once the elephant appears to compete with the tiger and appears to buck the general trend where the volume (number of stories) is concerned. On the other hand all the stories are indeed about conflict and fall in line with the general pattern in the media.

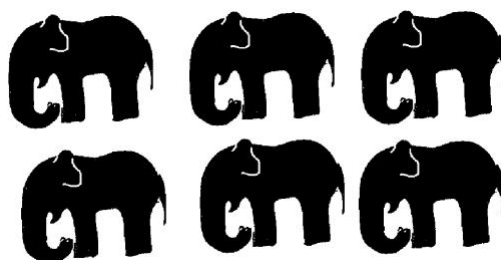
At the heart of all this reporting be it from Chhattisgarh, Odisha or Tamil Nadu, are different shades of things-not-being-right. The Chhattisgarh story might say *hathi mitras* (friends of the elephant), but it is, in fact, about a situation that is rife with conflict and loss. The elephant stories from Odisha are almost always about death and destruction and there are many of these on a regular basis. And the set from Tamil Nadu is very interesting for the institutional challenges and failures where elephant related issues are concerned – continued deaths of people and animals, serious lapses in investigation, and efforts at

bridge-building between the forest department and affected farmers.

For those whose major channel of engagement with the world is the media (and most of us fall in that category), the selection of what we are told and what we read or see suggests that there is no other world of the elephant. This is most likely true of almost everything that the media tells us. One of the big critiques of the news media, in fact, is its focus on the short term, on the ‘big’ and on trouble and conflict. The normal, the common and the non-spectacular, even though a larger part of life on a daily basis rarely if ever find a mention.

One could argue that elephants and people in shared landscapes are generally doing alright together. One could also argue that all is not okay everywhere and things could be better. We know that both realities exist and situations are dynamic and constantly changing. The media is an important element of this larger complex mosaic that we, elephants included, are all part of. There is a certain kind of exceptionalism that is at the heart of the media enterprise and we have to recognise it for that. Acknowledging that might help us understand in a more holistic and meaningful way the world of the media and the world the media reports upon

The elephants perhaps have their own version of a media and certainly their own stories of the world we live in. One can be sure that these would be fascinating even if one is not sure of the form of story-telling or indeed, what exactly the stories are about!



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

Increased sighting of Asiatic black bear outside Manas NP

There were 18 occasions between October 2021 and February 2022 when Asiatic black bears were seen outside the boundary of the Manas National Park (MNP) and had to be relocated. In contrast, there were only eight such events between 2009 and 2016 and only one on average every year between 2017 and 2020, informed two veterinarians, one working with the Manas Tiger Reserve (the core of which is MNP) and the other with the Wildlife Trust of India.

Some of these bears were reported in human habitations as far as 10-12 km from the forest. Most of these were adult males. Villagers have reported loss of livestock, including goats, pigs and poultry in bear attacks. On two occasions the bears also attacked humans; the animals had been provoked before the attack. No sightings of the bears have been reported since March.

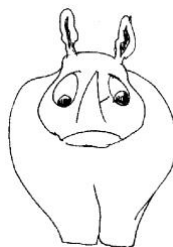
On the night of 15 December 2021, a bear entered and spent a night in a house in Daurebari village on the fringes of the park. On the night of 5 December, a bear was also reported to have eaten a small goat in Rajabeel village, near Daurebari. A villager in his 70s while talking about this incident claimed that it was first of its kind he had seen though he had spent his entire life in this region.

The north of Manas in India is connected to the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan. A rise in bear attacks and sightings outside forest reserves has also been reported in recent times in Bhutan. Experts have speculated that there are three possible reasons for these set of incidents: lack of food in the forest, degradation of their habitat and an increase in the bear population; this they said could not be confirmed without conducting a proper study, however.

Without policies guided by proper research, there is the concern that fear can spread fast, with adverse consequences for people and wildlife. In January, villagers in Koimari killed a bear cub and buried it by the river. The forest department was eventually informed, and a case was lodged against those responsible.

Source: Kasturi Das. 'Black bears stray from Assam national park in unprecedented numbers', www.thethirdpole.net, 23/03/2022.

Poachers saw off horn without killing the rhino in Orang NP



In a development that has baffled forest officials and experts in Assam, poachers managed to saw off the horn of a sub-adult rhino without killing it in the Orang National Park (NP). The incident came to light on

May 11 when the animal was found moving about a marshland of the park with a bleeding nose. The forest department is probing the incident.

While there is no dispute that the animal was made unconscious, no one knows how the poachers managed to do it. Usually, the poachers use firearms to kill the rhinos before hacking or sawing off the horn. The operation, however, is risky as the forest guards get alerted by the sound of gunshots.

Veterinarian Dr. Kushal Konwar Sharma, who has tranquilised several rhinos, ruled out the possibility that the animal was tranquilised by following the conventional method. He pointed out that there is only one source in South Africa which manufactures the drug to tranquilise rhinos. Procuring it is virtually impossible for anyone not in the government due to the processes involved. Further, he said that it is extremely difficult to tranquilise a rhino. Tranquilisation is carried out from elephant back and often the rhino charges the elephant. He said that he has

conducted on-foot tranquilisation too but with all the facilities that he has at his disposal.

Dr. Sharma has ruled out leakage from the Guwahati Zoo, the only place in the Northeast where the drug is kept. The drug is kept in a locker in the safe custody of the zoo director. The director is answerable to the central government for every dose used. One cannot also use the drug meant for tranquilising elephants or other animals for a rhino. One possibility according to him was the use of an electric shock for the purpose.

Source: Prasanta Mazumdar. 'Experts baffled as poachers take away horn without killing rhino', www.newindianexpress.com, 13/05/2022.

CHHATTISGARH

FD appoints *Hathi mitras* to warn people about elephants' movements

Residents of villages in Chhattisgarh affected by human elephant conflict (HEC) are being engaged by the state forest department (FD) to track elephants, warn people about their movement and send updates in a WhatsApp group created for the purpose. People participating in this exercise are called *hathi mitras* (friends of elephants).

About 60-70 villages in Mahasamund district are affected due to elephant movements. Elephants often cross the Mahanadi River to enter Mahasamund in central Chhattisgarh. They enter the villages after dusk in search of food. Government data for 2020 and 2021 reveals that there have been 15 deaths and six injuries in Mahasamund and on the border of Baloda Bazaar districts. Total compensation paid in cases of death stood at Rs 90 lakh while over a lakh was paid for the treatment of injuries. An amount of Rs 95 lakh was paid as compensation for crop loss over 445 ha of farmland.

Hathi mitras are selected locally to work for the FD. They track elephants through the help of fresh dung and foot prints. Though this helps minimise encounters, crop loss is

inevitable. The *hathi mitras* report that most casualties occur due to a lack of knowledge about elephant behaviour and movement. Incidents take place mostly at night when visibility is low. Awareness campaigns carried out by *hathi mitras* have helped reduce the craze for clicking photos of elephants and taking selfies with them. A person had died while trying to take a selfie with wild elephants in 2017.

The FD had also launched the *Gaj yatra* in Mahasamund in 2020. As part of the initiative, a vehicle that converted to resemble an elephant travelled across villages with a few staff in it. Officials visited schools to educate students about conflict mitigation. During afternoons, the vehicle stopped in villages to spread messages through loudspeakers. A film on how to respond after encountering elephants was also shown to people, informed the Mahasamund divisional forest officer.

Source: Deepanwita Gita Niyogi. 'Hathi Mitras: Chhattisgarh's solution to tackling human-elephant conflict', www.downtoearth.org.in, 06/05/2022.

