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Protected Area Update

Vol. XXVIII, No. 5, October 2022 (No. 159)

Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

Associate Editor: **Reshma Jathar**

Illustrations: **Ashvini Menon, Siddhi Jadhav, Shruti Kulkarni, Madhuvanti Anantharajan & Peeyush Sekhsaria**

Produced by **Kalpavriksh** and the **Centre for Policy Studies, IIT Bombay**

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

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

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

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EDITORIAL

Great Nicobar's great betrayal

Rich oceans teeming with life, a coastline that has among the most important sea turtle nesting sites in this part of the world, spectacular tropical forests with unmatched diversity of plant and animal life and indigenous communities that have been living here for 1000s of years: the 900 odd sq. km island of Great Nicobar is a national ecological treasure with no parallel. Protection and conservation of a place such as this, one would imagine, would be the priority of any nation that is committed to biodiversity conservation, protection of its indigenous peoples and taking up the challenge of global warming that threatens us all. Great Nicobar could indeed have been our showcase for how we can do things right...

What we have seen over the last two years, instead, is an aggressive push for a massive Rs. 75,000 crore integrated project that will destroy this national treasure for ever. The scale is as mind-boggling as the impacts this will have: the integrated project that includes a trans-shipment port, an airport, a power plant unit and a greenfield township will take over a staggering 169 sq. km of pristine forest land of this island; 8.5 lakh trees will be cut down; a Rs. 35,000 crore port project will be constructed at Galathea Bay, the most significant leatherback nesting site in the northern Indian ocean and 6,00,00 people will be brought over the next three decades to the island where the current population is less than 10,000.

What we have also seen over the last two years is systematic and aggressive institutional manipulation to make this project happen and push it through: denotification of the turtle sanctuary at Galathea Bay by arguing it is needed for the port; notification of zero km eco-sensitive zones for the national parks here so that the forests can be handed over; assurances by tribal welfare authorities that

land of the tribal reserve created for the Shompen and Nicobarese communities will be made available; significant underplaying of the risks of earthquakes here in the world's most tectonically and sensitive zone, and an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report that is replete with inadequacies, inaccuracies and obfuscations. Researchers from around the country had raised more than 200 objections to this draft and many of the responses by the EIA consultant when the final was submitted can be described as a farce at best.

The first call in the environment clearance process for such a project lies with the union environment ministry's Environmental Appraisal Committee (EAC) - Infrastructure 1. The minutes of every meeting of the EAC note sanctimoniously that "if any part of data/information submitted is found to be false/misleading at any stage, the project will be rejected and ToR/Environmental Clearance given, if any, will be revoked at the risk and cost of the project proponent." And yet, one sees virtually no serious accounting of the concerns and challenges that the committee should have dealt with on its own account.

The role that one sees the EAC having played here is more of a facilitator and less an institution that should have been asking important and difficult questions of the project and its proponents. In its most recent meeting in August, in fact, the EAC has gone ahead and recommended the project for environmental clearance with conditions that are bizarre any which way we are to look at them. Here are just two examples of these conditions for a project whose scale and impact has no precedence in the history of India:

- No trees will be cut at one go. These will be done in phased manner and depending on the progress of the work on an annual basis. Plan for cutting of trees should be developed by PP (project proponent) and got approved from state forest department. All trees which are exceptionally tall and old in age shall be safeguarded, as far as possible...

- Trees with nesting holes of endemic owls to be identified and geo-tagged with the help

from SACON. Such trees shall be safeguarded, as far as possible.

We are talking here of over 160 sq. km of tropical evergreen forest where nearly a million trees are slated to be cut. Even an army of qualified and well trained birders working over many years will not be able to find nesting holes of owls, leave alone those of the endemics. And in any case the EAC has said that the trees should be safeguarded only if possible.

This is as meaningless and non-sensical a condition as there can be, and evidence, if any was needed, of how deeply out of touch the EAC is with the reality of Great Nicobar in particular and of environmental and ecological realities in general. This is indeed symptomatic of the larger crisis we face today, but stands out even more because there is nothing else like this island in India. Great Nicobar stands betrayed and to go ahead with these projects will be to perpetuate a monumental folly the price for which cannot even be comprehended.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

EAC-Infra 1 recommends Great Nicobar project for environment clearance

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's Environmental Appraisal Committee (EAC) - Infrastructure 1 has recommended the mega Rs. 75,000 crore project in the Great Nicobar Island for environmental clearance. The

recommendation was made in the EAC's meeting held on 22-23 August earlier this year.

The project includes the construction of a Rs. 35000 crore port in Galathea Bay, an airport, a power plant and a greenfield township over 169 sq. km of the 900 sq. km island. The turtle sanctuary in Galathea Bay which is one of the most important nesting sites of the Giant leatherback turtle was denotified in 2020 to allow for the port. Further, 8.5 lakh trees are slated to be cut in the pristine forests here for the project.

The EAC laid down a series of additional conditions for the clearance; environmentalists have however expressed serious concerns over the conditions and the project in general. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 and Vol. XXVII, No. 1)

Source: [Minutes of the 306th meeting of Expert Appraisal Committee held on 22- 23 August 2022.](#)

CHHATTISGARH

Four villages granted CFRRs in Achanakmar TR

Residents of four villages in the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve (TR) in Chhattisgarh's Mungeli were recently granted community forest resource rights (CFRR) under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Bamhani, Mahamai, Katami and Babutola received forest rights over 1,663 ha, 1,384 ha, 3,240 ha and 191.60 ha respectively at a state government event on 9th August, earlier this year. This day is also celebrated as Adivasi Diwas.

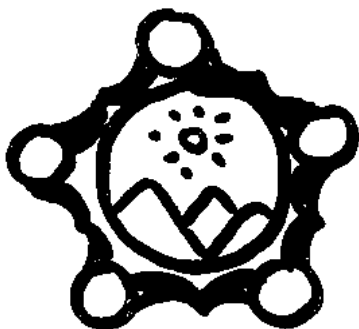
The granting of the rights is an outcome of a long fight along with 15 other villages in the core zone of the reserve, the ground work for which was laid in December 2009, when people from six other villages were evicted from the forests.