DELHI

FD exploring possibility of conservation zone for hyenas in Delhi

In light of increased sightings of Striped hyenas in the Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), forest officials are exploring the possibility of developing a conservation zone for the species in Delhi. The southern ridge, which surrounds Ayanagar, Mandi and Jaunapur areas, is connected via a corridor with the Asola forests. The area, according to the forest officials, has a high concentration of hyenas. Numbers of the species are unknown and the forest department (FD) has planned to conduct a census in all the forests of city with the help of the Wildlife Institute of India.

Based on the camera traps and other observations researchers have noticed that the hyenas are following the trails of leopards, scavenging hunts for food. The area is promising for the hyenas, and their presence

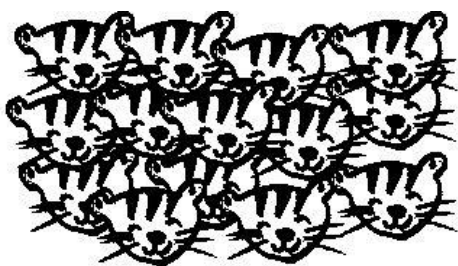
indicates that of other species of carnivores and their prey as well, said a researcher from Bombay Natural History Society.

Some experts, however, pointed out that a larger conservation plan is needed and this will require inter-state cooperation. Like leopards, hyenas also need connectivity from Asola to Damdama and other parts of the city, including areas towards Palwal, Manesar, which are bisected by peripheral roads. Since Asola is the northern-most end of the entire patch and it is protected, hyenas seem to be concentrated there. But in the long term, their sustenance will be difficult there alone.

Source: Kushagra Dixit. 'On hyenas' trail: Plan for a conservation zone takes shape in Delhi', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/04/2022.

GOA

Forest minister rejects demands for TR status for Mhadei WLS



Goa forest minister, Vishwajit Rane, has rejected demands for notifying a tiger reserve (TR) in the state, insisting that the state does not have resident tigers and he won't allow any move to upgrade the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to a full-fledged TR. The Mhadei WLS, which is connected to tiger areas in Karnataka, falls in Sattari taluka which is spread over two constituencies namely Valpoi and Poriem assembly segments. These are represented by Vishwajit Rane and his wife, Deviya Rane.

The Mhadei region has rich ore reserves and notifying it as a TR will, reportedly, seal any possibility of mining in the area. When the then union environment

minister Jairam Ramesh had proposed a TR in Goa in 2011, the Congress-ruled Digambar Kamat government has also objected saying that there wasn't enough evidence that Mhadei was home to tigers on a permanent basis.

A recent enumeration carried out by the Goa Forest Department (FD), however, showed that the state has five resident tigers and these have been intermittently detected on camera traps as well. Recently, the FD issued a notice warning of the presence of a tiger in the areas surrounding the Mollem National Park (NP) as well.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had, in fact, recommended setting up a TR at Mhadei WLS after the death of four tigers in 2019 here. The NTCA report submitted in February 2020 pointed out that the Mhadei WLS and Mollem NP are part of the Western Ghats complex, which has several interconnected TRs and protected areas along with reserve forests. However, it had noted, plantations, agriculture, industrial and infrastructure development activities are threatening the existing habitat connectivity in the region.

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

Source: Gerard de Souza. "Non-resident tigers": Goa minister Vishwajit Rane rejects tiger reserve demand', www.hindustantimes.com, 16/04/2022.

GOA/KARNATAKA

SC sets aside NBWL clearance for doubling railway line between Karnataka and Goa

The Supreme Court (SC), on May 9, set aside the clearance granted by the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for doubling the railway line from Castle Rock in Karnataka to Kulem in Goa.

A bench presided over by Justice L Nageswara Rao accepted the recommendations of the SC appointed Central

Empowered Committee (CEC), which in its report dated 23 April 2021 had said that it does not find any justification for the doubling as it will destroy the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats and also a very important wildlife corridor. The CEC had also noted that the track will only marginally enhance the capacity of the most inefficient section of the railway network while passing through an ecologically sensitive and biodiversity rich landscape that includes two wildlife sanctuaries and a national park. The order came on a plea by the NGO Goa Foundation.

The SC added that this will not, however, prevent the Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd. from carrying out a detailed analysis on the impact of the proposed project on the biodiversity and ecology of the protected areas and then submit a fresh proposal to the standing committee of NBWL.

The Standing Committee of the NBWL had cleared three projects - the doubling of the railway track, the four-laning of the NH 4A from Anmod near the Goa-Karnataka border to Mollem and laying of a 400 kV transmission line from Sangod in Goa to the Karnataka border.

The CEC had recommended revoking permission for the railway expansion project, but said that the highway expansion could be allowed subject to modifications like expansion of animal corridors and elevated highways in places where animal crossings are frequent. With regard to the transmission line, the CEC suggested that the existing 220 kV powerline alignment be utilised to lay a new 400 kV line as part of the ambitious Goa-Tamnar Transmission project instead of cutting down more forest. The SC had accepted this suggestion earlier on 7 April 2022. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3 & 2)

Source: 'SC sets aside NBWL clearance for railway doubling in Karnataka-Goa route', www.indianexpress.com, 10/05/2022.

JHARKHAND

Palamau TR to add 100 sq. km to its core from buffer

The Palamau Tiger Reserve (TR) management has recently moved a proposal to add 100 sq km of its buffer area to the core. Spread over 1,100 sq km, the TR currently has a core of 400 sq km and buffer of 700 sq km. There are over 156 villages in the reserve and the management has been trying to relocate two villages - Latu and Kujrum.

Kumar Ashish, director of the reserve's north division, said that the proposal to notify 100 sq. km of the buffer area into the core area has been made in accordance with the Union environment ministry's mandate at the time it gave the environmental clearance for the Mandal Dam project. The project, also known as the North Koel reservoir project, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2020. The 341 m high dam, which is to be built over North Koel River, is expected to inundate nearly 11 sq. km land within the buffer area of the TR once it is completed.

Source: Dhritiman Ray. 'Jharkhand: Palamau Tiger Reserve plans to expand core area by 100 sq. km', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/04/2022.

KARNATAKA

Conversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes rises in Karnataka: study

Nearly 1,353 ha of forest land in Karnataka was converted for non-forestry purposes such as agricultural and infrastructure projects in the period 2015-2021, a study conducted by the Centre for Ecological Economics and Natural Resources at the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) has found. Titled 'Economic assessment of forest ecosystem damages from climate stressors in forestry sector of Karnataka during 2015-2020', the study was funded by the Karnataka Forest Department.

The study has revealed that in 2020-21, 442.27 ha were converted as against only 36.31 ha in 2019-20. It notes that loss and degradation of forest ecosystem services remain a major socio-economic and ecological challenge in Karnataka. Various socio-economic factors determine the degradation of forests. For instance, natural factors such as flood, drought, forest fires, landslides etc., due to economic development, such as forest land conversion as non-forest land for irrigation, hydel and wind power projects, mining and quarrying, road, railway, transmission line and others.

The report recommends that before any forest land is converted, the consequences on socio-economic and environmental outcomes of present and future generations must be analysed. Also, the cost of forest conservation should account for two things i) how it contributes to human well-being and ii) examine the forest ecosystem products and processes.

Year-wise forest land converted for non-forest purposes Karnataka:

Year	Area converted (in ha)
2015-16	108.34
2016-17	298.38
2017-18	331.17
2018-19	137.28
2019-20	36.31
2020-21	442.27

Source: Aksheev Thakur. 'Karnataka: 1,353 hectares of forest land converted for non-forestry purposes from 2015 to 2021, says study', www.indianexpress.com, 18/04/2022.

MM Hills WLS to get tiger reserve status

The Male Mahadeshwara (MM) Hills Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) will soon become the sixth Protected Area Update Vol. XXVIII, No. 3

tiger reserve (TR) in Karnataka. Both the Centre and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) gave the necessary approvals in 2020-21. The state board for wildlife has also approved the proposal.

Soliga tribals living in the forest had initially objected to the TR status. They are said to have agreed to the proposal now having received assurances from the forest officials that their livelihood would not be affected, said the vice-president of Chamarajanagar District Soliga Tribals Association. Besides, 18 revenue enclosures have been kept outside the TR boundary so that the rights and privileges of local people are not affected.

With the MM Hills getting a TR tag, Chamarajanagar will become the only district in the country to have three TRs; the other two being Bandipur and BRT TRs.

Source: S Ramesh. 'MM Hills will become a tiger reserve, C'nagar 1st dist with three big-cat parks', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/05/2022.

Tribals relocated from Nagarahole TR protest, want to return



Over 170 tribal — Jenu Kuruba and Yerava — families from various settlements like Masthigudi and Andagundi on the Mysuru-Kodagu border staged a protest at the Andagundi Gate of the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (TR) in the 2nd week of May seeking to go back to the forests that constitute the TR. These families had been relocated from the reserve years ago and claimed that they had not been fully rehabilitated yet. They noted that they were living lives of nomads — neither in the forests nor in the towns — and doing odd jobs in coffee estates and paddy fields. The income was not sufficient and they were

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surviving on the free rations provided by the government.

Hundreds of tribals were shifted from various *haadis* inside the reserve including Adujudi, Chinni-Hadlu Haadi, Jungle Haadi, Majjige Halla Haadi and Anechowkuru Haadi. Each relocating family was promised benefits of upto Rs. 15 lakh and land to cultivate crops. Though they were promised three-acre land per family, the title deeds were not distributed. Houses that were built outside the forests leaked and the walls developed cracks just six months after construction, alleged the president of Jenu Kurubara Sangha. Now, the tribals are demanding 10 acres of agricultural land and other benefits as mentioned in the Forest Rights Act 2006. However, the president said, all their demands have been ignored despite several protests and submission of memoranda.

Visiting the protest site, the director of the reserve said that the rehabilitation activities are an ongoing process. While many homes were built for tribals from the *haadis*, there are a few pending works like the grant of title deeds. He assured that the land given to them will be tilled and the FD would supply tractors for the purpose. However, the tribal leaders said that though the director had promised at least 15 tractors to till over 650 acres of land, only two had been sent.

Source: ‘Decades after being displaced, tribals want to go back to forests’,
www.starofmysore.com,
10/05/2022.

BRT Tiger Reserve authorities to build rail barricade

BRT Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities have planned to build a rail barricade like the one at Nagarahole and Bandipur TRs to prevent entry of elephants to human habitats located along forest fringes in Chamaraajanagar district.

The forest department (FD) will spend Rs 3.6 crore for the project which aims at building a 2.4 km rail barricade in K Gudi range. The height of the barricade will be 2.1 m. The construction of the barricade is

expected to help prevent human animal conflict in several villages around Bellatta dam, Jyotigowdanapura, Honganur, and Muratipalya among others.

Source: ‘BRT tiger reserve to soon get rail barricades’,
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
04/04/2022.

ODISHA

Animal overpass on railway track in Kapilash WLS

An overpass is to be constructed on a railway track passing through the Kapilash Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to ensure safe passage for wild animals. The 100 m pathway for wildlife will be one of two railway overpasses in the country, the second one being planned in Jharkhand. It recently received a go-ahead from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

The overpass will be constructed in compartment 1 of the sanctuary to connect it with the surrounding landscape that includes the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary, Patapuri and Godabolu Reserve Forests, and Athagarh Forest Division. The exact location of the overpass will be decided jointly by Dhenkanal division forest officer (DFO) and East Coast Railway (ECoR) authorities.

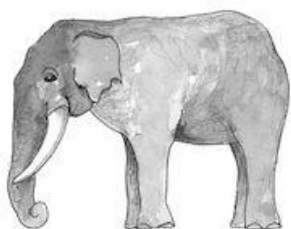
Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Shashi Paul, informed that the proposal for the overpass was placed before the NBWL last year during the Railway’s move to lay two more rail lines near the existing two, in Kapilash WLS. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) then studied the traffic load and feasibility of the project and recommended an overpass of 100 m with minimum two-m-deep thick soil for animals to pass over. The WII has recommended that the railway tracks on either side of the overpass to the span of 1.5 km be barricaded to ensure elephants and other wildlife use the structure regularly.

The Dhenkanal DFO said that they have proposed to the ECoR authorities to

design the structure in such a way that it could support a load of 15 to 20 elephants at a time.

Source: Sudarsan Maharana. 'Odisha's first animal overpass to come up in Kapilash', www.newindianexpress.com, 20/04/2022.

Centre cuts funding for Project Elephant; Odisha gets 75% less



Central funding for Odisha under Project Elephant may reduce by 75% of what was approved in the last (2021-22) fiscal. The state

had submitted a budget for Rs 15 crore last fiscal of which about Rs 12 crore was approved. However, this year, the state has been asked to submit an estimate of only Rs. 3 crore as the total budget for Project Elephant for the entire country is only Rs. 35 crore.

The major concern for Odisha after reduction of funds will be managing elephant protection squads and other staff. Around 40 elephant squads, each comprising five members, have been engaged in different divisions under the centrally sponsored scheme for which around Rs 4-5 crore is required. As the slashed budget would be too less to meet the expenses under the project, the forest department (FD) is now planning to submit an estimate of not less than Rs 11 crore.

Fund reduction will also hamper works such as the creation of new water bodies, renovation of old ones, maintenance and repair of the existing communication network, creation of new systems and the construction of watch towers, barracks and forest roads in elephant habitats. Besides, there would also be an impact on grassland meadow management, fodder plantation and elephant forage plantation in elephant habitats. Activities carried out to create village level awareness will also be affected.

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The state, in the last two decades, has lost over 1,300 elephants due to various reasons. This includes 136 deaths due to poaching, 19 caused by poisoning, 33 in train accidents, six in road mishaps while 204 died in other accidents; 206 elephants also died due to electrocution in this period.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 2; Vol. XVII, Nos. 4 & 3).

Source: Sudarsan Maharana. 'Centre slashes Project Elephant funding, conservation to be hit in Odisha', www.newindianexpress.com, 27/04/2022.

RAJASTHAN

Relocation begins of sixth village from Sariska TR

The process of moving Lodge Nathusar, the sixth village to be relocated from within the Sariska Tiger Reserve (TR) began recently with the shifting of 32 of the 99 families to Tijara. The majority of families that shifted opted for land packages. The package includes six bighas of agricultural land, a 60x90 sq. ft. plot and electric connection for cultivation. The villagers who moved out earlier have seen land value increasing in Tijara, Kanpura and other areas. This has motivated them to shift, said a district administration official.

The five other villages that have been shifted since the relocation plan began in 2006 include Panidhal and Dabri. The forest department has said that it would shift another six villages - namely Sukola, Devri, Kankwari, Kraska and Pilapani - within a year. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 1; Vol. XXIII, No. 2 and Vol. XXII, No. 1)

Source: 'Rajasthan: Shifting of 6th village begins in Sariska', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/04/2022.