The 249 families who were moved out when a TR was declared here were promised a compensation package of Rs .10 lakh and basic amenities in the new settlement. These

included five acres of agricultural land, accommodation, school, healthcare and better livelihood opportunities. After the relocation, however, an alternative location was not provided to the displaced population and the villagers had to stay in temporary huts built by the forest department. Each household was only given a measly sum of Rs. 5,000 in cash and Rs. 45,000 in their bank accounts.

The fear of relocation and displacement without getting ownership of land had been looming over them since this episode, said Simanchal Achary of Mungeli, who has been spearheading the fight for forest rights of these villages. Residents from the remaining 19 villages then united and began their collective fight for CFRR in 2019.

Once CFRR is recognised for a community, the ownership of the forest passes into the hands of the Gram Sabha. It is free to form its own rules and regulations for management, use and conservation after getting the rights. Without its consent, the forest cannot be diverted for any use, including for wildlife conservation. Effectively, the Gram Sabha becomes the nodal body for management of the forests.



Source: Zumbish. 'Future in forest: How eviction of villagers from Achanakmar tiger reserve united adivasis to fight for CFRR', www.downtoearth.org.in, 26/08/2022.

KARNATAKA

State wildlife board rejects conservation reserve status for Hesaraghatta grasslands; HC sets aside rejection

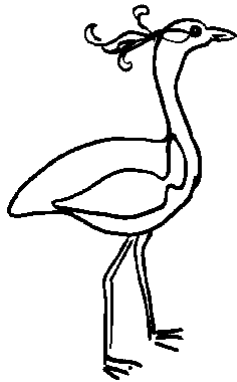
A division bench of the Karnataka High Court comprising Acting Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Vishwajit Shetty recently set aside the state wildlife board's rejection of a proposal for declaring Hesaraghatta grasslands a conservation reserve. The court was hearing a petition by ecologist Vijay Nishanth. The High Court had last year directed the state government to ensure that the present status of Hesaraghatta grasslands should not be altered in any manner.

In January 2021, former chief minister (CM) BS Yediyurappa had rejected the proposal to declare the area as a conservation reserve after Yelahanka MLA S R Vishwanath opposed the idea. Wildlife board members had stated anonymously that though Vishwanath was not a member of the wildlife board, he barged into the meeting and told Yediyurappa that the Hesaraghatta grasslands should not be declared as a reserve as it would impact the farmers. The former CM, who was heading the board, did not solicit opinions from the members of the board and rejected the proposal of declaring it as a conservation reserve.

Former CM Siddaramaiah during his tenure (2013-2018) had proposed to set up a film city in Mysuru and later the coalition government of Congress-JD(S) decided to move the film city to Ramanagara. The proposal was met with stiff opposition from ecologists.

In his budget speech on March 8, 2021, Yediyurappa had said that a 'Theme Park' will be established on 100-acre land in Hesaraghatta with private partnership to provide information and training with permanent exhibition and demonstration of native livestock, breeds of sheep and goats and poultry.

In January this year, state forest minister Umesh Katti agreed, in response to a request by member of the state board for wildlife Siddharth Goenka, to submit a proposal at the next wildlife board meeting to declare more than 5,000 acres of Hesaraghatta as a conservation reserve. However, this did not fructify into action.



Source: 'Karnataka HC sends back issue of declaring Hesaraghatta Grassland as reserve to state wildlife board', www.indianexpress.com, 31/07/2022.

MANIPUR

Hume's Pheasant habitat in Razai Khullen to be declared community reserve

The Manipur government is planning to declare approximately 567 sq. km of dense forests of Razai Khullen in Ukhrul district as a community reserve for the protection of the Hume's Pheasant. The bird is known as *Nongin* in the local language and is the state bird of Manipur.

The development comes weeks after a four-member team, including a journalist and three wildlife photographers reported the presence of the bird in this area.

Source: 'Nongin habitat Razai Khullen to be declared 'Community Reserve'', www.ifp.co.in, 11/08/2022.

Local opposition to proposed Zeilad WLS

The Zeilad Wildlife Sanctuary Affected Villages Committee in collaboration with Chramram Segment Voice have opposed the proposed Zeilad Wildlife Sanctuary in Manipur's Tamenglong district. The sanctuary

that is to be declared over an area of 21 sq. km covers four villages - Zeiladjang, Makuai (Atengba), Tajijang and Tongtao. Another 13 villages will come under the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary.

In a meeting held in the first week of September the villagers re-affirmed the decision they had first made a month earlier on August 19 to oppose the sanctuary. They alleged that the notification for the sanctuary never reached the deserving stakeholders, land owners and the affected villages.

Source: 'Objections raised against proposed wildlife sanctuary', www.ifp.co.in, 07/09/2022.

ODISHA

11 elephant deaths due to electrocution in State in last two years; 120 for 2009-2019



At least 11 elephants have died of electrocution in the last two years in the state of Odisha. The most recent deaths occurred in August earlier this year when two female elephants came in contact with sagging overhead electric wires

in the Keonjhar forest division. The incident happened in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra when a herd of elephants had entered the 50-acre agricultural extension centre. Two animals came in contact with electric wires while feeding on the branches of a tree and died. The carcasses were recovered on August 25.

Before this an elephant was electrocuted on July 11 near Golabai road in Khordha. Another such death was reported near Madhapur village under the Angul forest range on March 8. At least seven elephants died of electrocution in 2021 in Odisha. Seven were also electrocuted on October 27, 2018 near Kamalanga in Dhenkanal district.

Electric-wire-trap poaching is a major concern in Odisha and many elephants have been killed in Sambalpur, Dhenkanal, Sundargarh, Angul, Cuttack and Keonjhar districts by trappers using this method.

The state energy department had released a Rs. 445.75 crore fund in October 2021 to power distribution companies to increase the ground clearance of the electrical transmission networks (33 kV and 11 kV wires). Bare conductors were to be replaced and electric wires were to be enveloped in elephant corridors and movement areas to prevent electrocution of the elephants.

Odisha Forest Department statistics indicate that around 120 elephants were electrocuted in Odisha between 2009 and 2019.