TAMIL NADU

2019 WCCB report highlights serious oversights in elephant poaching investigations

A 2019 Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) report has highlighted serious oversight on the part of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) in investigating elephant poaching cases in a number of districts, including the Nilgiris and Coimbatore. The report details instances of under-reporting of cases, registering of cases in a “casual and careless manner”, failure to include the names of the main accused in the cases filed, and also poor investigation practices.

The WCCB investigated the cases in Megamalai, Valparai, the Sigur Range and Kotagiri in the Nilgiris, Sirumugai and Mettupalayam in Coimbatore and also the forest ranges in Theni in 2015. As per the report, tusks were collected from poachers in many parts of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, including Kotagiri, Kallar, Bhavani and Coonoor.

The report mentions a case in which only one case was registered in the Sigur range of the Coimbatore division even though the person was accused of killing three elephants at three different times. It has further pointed out that suggestions communicated to the FD for rectifying the same were not acted upon. Further, the main accused, who bought the entire ivory (more than 300 kg), was not included in any of the cases. The WCCB has also identified key businessmen, industrialists and entrepreneurs from across India who are known to have purchased ivory from the key accused identified by it. Another mention is about one of the accused arrested in Sigur revealing to the WCCB that he had killed eight elephants; however cases registered were not commensurate with this.

Activists have voiced concerns recently over the formation of a four-member committee to look into the elephant deaths in the state over the last year. They have noted that officers who were in charge when the alleged oversights were committed by the FD

while investigating the cases have been included as members of the committee. Another conservationist from the Nilgiris has questioned the rationale behind the FD forming a committee to probe the elephant deaths when the high court had already ordered the formation of a special investigation team.

Source: Rohan Premkumar. ‘WCCB report highlights oversights in official probe into elephant poaching cases’, www.thehindu.com, 08/04/2022.

Veterinary team studying elephant deaths in Pethikuttai RF recommends toxicity studies

A five-member veterinary team that studied elephant deaths in the water storage areas of Bhavani Sagar reservoir has recommended to the forest department to conduct toxicity profiling of crop raiding elephants by examining their dung to study long-term effects of organophosphorus compounds (OPCs). The study was conducted in the Pethikuttai Reserve Forest (RF), which is located between the reservoir and the villages.

Of the 43 elephant deaths in Coimbatore Forest Division since 2020, 14 have occurred in this RF. Seven of the 14 had liver disease and samples of two tested positive for OPCs – a possible hint at poisoning through pesticide applied to crops. The veterinary team has therefore proposed environmental toxicology studies to understand the effect of routine use of pesticides on crops.

The team found that there was no water contamination in the backwaters of the Bhavani Sagar dam or in the soil. Moreover, there was no report of mass deaths of other animals like cattle, bison, deer, birds and other aquatic animals which depend on the reservoir.

Team members pointed out that though it is said that the contaminated soil from the viscose area (an abandoned mill), where elephants are found to herd, is a source of toxic materials, elephants found herding inside the site were mostly tuskers, while the deaths were reported only in females.

The team submitted its report to the four-member committee headed by Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, which was recently tasked by the forest department (FD) to verify facts of elephant deaths in Tamil Nadu for the past one year. The committee has decided to send biological samples of dead and sick elephants to the toxicology department of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History to find out the nature and quantity of OPCs in the dead female elephants.

Meanwhile, a 71-year-old retired camp elephant, Vijayalakshmi, who was under treatment since April 7, died without responding to the treatment at Kozhikamuthi tribal settlement in the Ulanthy forest range in Anaimalai TR.

Source: S Senthil Kumar. 'Salim Ali centre to analyse tissue samples of sick, dead elephants', www.newindianexpress.com, 28/04/2022.

PCCF seeks investigation into use of country-made bombs for hunting

The death of a female elephant in Coimbatore Forest Division (CFD) on March 24, three weeks after it bit into a country-made bomb (*avittukai*), has prompted the forest department (FD) to act against this age-old method of hunting. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forest - Head of Forest Force (PCCF-HFF) has tasked the Deputy Conservator of Forest (DyCF) and the principal of Tamil Nadu Forestry Training College to conduct an investigation on usage of *avittukai* in farmlands adjoining the Coimbatore division.

Use of *avittukai* is common in agricultural lands near forests and people use them mainly to hunt wild boars that damage crops. The crude bomb, the size of an egg is wrapped with meat waste or stuffed inside fruits as bait to kill wild animals. The bomb explodes when the animal bites it.

According to FD field staff, people who use the explosive do not intend to target wild elephants. However, elephants take the bait in a few cases.

Source: Wilson Thomas. 'Use of country-made bombs in Coimbatore Forest Division under investigation', www.thehindu.com, 03/05/2022.

FD holds meeting with Coimbatore farmers to discuss human elephant conflict

The committee probing into the issue of elephant deaths in the Coimbatore region recently convened a meeting with farmers here. Held on 18th April at the Tamil Nadu Forest Academy, the meeting was attended by over 100 members from various farmers' associations and other stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting was to get the inputs from the farmers on three aspects: eradicating human elephant conflict, preventing elephant deaths due to electrocution and country-made bombs (see story above) and the expectations of farmers from the FD. Members of the farmers' associations said that the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (WLPA) must be suitably amended as prosecuting farmers under the Act was unfair.

On the same day, after more than 60 days of search, officials of the Coimbatore Forest Division arrested a farmer on charges of electrocution of an elephant. A tusker aged 12-14 years was killed after it came in contact with an electric wire in this farmer's land at Varapalayam on February 12.

The farmers' representative said referring to the arrest, that elephant deaths were unavoidable if the animals venture outside forest areas and into the *patta* lands of farmers. The forest department (FD) should book farmers under the WLPA only if their direct involvement in elephant mortalities was established after a thorough investigation, said a former police official.

Farmers suggested that a radio collar be fixed on the matriarch of the group as she leads and guides a herd that damages the crops. They pointed out that once the location of the matriarch is tracked, forest staff can reach the place and divert the animals. They noted that they have been suggesting this to officials since 2006.

Source: 'Elephant deaths: Panel meets ryots to find solutions',
www.newindianexpress.com,
19/04/2022.

'Forest Department condemned for booking farmers under Wildlife (Protection) Act',
www.thehindu.com, 18/04/2022

Tamil Nadu reconstitutes its State Board for Wildlife

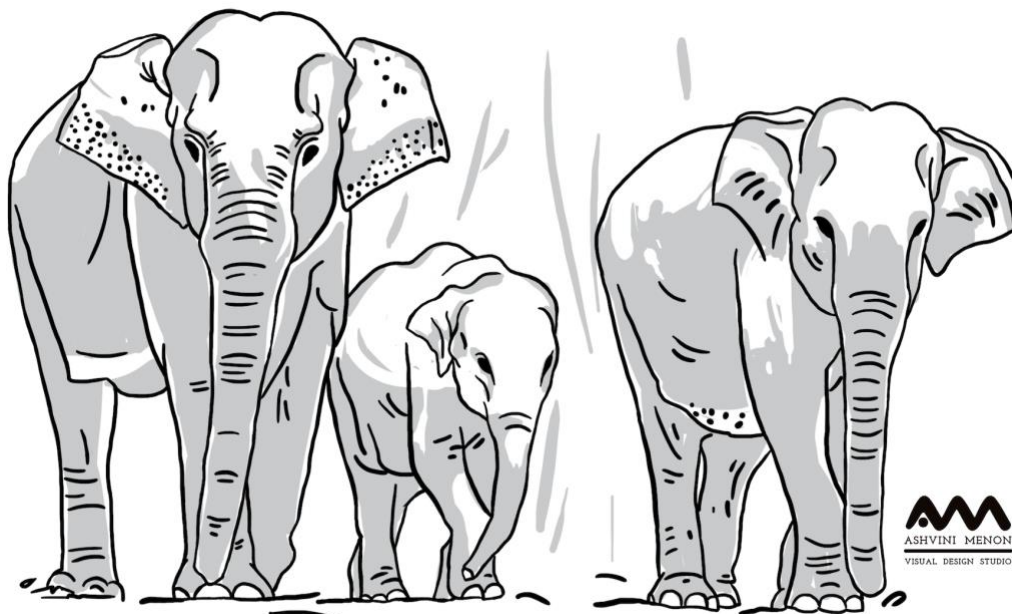
The Tamil Nadu government has reconstituted its State Board for Wildlife with Chief Minister MK Stalin as its chairperson and the minister of forests K Ramachandran as vice-chair.