Over 200 elephants died in India from 2018 to 2021, Union Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) Bhupendra Yadav informed the Lok Sabha on August 8, 2022. Out of the 222 animals, the maximum had died in Odisha — 51 deaths in three years.

Following are the State-wise elephant deaths for the period 2018-2021:

State	No. of elephant deaths
Odisha	51
Tamil Nadu	34
West Bengal	29
Karnataka	26
Assam	23
Chhattisgarh	15
Kerala	12
Jharkhand	11
Andhra Pradesh	8
Nagaland	7
Uttar Pradesh	6
Meghalaya	5
Uttarakhand	5

Source: Ashis Senapati. ‘Live electric wires a huge threat to wild elephants; two female jumbos die in Odisha’, www.downtoearth.org.in, 25/08/2022.

Odisha records 49 leopard poaching cases in two-and-a-half years



Official estimates suggest that a total of 49 leopards, accounting for more than 6% of the leopard population of 793 leopards in Odisha has fallen victim to poachers in the last two-and-a-half years. Officials and wildlife activists have however expressed the opinion that the number of leopards killed by poachers could be more than double this number.

While 30 leopard skins were seized by the special task force (STF) of the Odisha Crime Branch, another 19 have been seized by the forest department over the last 30 months. Besides the leopards, tuskers are also being targeted by the criminals. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of STF informed that the force had seized 30 leopard skins and arrested 43 wildlife criminals. These criminals were found trading leopard skins with organised crime networks.

The STF is reported meanwhile to have been struggling to nab the criminals with its limited manpower. There are only 10 personnel in the squad looking after the entire State.

Source: Subhashish Mohanty. ‘Over 6% leopards fall prey to poachers’, www.telegraphindia.com, 29/07/2022.

Record 3,700 saltwater crocodiles born in Bhitarkanika NP this season

A record 3,700 saltwater crocodiles were born in the Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) from 122 nests this season. This is 50% more than the number from the last nesting season, when the number of hatchlings and nests were 2,500 and 84 respectively.

The Union environment ministry in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme had started a crocodile hatchery and rearing project in Dangmal within the park in 1975. This has helped increase the crocodile population here from 96 in 1974 to 1,784 in January 2022. Following are the year-wise nests and hatchling numbers as per forest department data:

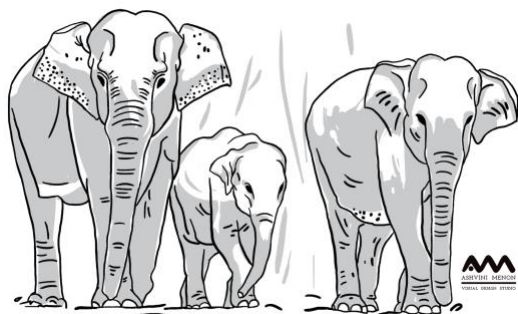
Year	No. of nests	No. of hatchlings (approx.)
2015	78	2,300
2016	80	2,400
2017	86	2,500
2018	101	2,900
2019	103	3,000
2020	103	3,000

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII. No. 5; Vol. XXVI, No. 1 and Vol XXV, No. 5)

Source: Ashis Senapati. ‘Most number of saltwater crocodile births in Bhitarkanika this year’, www.downtoearth.org.in, 01/09/2022.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu gets one more elephant reserve; 31st in the country



A new elephant reserve (ER) was notified in Tamil Nadu in the month of August. The Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav made an announcement to this effect in a programme held at Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. This will be the 31st ER in the country after Singphan ER in Nagaland that was notified in 2018.

The new ER will be spread over an area of 1,197 sq. km in Agasthyamalai in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts. The forest falls in three taluks in Tirunelveli district, namely Ambasamudram, Nanguneri and Radhapuram; and four taluks in Kanyakumari district — Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thiruvattur and Thovalai.

According to the latest estimate carried out in 2017, the population of elephants in India was a little more than 27,300. Karnataka had the highest number of elephants (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054).

Source: ‘Agasthyamalai in Tamil Nadu declared as an elephant reserve’, www.thenewsminute.com, 22/08/2022.
Shuchita Jha. ‘Centre notifies India’s 31st elephant reserve in Tamil Nadu’, www.downtoearth.org.in, 12/08/2022.

FD planning to use AI-based system to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks

The Tamil Nadu (TN) Forest Department (FD) is planning to install an artificial intelligence (AI)-based warning system for preventing elephant deaths on a 13 km stretch of railway tracks in the Madukkarai forest range of Coimbatore Forest Division. The stretch was identified based on the frequency of elephant crossings, which have resulted in six train collisions and 11 elephants deaths since 2008. It falls on the TN side of the twin single lines ‘A’ and ‘B’ of 1.8 and 2.8 km lengths respectively between Palakkad junction in Kerala and Madukkarai in TN.

The FD said it was looking for a modern, AI-driven, autonomous surveillance system that would be suitable, sustainable and worked round the clock. For installation of the system, the FD has divided the vulnerable stretch into three zones from the centre of the railway track - about 50 m on either side as the red zone, the next 50 m as the orange zone and the third 50 m as the yellow zone.

The system will trigger an alert when an elephant enters the yellow zone, that will be communicated to track watchers and forest guards. An alert would be sent to the beat guard, forester, a range forest officer and the station master concerned when the elephant enters the orange zone. When the animal enters the red zone, an alarm would be sent to all forest officials up to district forest officer level and up to the divisional engineer in the Railways. This would be communicated to the loco pilots with details of the location and the distance from the track.

As per a report by a committee constituted by Project Elephant division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, a total of 24 elephants have been killed in 19 accidents between Palakkad junction and Madukkarai from 1978 to March 15, 2021. Another three elephants were mowed down by a train on 'A' line in November 2021.



Source: Wilson Thomas. 'TN Forest Dept's AI-based warning system to cover 13 km of vulnerable railway lines', www.thehindu.com, 25/08/2022.