The board now includes three members of the state legislative assembly, N Eramakrishnan, T Udayasuriyan and IP Senthil Kumar. Other members include Pratim Roy of Keystone Foundation, K Kalidasan of OSAI Environmental Organisation, CP Rajkumar of

Nalam Hospital, Tarsh Thekaekara from Deivarnalai, Gudalur and Antony Clement Rubin from Chennai. Also part are two individuals from scheduled tribe communities - S Savithri from Ambasamudaram, Tirunelveli, and S Thangapandi from Aandipatti, Theni.

The board will advise the state government on a number of matters including the selection and management on the areas to be declared as protected areas, formulation of policy for protection and conservation of wildlife and specified plants, measures to be taken for harmonizing the needs of the tribal and other forest dwellers with the protection and conservation of wildlife.

Source: Saranya Chakrapani. 'Tamil Nadu wildlife board to focus on strong, foolproof policies',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
13/04/2022.



Farmers & traders protest against night traffic ban through Sathyamangalam TR

Stating that restrictions on night movement of vehicles on the Bannari–Karapallam stretch of the national highway that passes through the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR) is adversely affecting traders, farmers, workers, lorry owners and the public, over 2,500 traders in Sathyamangalam and Talavadi protested on April 11 by downing their shutters and keeping lorries off the road in Erode district. While over 2,200 shops were closed in Sathyamangalam, over 350 shops in Talavadi and Hasanur, including vegetable mandis, were closed for the day. Members of various political parties, trade and farmers' associations, merchant unions and the public gathered near Bannari check-post and at Talavadi bus stand to stage demonstrations.

The Madras High Court had on 6 April 2022, issued orders on vehicle movement on the national highway that passes through the reserve to prevent death of wild animals. As per the regulations, any vehicle with 12 wheels and above, and vehicles carrying goods over 16.2 tonnes cannot not be allowed to use the stretch. Other vehicles were permitted to use it from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Buses were not allowed to use it from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

However, members of Talavadi Farmers' Association said that forest officials were denying permission even for light motor vehicles during night hours that transported vegetables and farm products from Talavadi and Karnataka to various markets in Tamil Nadu. These vehicles should be exempted from toll fee collections at the two check-posts and should be allowed to ply without any restrictions, they stressed. They wanted buses to be allowed to use the stretch round-the-clock and for local people to be allowed to travel without passes.

Members of the Sathyamangalam Lorry Owners' Association said that the night ban on vehicle movement was affecting transportation of goods, including vegetables and essential commodities, and wanted the

state government to file a review petition in the court to revoke the ban permanently.

Source: SP Saravanan. 'Traders down shutters against regulations on vehicle movement on Bannari-Karapallam stretch', www.thehindu.com, 11/04/2022.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Dr. Kamal Bawa elected to US National Academy of Sciences

Conservation biologist and president of the Bengaluru-based Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE), Dr. Kamal Bawa, has been elected to the US National Academy of Sciences. He is already fellow of the Royal Society (London) and the American Philosophical Society.

A few years ago, Dr. Bawa brought together scientists from India's leading institutions to develop the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-being under the banner of the Biodiversity Collaborative. The effort was supported by the office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, and is currently funded by the Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies.

Source: 'Indian environmental scientist elected to U.S. National Academy of Sciences', www.thehindu.com, 04/05/2022.

MoEFCC gives in principle approval to extended reach drilling in forest areas; researchers, geologists, environmentalists express concern

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has given in-principle approval to extended reach drilling (ERD) in forest areas, contingent upon the sanction of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). ERD is a method of extraction of oil and gas that

involves digging a horizontal well at an incline, which allows for the drilling to take place at a distance from the site of extraction.

In a meeting held on 31 March earlier this year, the FAC decided to give its 'in-principle' approval for ERD based on a report by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), which proposes that drilling occurs at least one km outside a protected area, and half a kilometre away from villages in forest areas. The FAC said a final decision would be taken after WII provides its views on the matter and specifically considers the effects on wildlife.

The report stated that the technology has no direct impact on fauna, but that indirect impact could include forest fires from oil leakages, soil surface contamination, and reproductive disorders in animals. Its conclusion that ERD is environmentally safe and the best technology for tapping the hydrocarbon from beneath without disturbing the surface area included a recommendation by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education. The DGH also argued that the extraction process would be a silent one, and any damage resulting from it would be "minimal" and last for "a limited period of six months only".

To undertake ERD in forest areas permission is needed under the Forest Conservation Act 1980 (FCA). If the FAC is to grant its final approval, it could result in exemptions to the clearance process outlined by the FCA in its current form, said experts. In October 2021, the MoEFCC proposed amendments to the FCA, which included removing ERD from its purview. The report submitted to the FAC also argued that the FCA shouldn't apply to ERD since it works "from outside forest areas" and "there would be minimal impact on surface forest area". Notably, the FAC had previously shown hesitation in granting to ERD, saying its ecological effects needed to be deliberated further, but it changed its mind after meeting with officials from the DGH.

However, experts including geologists say that the risks of oil extraction within a

forest area are still high, even if it is done from a distance. Also, long horizontal and inclined wells will disturb the aquifer systems and pollute the groundwater. Environmentalists have expressed concern over the ambiguity around the impact of ERD, and say that oil extraction in PAs still poses serious environmental and health risks. Further, a legal researcher has pointed that ERD could affect how local communities use the land at the proposed site for drilling and extraction.

For context, a blowout - an uncontrollable release of gas — at Oil India Limited's (OIL) well at the Baghjan oil field in Assam's Tinsukia in 2020 led to a fire that lasted for almost six months. The fire had a significant impact on the nearby Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and led to large scale evacuations (*PA Updates* XXVI, Nos. 4 & 3 and Vol. XXIII, No. 5)

OIL was granted environmental clearance for ERD in the same district in 2017, but this was stayed by the Gauhati High Court in the aftermath of the Tinsukia disaster when the company could not produce an impact assessment of ERD on the area's biodiversity.

Source: Simrin Sirur. 'With top advisory panel's cautious nod, govt. closer to approving oil drilling in forest areas', www.theprint.in, 17/04/2022.

Minister launches field manual for managing human elephant conflict in the country

Bhupender Yadav, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, recently released a field manual to guide forest staff in dealing with human elephant conflict (HEC) in major elephant range states. The manual has been prepared by the ministry in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - India.

Titled 'Field Manual for Managing Human Elephant Conflicts in India', it was released at the Forest Research Institute while the minister was chairing the 16th Steering Committee meeting of Project Elephant.

Various aspects related to elephant conservation were discussed in the meeting. Besides the manual, the minister also released the Preliminary Report on HEC and a booklet titled *Trumpet*.