Wildlife rescue centre for Coimbatore Forest Division to serve Sathyamangalam, Mudumalai & Anaimalai TRs as well

A wildlife rescue, treatment and rehabilitation centre (RTRC) is slated to come up at Pethikuttai in Sirumugai forest range of the Coimbatore Forest Division (CFD). It will be spread over 50 ha and officials are said to be preparing the blueprint for the facilities with assistance of experts. This is one of three RTRCs that the state government had announced in October 2021; the other two are in Tiruchirappalli and Tirunelveli districts.

The centre at Pethikuttai will have animal enclosures, a treatment centre, an operation theatre and open enclosures for carnivores and herbivores. The facility will serve all the seven forest ranges of CFD, the nearby Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR), Mudumalai TR, Anaimalai TR and other forest divisions in the neighbouring districts.

Conservator of forests (Coimbatore Circle) and field director of Anaimalai TR said that a similar facility was functional in Mysuru, the model of which would be consulted for the RTRC to be set up at Pethikuttai. The plan readied by the forest department (FD) would be sent to the state government for its approval.

Pethikuttai has witnessed the highest number of elephant deaths in CFD in the past few years and the establishment of the RTRC would boost the FD's efforts to study reasons for the fatalities and offer early treatment for animals, said another forest official.

Source: Wilson Thomas. 'Coimbatore to get rescue, treatment and rehabilitation centre for wildlife', www.thehindu.com, 25/07/2022.

UTTAR PRADESH

Ranipur WLS to be declared TR: 4th in UP

The Uttar Pradesh (UP) cabinet September 27, 2022 approved the notification of the State's fourth tiger reserve (TR) in the Ranipur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Chitrakoot district. The reserve will be spread across 529.89 sq. km with a 299.58 sq. km buffer zone and 230 sq. km core area, which was already notified as the Ranipur WLS in 1977.

The sanctuary does not have any tigers of its own but pugmarks have been seen frequently, most likely from tigers visiting here from the Panna TR which is located 150 km away. The sanctuary is also listed as an important corridor for the movement of tigers, according to the 'Status of Tigers, Co-predators and Prey in India' report by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Camera

trapping had been conducted by the forest department in Ranipur during the last estimation of tigers by the NTCA in 2018. The 12 tiger photo-captures showed that there were three tigers here — one male and two females

This will be the fourth TR in the State after Dudhwa, Pilibhit and Amangarh (buffer of Corbett TR). It will also be the first in the State’s Bundelkhand region, which it shares with neighbouring Madhya Pradesh.

A Ranipur Tiger Conservation Foundation will also be established.

Source: Shuchita Jha. 'Uttar Pradesh plans its 4th tiger reserve in Bundelkhand', www.downtoearth.org.in, 28/09/2022.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

Over 1500 human deaths in India in last three years due to elephant attacks; maximum deaths in Odisha



A total of 1578 people were killed between 2019-20 and 2021-22 in incidents of human-elephant conflict incidents across the country. Odisha with

322 deaths recorded the maximum number. The information was provided in the Lok Sabha recently by Bhupender Yadav, Union minister for environment, forest and climate change.

The minister elaborated on the steps taken by the central government but pointed at the same time to the fact that the management of wildlife was primarily the responsibility of state governments and Union Territory (UT) administrations.

Yadav informed the Lok Sabha that the centre provided financial and technical assistance to the States and UTs under ‘Project Elephant’. His ministry also implemented various centrally sponsored schemes for

improving elephants’ natural habitat by augmenting water sources, planting fodder trees and regenerating bamboo among others. Further, he pointed out that the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 provided assistance to develop wildlife habitats, and establish animal rescue centres among other things.

In 2017, MoEFCC issued guidelines for managing human-elephant conflict and had directed the elephant range States to implement the same. Critical elephant habitats had been notified as ‘elephant reserves’ according to these guidelines, in order to reduce conflicts. A field manual for frontline staff was also released during the 16th meeting of the steering committee on April 29, 2022. Compensations were provided to local communities for the losses incurred by them during human-elephant conflict, in order to reduce the retaliatory killing of elephants, said Yadav.

Following are details of State wise deaths as provided by the minister:

State	Human deaths
Odisha	322
Jharkhand	291
West Bengal	240
Assam	229
Chhattisgarh	183
Tamil Nadu	132
Karnataka	69
Kerala	57
Meghalaya	12
Andhra Pradesh	10
Uttar Pradesh	7
Tripura	5
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Maharashtra	1

Conflict in Odisha

In the months of April, May and June, Odisha reported a rise in human casualties owing to human-elephant conflict. Around 60% of the deaths were reportedly caused by tuskers.

It has also been noted that in 50% of the cases, humans encountered elephants when they went out to relieve themselves near the

forests, while nearly 25% of human casualties happened when elephants toppled the walls of the huts to get paddy and liquor.

Source: Ashis Senapati. 'Over 1,500 people died in elephant attacks in last 3 years, maximum casualties in Odisha', www.downtoearth.org.in, 04/08/2022.

WTI campaign along southern western coast to save whale shark

The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) launched its 'Save the Whale Shark Campaign' along Karnataka, Kerala and Lakshadweep on August 30, International Whale shark Day.

The whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) is the largest fish on Earth and is listed as a Schedule I animal under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. As per the IUCN Red List, its populations are on the decline and its global status is notified as 'endangered'. The main threat to these plankton feeders is accidental entanglement in fishing nets that can result in mortality. The only way to curb such mortality is to ensure release of the entangled whale sharks from the fishing net without any delay. For this, the primary target group, which is the fishers, needs to be sensitised.

The whale shark is distributed all along the Indian coast and the largest aggregation is seen along the Gujarat coast. WTI has been running a project in Gujarat for the last 20 years which has resulted in fisher folk releasing 852 whale sharks in the Arabian Sea (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII. No. 2, Vol. XXIII, No. 6, Vol. XVII, No. 3 and Nos. 48 & 47).

WTI with the support from IUCN had conducted a survey along the west coast (excluding Gujarat) during 2012-13 and found that the highest number of whale shark sightings (after Gujarat coast) were near the waters of Lakshadweep. Whale shark landings and strandings are largely reported from Kerala. Fishers of Kerala often go to Lakshadweep waters to fish and the high

incidental landings can be attributed to this fact, the WTI statement said.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'International Whale Shark Day: Wildlife Trust of India launches campaign to sensitise fishers along southwest coast', www.downtoearth.org.in, 30/08/2022.