India is home to approximately 27,000 Asian elephants, which is the world's largest population of the species. Some 30 elephant reserves have been established so far in 14 major elephant states. However, as human populations have grown and elephant habitats have been altered by development, HEC has resulted in unfortunate and tragic outcomes for both people and elephants, read the statement issued by WWF India.

The minister had told the Rajya Sabha in August 2021 that HEC had caused 1,401 human and 301 elephant deaths in India from 2018 to 2020. Some 115 elephants and 457 people died in 2018-19 while 99 elephants and 585 people died in 2019-20.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Bhupender Yadav launches field manual for forest staffers to manage human-elephant conflict', www.downtoearth.org.in, 29/04/2022.

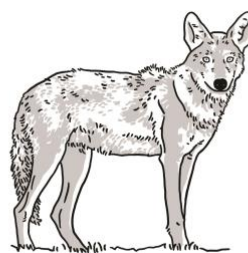


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IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

CHANDIGARH

SEIAA cancels environmental clearance for projects within 10-km of Sukhna WLS

The State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Haryana, has cancelled the environment clearance for projects within a 10-km radius of the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). SEIAA chairman Sameer Pal Srow, in his order, stated that the sanctuary was being damaged due to construction within its 10-km radius. The decision is likely to affect construction activity in the newly developed Sectors 27, 28, 30, DLF of Mansa Devi Complex, Pinjore, Amravati Enclave, societies of Sector 20 of Panchkula and Peer Muchalla.

Most of the 10-km area falling in Panchkula has been developed, due to which meetings had been held at the administrative level in which officials had stated that the construction should be allowed at least outside 300 m around the sanctuary. A committee headed by the Deputy Commissioner of Panchkula had also sent a proposal to the government in this particular matter.

Now, a committee has been constituted by the SEIAA to identify the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). The committee would inspect the area around the sanctuary and identify the ESZ, after which further action will be taken. The matter will go to the National Green Tribunal after the committee has presented its report. In 2017, a proposal was also sent to the Central government to notify the area within one-and-a-half-km from the boundary of the sanctuary as the ESZ. This has been agreed to by Chandigarh, Punjab and Haryana. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, No. 1 and Vol. XXVI, No. 2)

Source: 'Sukhna wildlife sanctuary: Haryana cancels its environment clearance for 10-km radius', www.tribuneindia.com, 13/04/2022.

SOUTH ASIA

Birdwatchers from India, Nepal & Bhutan come together to list birds in the Himalayas

Birdwatchers in the Himalayan regions of India, Nepal and Bhutan came together for a unique inter-country exercise to document as many birds of the mountain range as possible. Named 'Himalayan Bird Count', it was undertaken on May 14 and a total of 607 species were documented in one day.

The count was co-organised by 'Bird Count India', which is an informal partnership of organisations and groups interested in documenting and monitoring India's birds. 'Bird Conservation, Nepal', and the 'Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Bhutan' helped co-ordinate the count in their respective countries.

In India, the count was conducted in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, northwest Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. Uttarakhand reported the highest number of bird species, at 293, while the maximum number of checklists, at 192, was uploaded from Jammu & Kashmir. Birdwatchers from Ladakh, including members of the 'Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club', spread out in various regions of Ladakh and uploaded 182 checklists. In 36 checklists, birdwatchers from Sikkim recorded 157 species. Similarly, 50 checklists yielded 234 species in Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: Bindu Shajan Perappadan. 'Birdwatchers from India, Nepal and Bhutan record Himalayan species', www.thehindu.com, 17/05/2022.



Book Review by L.A.K. Singh
Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in
Contemporary India

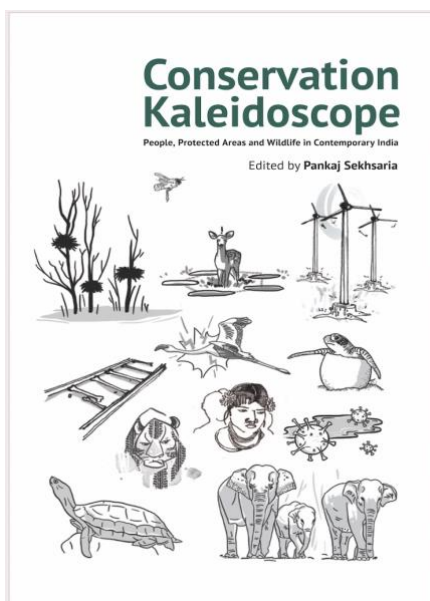
Journal of Threatened, 26 February 2022,
<https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.7898.14.2.20701-20702>

The launching of the *Protected Area Update* (PAU) by Kalpavriksh in 1994 speaks about the very unique foundation and sustainable foresight for perennial source of information. PAU has grown in its contents and deliverables. At regular interval while it is updating its readers with all that is happening in the country about wildlife, the volume of information the PAU have amassed have developed into a historical data bank.

For a researcher it would have been difficult to go back and search the contents of PAU for crisp and meaningful data pieces, anywhere. In 2013, Sekhsaria brought out *The State of Wildlife in North-East India 1996–2011* within 295 pages, and in 2015 it was the turn for *The State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra*, within xii + 235 pages. I had the opportunity to go through the second masterpiece (Singh 2020).

This time, as a person ever hungry for data and information, I have profound pleasure and satisfaction while going through *Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India*, compacted within xviii + 412 pages. The book has a simple and attractive cover within 23 x 15 cm. From the small art works, one is able to know the scope within the book.

I reaffirm my own opinion (Singh 2015) that information relating to wildlife and natural history photography have now



expanded to people who are beyond full time field researchers, and the platforms used for dissemination of information are often outside impact-loaded journals. One needs to see his observation or writing quickly in the print or electronic media. PAU has very ably harvested upon these changing trends.

Field discoveries, management remarks, instances of policy flouts, and people interfaces are now possible by tourists, amateur photographers, and users of normal mobile phones. Data do not have to wait for confirmation by full time researchers from large institutions or sophisticated equipment or costly laboratory profiling. PAU has the pages where these are documented and getting accessibly organised in the compilations edited by Sekhsaria. The data doesn't come only from India, but from the neighbourhood, as well. For example, "Only two rhinos poached in Nepal in 2007" (Page 347). The piece on "Do we want the cheetah back?" (Page 351) from October 2009 is interesting to browse back in the light of present developments. The volume includes more than a hundred editorials from old issues of PAU. Congratulations!

Obtaining authentic information from every nook and corner of the country is extremely difficult, time consuming and depends on the level of networking. The editor, Mr. Sekhsaria, has handled these faculties with grit and efficiency so well for nearly two decades. That has made this book possible.

Organising the contents for such a data base is a hard task, considering the range of topics, over historical account of states, and the variety of happenings. Yet, the contents have been well planned and laid out in 14 chapters. Well done! The chapters include 1. Law, Policy, and Governance; 2. Human Rights in Protected Areas; 3. The Developmental Threat; 4. The Linear Infrastructure Nightmare; 5. The Local Context; 6. At the State Level; 7. Specific Geographies; 8. Changing Seasons; 9. Tourism; 10. Communicating Conservation; 11. Tiger and Tiger Reserves; 12. Fate of the Elephant; 13. Rhinos, Bees, Bats, Dolphins; and 14. A Colourful Mosaic. The Editor's Note is very explicit. There is also a very exhaustive list of abbreviations running to 5.5 pages. The entire work is carefully woven. An index would have made usage more at once.

I am confident that the volume will draw references for students, historians, and general readers in India and overseas keen to know the happenings around wildlife in this

part of the globe with the scope of a wide-ranging chapter titles.

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Singh, L.A.K. (2015). A scientometric analysis of the trends of information dissemination on 'true albino' and 'white' mammals. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 111(3): 216–220.

Singh, L.A.K. (2020). The State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra: News and Information from the Protected Area Update 1996–2015. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 12(3): 15405–15406.

<https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.5791.12.3.15405-15406>

Book Details: Price: 650; 450 pp, 140 line drawings by Ashvini Menon Visual Design Studio. ISBN: 9788195410026

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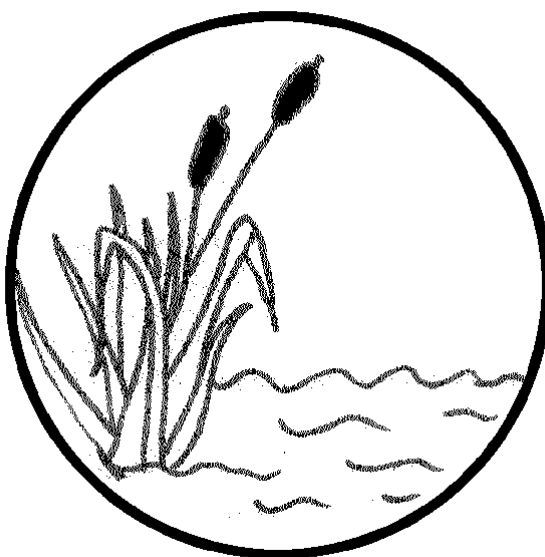
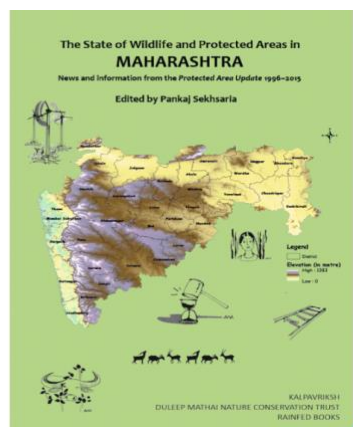
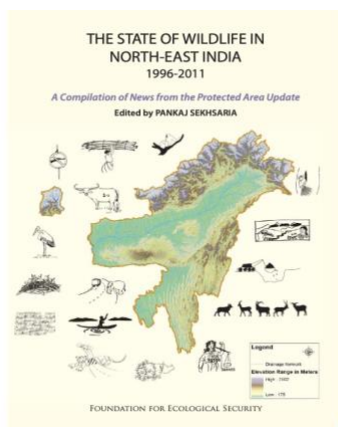
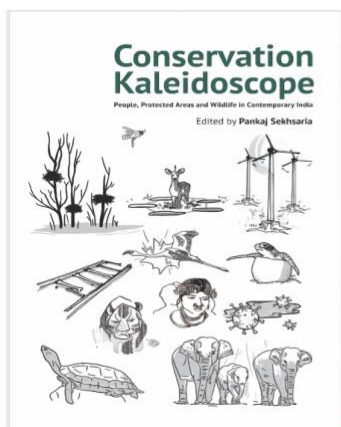


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- 3) *The State of Wildlife in North-East India 1996-2011: A compilation of news from the Protected Area Update*, 2013, 330 pp, 100 line drawings, Price: Rs. 300

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Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. Spider Faunal Diversity of Adjoining Areas of Tadoba Andheri Tiger Reserve and Nagzira Navegaon National Park, Maharashtra, India

Author(s): Sumana Saha, Dinendra Raychaudhuri

Keywords: Spider, diversity, protected areas, TATR, Maharashtra

Summary: The authors report a total of 39 species (30 genera and 14 families) of spiders from areas around the two protected areas in Central India. Out of the 39 species, 17 were reported to be new to Maharashtra state.

Link:

<http://psjd.icm.edu.pl/psjd/element/bwmeta1.element.psjd-f6789ad9-f648-45ff-959f-8bb1f3cf6a54>

2 Two new distribution records of *Strobilanthes Blume* (Acanthaceae) for Assam, India

Author(s): Sanswarg Basumatary, Nazrul Islam, Sanjib Baruah, Uditya Kumar Borkataki, Tanisha Chhetri, Moklesur Rahman

Keywords: Assam, Ultapani, New record, *Strobilanthes*, Manas Biosphere Reserve

Summary: The study reports new distributional records of two *Strobilanthes* species - *S. anisophylla* and *S. sabiniana* from the Manas Biosphere Reserve, Assam.

Link:

<https://horizonpublishing.com/journals/index.php/PST/article/view/1685>

3. Human elephant conflict in changing land-use land-cover scenario in and adjoining region of Buxa Tiger Reserve,

Author(s): Chiranjib Nad, Ranjan Roy, Tamal Basu Roy

Keywords: Buxa Tiger Reserve, Elephant corridor, Human elephant conflict, Railway track, Land use land cover change

Summary: In Bengal's Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) and adjoining areas, the overlaying of two maps - one indicating spatiotemporal land use land cover change (LULCC) and another determining human elephant conflict (HEC)

resulted in correlation between the two and identified the probability of conflict. The areas with moderate to very high HEC were located where the surrounding forest and scrubland have been degraded or replaced by human activities such as agriculture fields and settlements over time. They also identified accident-prone zones (between trains and elephants) along the railway line.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667010021003589>

4. A new species of *Conothele* Thorell, 1878 (Aranei: Halonoprocridae) from the northern Western Ghats, India

Author(s): Rajesh Sanap, Swapnil Pawar, Anuradha Joglekar, Akshay Khandekar

Keywords: Trapdoor spiders, Araneae, Northern Western Ghats, Maharashtra

Summary: A new species of trap-door spider namely *Conothele ogalei* sp.n. is described from Amboli, part of Sahyadri in Maharashtra.

Link:

https://kmkjournals.com/journals/AS/AS_Index_Volumes/AS_31/AS_31_1_079_089

5. Application of the METRIC model for mapping evapotranspiration over the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, India

Author(s): Ismail Mondal, Sandeep Thakur, Aakash De, Tarun Kumar De

Keywords: SEBAL, Remote Sensing, LST, Vegetation's model, Evapotranspiration, METRIC

Summary: In India's Sundarbans, geographical distribution of daily evapotranspiration (ET) was estimated through the METRIC model. The ET ranged from 6.874 mm/day in cropland to 12.321 mm/day in the forest and water-bodies.

Link:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1470160X22000243>

6. The tide of tiger poaching in India is rising! An investigation of the intertwined facts with a focus on conservation

Author(s): George Nittu, Thekke Thumbath Shameer, Nanjanad Kannan Nishanthini, Raveendranathanpillai Sanil

Keywords: Wildlife seizures, Tiger dominated landscapes, Trade routes, Tiger parts, Poaching

Summary: In this study, newspaper archives are used as the primary source of data to calculate the number of tiger seizures in India from 2001 to 2021 and relate it with various factors such as location, demand, intensity, etc. Based on secondary seizure data, the current study attempts to estimate the intensity and incidents of poaching. The study's goal is to look at the effects of demographic, economic, and sociological factors on poaching intensity in a given state.

Link:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10708-022-10633-4>

7. Three new cryptic species of South Asian *Cnemaspis* Strauch, 1887 (Squamata, Gekkonidae) from Karnataka, India

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

Keywords: *Cnemaspis stellapulvis*, dwarf geckos, granite boulders, Mysore plateau,

systematics, taxonomy, Western Ghats

Summary: Three new species of geckos- *Cnemaspis tigris* sp. Nov., *C. sakleshpurensis* sp. Nov. and *C. vijayae* sp. Nov. have been described from Kaiwara, Sakleshpur and Coorg in Western Ghats of Karnataka.