FAC recommends further studies before making final decision on ERD

Months after giving its in-principle approval for extended reach drilling (ERD) in forest areas, the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has recommended that further studies need to be done before a final decision is made in the matter. In a meeting held on March 31, 2022, the FAC had given in-principle approval for ERD based on a report by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) that proposed drilling should occur at least a kilometre outside protected areas (*PA Update XXVIII*, No. 3).

ERD is a method of extracting oil and gas that involves digging a horizontal well at an incline that is at least twice as long in its length as it is in depth; this allows for the drilling to take place at a distance from the site of extraction.

According to the minutes of the FAC's meeting held on August 01, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) cautioned the committee against drilling in wildlife corridors and advised that the impacts of ERD need to be evaluated further. WII also said that drilling should not be allowed within one km of protected areas and wildlife corridors, adding that this range is only based on the "precautionary principle" and that the "exact distance should be recommended based on the detailed study". The FAC has now directed WII to collaborate with DGH and collect primary data from the existing locations where ERD technology is being used and to prepare and submit a report in the matter within three months.

However, some environmentalists have expressed concerns that this approach may be inadequate when it comes to understanding the effects of ERD. A geologist said that this evaluation method is risky because it is not being undertaken by a technical body. Neither WII nor DGH have the expertise in drilling and the impacts it can have on something like groundwater resources. It is important that a technical body be brought in to evaluate ERD.

Notably, in October 2021, the Central government proposed exempting ERD from the purview of the Forest Conservation Act calling it an “environmentally friendly” technology. A final decision regarding this is yet to be made.

Source: Simrin Sirur. ‘Govt wants to drill for oil, gas in forest areas, but Wildlife Institute of India wary of new tech’, www.theprint.in, 24/08/2022.

Report documents infrastructure threats to 10 tiger reserves in the country

A recent report by the Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA) has documented infrastructure related threats to 10 tiger reserves (TRs) from across the country.

The TRs the report covers include Pakke (Arunachal Pradesh), Kaziranga (Assam), Bandipur and Kali (Karnataka), Parambikulam (Kerala), Panna (Madhya Pradesh), Tadoba Andhari (Maharashtra), Mukundra Hills (Rajasthan), Amrabad (Telangana), and Rajaji (Uttarakhand). Below are some details of the major threats faced by these TRs in recent years as documented in this report :

No	TR	Threats
1	Pakke	Hydro-electric and linear infrastructure projects
2	Kaziranga	Infrastructure projects; expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery
3	Bandipur	Four laning of highway passing through the reserve

4	Kali	Proposal for new railway line through the reserve
5	Parambikulam	Hydro-electric projects
6	Panna	Ken-Betwa River Linking Project; expansion of diamond mining
7	Tadoba-Andhari	Coal mining, linear infrastructure through the reserve, growth of five star tourism
8	Mukundra	Road infrastructure and mining projects
9	Amrabad	Uranium mining (now shelved)
10	Rajaji	Road and Railway expansion; growth of tourism

Source: Rajiv Shah. ‘Amidst plans to uproot tribals to ‘protect’ forests, GoI infra projects hit tiger reserves’, 25/08/2022, www.counterview.net Nishank. 'Undoing Conservation: India's Tiger Reserves Giving Way for Infra Projects - A Compendium of 10 Case Studies on Tiger Reserves', Published by Centre for Financial Accountability, <https://www.cenfa.org>

SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

Researchers confirm presence of Sikkim grass lizard in eastern Nepal

Researchers have confirmed the presence of the Sikkim grass lizard in eastern Nepal, nearly 100 km from its known range in Sikkim. In a recently published study, zoologist Bivek Gautam and members of his team concluded that what they had captured in eastern Nepal was a specimen of Sikkim grass lizard (*Takydromus sikkimensis*).

The Sikkim grass lizard was first described in 1888 by German-British zoologist Albert Günther on the basis of a description of

grass lizards from Sikkim by Czech palaeontologist Ferdinand Stoliczka in 1872. However, there was so little known about the species that researchers at times even doubted that it existed. Belgian-British zoologist Albert Boulenger and other researchers after him said that they believed the Sikkim grass lizard was simply a northern population of the Asian grass lizard (*Takydromus sexlineatus*). However, a team led by Indian herpetologist Subramanian Bhupathy in 2009 spotted one in the lower Teesta valley of Sikkim, confirming that the species exists.

In 2021, the IUCN Red List classified the species as 'endangered' because it is believed to have been restricted to a range of only around 19 sq. km in the Teesta Valley. The IUCN assessment noted that the quality and extent of the species' habitat are under threat from agricultural activities and the construction of a hydroelectric dam.

Gautam said that it is necessary to address the threats that lizards in general face in Nepal. While climate change and habitat destruction are major threats, human attitudes toward these animals also pose a challenge; farmers, for instance, kill lizards believing that they attack chicken and make holes in fields where water needs to be retained. Similarly, children living in rural areas 'play' with lizards by plucking their tail and tying them up with strings. He said that to address these threats, we need to increase public awareness.

Veteran herpetologists in Nepal say this first confirmed sighting of the lizard species in Nepal also highlighted the need to invest more in the study of reptiles in the country.

Source: Abhaya Raj Joshi. 'An elusive lizard thought to live only in India makes an appearance in Nepal', news.mongabay.com, 17/08/2022

Nepal achieves goal of doubling tiger numbers



A recently released report 'Status of Tigers and Prey in Nepal 2022' has revealed that the total number of tigers in Nepal has reached 355. This is an increase of 51% over the numbers counted in 2018. The report synthesises the findings of the fourth nation-wide tigers and prey survey in Nepal that was conducted between December 2021 and April 2022. The survey recorded the presence of tigers in 16 of the 24 districts of Nepal.