Link:

<https://vertebrate-zoology.arphahub.com/article/76308/>

8. Freshwater fish diversity in hill streams of Saberi River in Eastern Ghats of Odisha, India

Author(s): Supriya Surachita, Sharat Kumar Palita

Keywords: Saberi River, habitat analysis, Ichthyodiversity, mountain streams, physico-chemical parameters, Koraput district

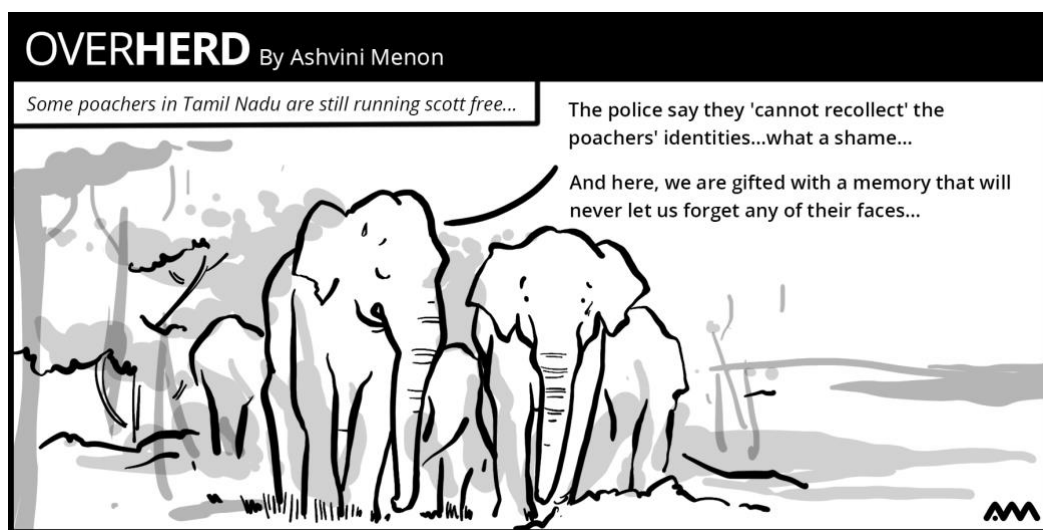
Summary: A total of 36 species of freshwater fish were recorded from Saberi River between Gupteswar Proposed Reserve Forest and Kanger Valley National Park. The species diversity differed between pre and post monsoon surveys.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/JoTT/article/view/7341>

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

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ARUNACHAL PRADESH

35 species recorded in camera-trapping exercise in Namdapha NP

A recent camera-trapping exercise has revealed the existence of 35 species of birds and animals, including tigers and leopards in the Namdapha Wildlife Sanctuary and Tiger Reserve (NWSTR). The two-month exercise spread over February and March, earlier this year, was carried out by the a Guwahati-based NGO, Aaranyak, with the logistic support provided by the NWSTR.

Four camp sites at Happy Valley, Hornbill Farm base with base camp at Deban were set up for the purpose. Eighty cameras were installed at multiple locations identified as potential tiger habitats covering almost 25% of the total geographical area of the reserve.

The entire observation drill cost around Rs 19 lakh. This included procurement of stationary, camp equipment, ration and payment of wages to porters who were engaged for transportation of material to the various base camps.

The first picture of an adult male tiger was captured by two cameras in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve (TR) on March 20. The exact location of this has not been revealed for fear of the information being used to poach the animal.

The other species photographed during the exercise were the following: Sambar, Barking deer, Serow, elephant, gaur, Wild boar, Hog badger, binturong, Khaleej pheasant, Marbled cat, Himalayan black bear, leopard, Large Indian civet, Small Indian civet, Common Palm civet, Yellow Throated marten, Crestless porcupine, Crested porcupine, Brush-Tailed porcupine, Spotted linsang, Asiatic wild dog, Clouded leopard, Malayan sun bear, Red goral, Crab-eating mongoose, Rat bandicoot, Capped langur, Stumped-tailed macaque, Assamese macaque, Fish owl, Peacock pheasant, Leopard cat and the Asiatic golden cat.

The exercise, however did not go smoothly, though. On several occasions the

frontline staff and members of Aaranyak were fired upon at Bulbulia and Kodboi areas and their base camps destroyed by suspected poachers. One of the major threats faced by the authorities is said to be the organised poaching of tigers by Lisu families living in the area.

It is believed that the same set of people also fired at a high level team led by PCCF (wildlife & biodiversity) on February 28. They are also suspected to have stolen 24 memory cards and eight of the 80 cameras set up as part of the exercise. A few iron-made Burmese traps had been set up all along the routes that had pug marks of tigers. The National Tiger Conservation Authority, meanwhile, has constituted a five-member fact-finding team to find out the exact ground situation in Namdapha in view of the attacks on census officials and theft of equipment. The team, headed by an official of the National Board for Wildlife has been asked to submit its report within a month.

According to the Field Director of the reserve, a well-equipped and regular tiger protection force is essential in order to tackle the activities of miscreants and poachers. The reserve that is spread over an area of nearly 2000 sq km of area, has only about 60 employees to administer, monitor and protect it.

Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap, 'Poachers from Myanmar pose hurdle to tiger census', www.indianexpress.com, 21/03/12.

Tongam Rina, 'Tiger sighting at Namdapha amidst continuing threats to conservation, The Arunachal Times, 03/04/12.

'Camera traps capture tiger in Namdapha reserve', www.rediff.com, 04/04/12

'Camera trapping reveals 35 species in Namdapha Sanctuary', The Sentinel, 05/04/12.

Roopak Goswami, 'Tiger sighted in Namdapha - Big cat spotted on camera, pug marks promise more', The Telegraph, 05/04/12.

PERSPECTIVE

Brown can be ‘green’ too

While conducting a survey for the critically endangered Lesser florican in the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh, I fell in love with grassland ecosystems. For the first time I saw mammals like the fox, wolf and the jackal, the mating display of the floricans and herds of blackbuck. Being from the tropical Andaman Islands, when I first came to Hyderabad in 2005, I yearned to see dense vegetation and canopy but all I could see was shrubs and rocks. Though, I appreciated these landscapes shaped by huge rocks and boulders, my admiration for them increased as I spent more time hiking and exploring parts of the deccan plateau. Grasslands and Savannahs provide provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem services but yet their uniqueness and importance is highly overlooked. These habitats are home to unique flora and fauna and a diverse avifauna like bustards, harriers, francolins, quails and larks. They also support agro-pastoral communities whose livestock depend on the grasslands for fodder.

Grasslands are under severe threat in India and globally. They are looked at as wastelands- ready to be used for industrial purposes or to be “forested”. During the florican survey in the Rayalseema region, I directly witnessed many of these threats – sand extraction and creation of mega solar parks being among the major ones. Millets were the staple food of this region as it is a semi-arid area with minimal rainfall. However, large tracts of grasslands have been converted into rice fields as canals have been built for irrigation or turned into plantations of exotics such as eucalyptus. Invasive species of plants have also degraded the remaining grasslands.

Closer to cities like Hyderabad, the huge boulders which are geological wonders

65 million years old are being blasted away to make room for high rise buildings. The boom of real estate and the technology sector have been swallowing these giant boulders and rocks with every passing day. In 2015, the Telangana government initiated a flagship programme to increase the tree cover in the state from 24% to 33%. Massive planting has been carried out within notified forest areas and outside such as “barren hills”. The species mostly are fast growing exotics and the planting often needs clearing of the existing grasslands and native shrubs. This race to increase the green cover of the landscape by the authorities violates the magnificence and value of these habitats and landscapes.

Hope this stops and better sense prevails.

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