Tiger density (number of tigers per 100 sq. km) in protected areas (PAs) and adjoining forests, was estimated to be 1.74, 4.06, 0.97, 7.15 and 1.99 in Parsa, Chitwan, Banke, Bardia and Shuklaphanta National Parks (NPs), respectively. Wild prey species detected during the survey included four deer species (spotted deer, sambar, hog deer, barking deer), two antelopes (blue bull and four-horned antelope), wild boar, gaur and two primate species (rhesus monkey and langur). The combined prey density (number of individuals of all prey species per sq. km) in PAs and adjoining forests was 75, 100, 33, 90 and 146 in Parsa, Chitwan, Banke, Bardia and Shuklaphanta NPs, respectively.

The report credited the increase in numbers to effective implementation of periodic tiger conservation action plans on the ground, the establishment of Banke NP, the extension of Parsa NP and the restoration of critical corridors. It also noted that strategic interventions would be needed in the future to maintain these tiger populations.

The country has been conducting periodic assessments of tigers at intervals of

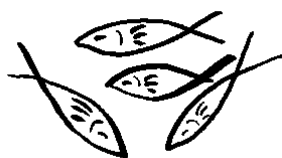
four years since 2009. The first, second and third nation-wide assessments carried out in 2009, 2013 and 2018 had estimated 121, 198, and 235 tigers, respectively.

Globally, Nepal has fulfilled its promise made in 2010 in St. Petersburg to double its tiger numbers by 2022. Experts noted that Indo-Nepalese collaboration has played a significant role in this increase of Nepal's tiger numbers. Because all Nepalese PAs border India and the two countries have very good coordination on tiger conservation and management across corridors in the Terai Arc Landscape, Nepal was able to increase its tiger numbers. They, also, pointed out that populations in contiguous habitats cannot be looked at in isolation, hence, if the tiger population has increased on the Nepalese side, there is bound to be dispersal; thus, subsequently, adding to the population on the Indian side as well.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Nepal's tigers triple: India had and will continue to have a role to play, say experts', www.downtoearth.org.in, 29/07/2022.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

UN IGC-5 wrapped up without consensus on protection of biodiversity of high seas



Two weeks of negotiations at the United Nations (UN) aimed at securing protections for marine life in international waters concluded without a consensus on August 26.

UN member States have been trying for the last 15 years to agree on a legally binding document and were expected to finalise it at the fifth session of the UN Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-5), held in New York from August 15 to 26. A final text

on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) was anticipated from the session.

A BBNJ treaty, if agreed upon, would have significantly contributed to the direct management and conservation of marine biodiversity, including its genetic components. The treaty would have led to rules for protecting marine biodiversity in two-thirds of the world's ocean areas outside national jurisdictions. IGC-5 made more progress than negotiations over the last decade. Despite the progress, delegates were unable to reach a consensus.

IGC-5 focused on four main components — marine genetic resources (MGRs) and sharing benefits from marine life; area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments (EIA) and capacity building and the transfer of marine technology (CB&TT). Discussions around MGRs and sharing benefits from research and developing resources from marine life in the international waters have remained among the most contentious issues. While these issues were discussed almost daily, differences remained in establishing an access and benefit-sharing (ABS) mechanism, monetary benefit-sharing and intellectual property rights.

These differences were visible during IGC-4, too. EIA provisions of the BBNJ agreement offer the opportunity to update and modernise the practice of ecological assessment in ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction, stated the High Seas Alliance (HSA), which is a partnership of 40 non-profits, including the IUCN. But there were differences in EIA, too. HSA called for the second part of IGC-5 to deliver a coherent and effective framework for EIAs.

Considering CB&TT essential, the delegates agreed to establish a committee on CB&TT. But they disagreed on funding modalities.

The draft text was revised and released twice by IGC President Rena Lee during the

meeting. Some member states, including India, are keen on adopting the most recent revised text released on August 26 as the basis for further negotiations. Delegates, including those representing Russia, felt that the new draft lacked the overall consensus and preferred to resume negotiations based on the text issued August 21.

Source: Kiran Pandey. 'Missed opportunity: UN session to save biodiversity in high seas ends without consensus', www.downtoearth.org.in, 30/08/2022.

Living Planet Report 2022: Wildlife populations decline by 69% in 50 years

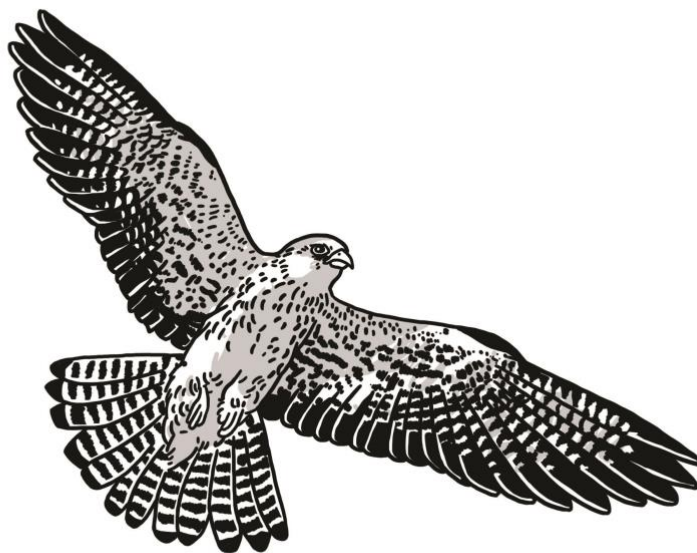
There has been a 69% decline in the wildlife populations of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish, across the globe in the last 50 years, according to the latest Living Planet Report by World Wide Fund for Nature

(WWF). The highest decline (94%) was in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Africa recorded a 66% fall while the decline for the Asia Pacific region is 55%.

The Living Planet Index (LPI), featuring about 32,000 populations of 5,230 species across the world, showed that vertebrate wildlife populations are plummeting at a particularly staggering rate in tropical regions of the world. Mangroves continue to be lost to aquaculture, agriculture and coastal development at a rate of 0.13%.

The report has identified six key threats to biodiversity — agriculture, hunting, logging, pollution, invasive species and climate change.

Source: Shuchita Jha. 'Living Planet Report 2022: Wildlife populations decline by 69% in 50 years', www.downtoearth.org.in, 13/10/2022.



IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

MAHARASHTRA

Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary gets Ramsar tag

The Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS) has been designated as a Ramsar site. Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav announced on August 9 that 11 Indian wetlands, including TCFS, have got Ramsar recognition. The total number of Ramsar sites in India has now gone up to 75.

The TCFS, spread over 1690.5 ha, is the first such site in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the third in the State to get designated as a Ramsar Site. Nandur Madhameshwar was the first Ramsar site in Maharashtra while Lonar lake in Buldhana district was declared the 41st Ramsar site in India and second in the State in 2020.

Virendra Tiwari, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Mangrove Cell, said that the Ramsar designation and the announcement of a sizable ecologically sensitive zone last year would both contribute to the improved protection of TCFS.

Surrounded by highly urbanised areas, TCFS is spread across Mulund, Vikhroli, Bhandup and Kanjurmarg suburbs of Mumbai. The Thane Creek lies on the eastern side of the Eastern Express Highway and shares boundaries with Thane and Navi Mumbai. The TCFS is home to 12 mangrove species, 39 mangrove associates, 167 species of birds including flamingos, 45 fish species, 59 species of butterflies and 67 insect species. Mammals such as jackals are also found here.

Source: 'Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary secures recognition as Ramsar site', www.indianexpress.com, 14/08/2022.

RAJASTHAN

GIBs in Desert NP lay 20 eggs this breeding season; four females lay two eggs each

Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) in Desert National Park (DNP) have laid around 20 eggs this breeding season, with four females laying two eggs each.

Bustards usually lay only one egg in a breeding season that lasts from March to October. Ashish Vyas, deputy conservator of forests (DCF) in DNP, informed that two GIBs had laid two eggs each in 2020, when there had been a locust attack in the region. This phenomenon was repeated this year.

Good rainfall this year has led to a luxuriant growth of sewan grass (*Lasiurus scindicus*), which the GIBs use to lay eggs. The number of insects and pests had also increased due to the moisture and humidity. This meant there was more food for the birds. Also, DNP authorities had made an enclosure of about 18 km in circumference and 15.1 sq. km in area. The enclosure was predator-proof and had minimum human disturbance. All these factors, the authorities believe, have led to this unique incident.

Secretary of the Tourism and Wildlife Society of India, Harsh Vardhan, said that the egg-laying aspect of GIBs had received attention at an international symposium on bustards organised in Jaipur in 1980. Most of the experts who attended the event were unanimous that the GIB laid only a single egg, while renowned ornithologist Salim Ali had opined that the bird laid more than one egg. The citing by British ornithologists during the colonial period were also in favour of the GIB laying one egg at a time.

The DNP authorities are now planning to collect a few eggs from the wild and hatch them in the breeding centre. The state forest department had in 2019 in collaboration with

the Wildlife Institute of India established a GIB breeding centre to protect and conserve eggs collected from the wild. Since then, 20 chicks have hatched at the breeding centre while five are on the way. WII's scientist Sutirtha Dutta, who is leading the GIB breeding project informed that six nests with two eggs each had been detected so far in the DNP.

There were around 127 birds in Jaisalmer district according to the last count of the GIB in 2018. GIBs roamed over a 30,000 sq. km area that was outside of the forest department's control and was mostly community-owned land or land under the revenue department. Gujarat claims to have a few females left in its Banni Grassland Reserve.

Source: Mohammed Iqbal. 'Great Indian Bustards adapt to produce 2-egg clutch', www.thehindu.com, 19/08/2022.

Shuchita Jha. 'Good News: Great Indian Bustards lay 20 eggs', www.downtoearth.org.in, 18/08/2022.

TAMIL NADU

Six wetlands get Ramsar recognition; State tally now 10

Six wetlands in Tamil Nadu were declared recently as Ramsar sites. These are the Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary in Tirunelveli, Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve in Thoothukudi and Ramanathapuram, Vembannur wetland complex in Kanniyakumari, Vellode Bird Sanctuary in Erode, Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary in Chengalpattu and Udayamarthandapuram Bird sanctuary in Tiruvarur.

The total number of Ramsar sites in Tamil Nadu has gone up to 10 with these additions.

Source: 'Six Tamil Nadu wetlands get Ramsar recognition, CM hails state forest Dept', *The Hans India*, 04/08/2022.

NEPAL

Bird collision concerns as new international airport to open in Pokhara



With Nepal's new international airport in Pokhara town set to open early 2023, conservationists have expressed concern regarding the possibility of bird hits here. The matter is related to the existence of a landfill site close to the airport, which

draws birds including several threatened species of vultures.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) said that it will take measures to keep the birds away from the airport and out of danger, including with the use of lasers, reflectors, and loud noises. There is no plan, however, to relocate the landfill site. CAAN officials said they are hoping the local municipal officials will move the landfill site soon.

Pokhara's recently elected mayor, Dhanraj Acharya, has been making the rounds of various cities across Nepal and in neighbouring India to learn how they're managing their waste. Man Bahadur GC, Acharya's predecessor, had set up a committee of experts, including civil aviation officials, to find an appropriate new site for the landfill. The committee settled on Timurpata in the south eastern part of the city, noting that it was far from major sources of water, human habitation, and, crucially, the airspace of the new airport. But local political leaders submitted a written protest to the mayor saying that the relocation would make the area unliveable.

Conservationists have said that birds are accustomed to feeding at the landfill site, which means they will keep coming to the area

for months or even years after the waste is relocated elsewhere. During this period, the risk of aircraft-bird collisions will remain high. It has also been observed that birds had continued to look for prey at the airport site even five years after the construction of the airport had begun here.

The Pokhara Valley is home to 470 species of birds and all nine species of vultures

found in South Asia. The area also falls on the migration route of the endangered steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*).

Source: Abhaya Raj Joshi. 'No time to keep vultures out of danger as new Nepal airport set to open', news.mongabay.com, 26/28/2022.

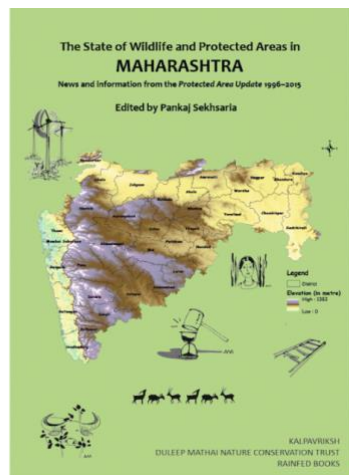
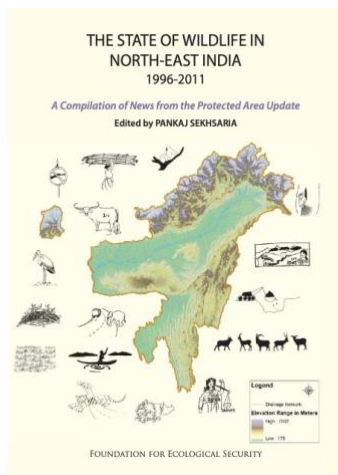
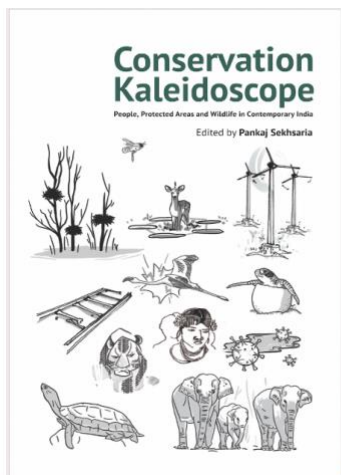


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OBITUARY

Irreplaceable loss for the islands – Zubair Ahmed

It was three months ago and somehow the reality has still not sunk in. Zubair Ahmed, educator, journalist, activist, friend for two decades and the Andaman Islands' best-known citizen is no more. It was early morning on the 8th of July and it was with shock I read the whatsapp message from another friend in Port Blair. Zubair had died the earlier evening; tragically he had taken his own life.

One felt a sudden sinking helplessness and despair, and the mind went racing in multiple directions to make sense. When life goes away suddenly and in this manner the only thing left is a total sense of incompleteness. How many questions still not answered, how many roads still not taken... the mind and heart reaches out to that one last question, but that is precisely what will not be allowed. We need only a moment, but it's too late already. That closure will never come. These are the most eternal silences.

Zubair was my go-to person to discuss anything related to the islands. There was no one else who understood and knew the islands like he did. He was knowledgeable, perceptive, and insightful. More importantly he was hugely gutsy and cared deeply for the islands and its denizens. He was a lone voice of sanity asking the world, and more crucially, his fellow islanders, to understand 'their own' islands for what they were. We are the Andamans he would say, we should be the Andamans – why become a Dubai or a Hongkong or a Singapore? And he had the capacity to immediately go deeper. 'Lets' first understand how Singapore became a Singapore, he would argue, before we want these islands to become a Singapore.

His understanding of the islands and their issues were comprehensive, deep and critically sharp. While his was indeed a lone voice (that was his courage reflecting), I did often get the sense that there was a lot of well-meaning ground support for him. The general

islander understood he cared and that he would speak for them, even if they could not speak for themselves. He had many ears and eyes on the grounds and in the corridors of local power that were willing to trust him with information and insights.

This is how Zubair made his journalism effective and powerful. The range of his writing and the issues he covered were unbelievable. He was as convincing and insightful when writing about an issue of a local place that many even in the islands may not have known about as he was when writing and exploring matters related to the rights of the Jarawa community that would generate immediate international attention. For him both were equally important.

The islands will not be the same again for what he was and what he would have continued to do if he was around. He was in fact petitioner in a case that was to be filed in the Calcutta High Court challenging the hugely destructive project being pushed currently in Great Nicobar Island (see edit). Being a small town in India is not easy and these were the moments of courage and conviction that made Zubair stand out. We have to acknowledge that small town India, its vested interests and the state apparatus that holds power here is not particularly kind to voices that speak truth to power. Zubair suffered because of this including when he was imprisoned on the most ridiculous and flimsy charges during the Covid pandemic. It was a blatant exercise of bureaucratic power that needs systemic solutions. Otherwise the most relevant and important voices will never be heard and we will all be drowned out in an ocean of mediocrity, sycophancy and meaninglessness.

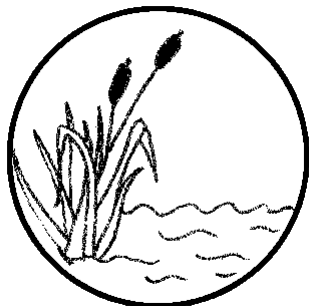
Why Zubair went, we will never know. Could we have done something to help him is a question that we will never be able to ask. We don't have that answer ourselves and he's not there anymore to answer it. It is a twin burden for us to carry to the end. Many of us (me

certainly) continue to see a blank wall now when I think of the islands and think of Zubair. I can't even imagine the sense of pain, loss and grief being experienced by his wife, children, parents and other near and dear ones. One can only grieve for the loss of such a brilliant life.

And hope we do justice in the work we do and live up to what he would have expected from us.

For his islands and his islanders!

- **Pankaj Sekhsaria** is editor of the
Protected Area Update



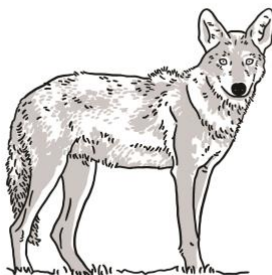
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Contemporary research in & around protected areas: An overview

1. A checklist of grasses from Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary (KWLS), U.P., India

Author(s): Pushpendra Katiyar, Priyanka Agnihotri, A. K. Paliwal and Tariq Husain

Keywords: Generic Key, Grassland, Kishanpur, KWLS, Poaceae, Saccharum

Summary: Sixty-five species of grasses were documented from Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary (Dudhwa Tiger Reserve), in exploration studies from 2015 to 2020. Significance of grasses in an ecosystem has been reiterated in this study.

Link:

<http://floraandfona.org.in/Uploaded%20Pdf/281/49-57.pdf>

2. Description of two new species of the genus *Afraflacilla* Berland & Millot, 1941 (Araneae: Salticidae) from India

Author(s): Puthoor Pattammal Sudhin, Karunnappilli Shamsudheen Nafin, Rishikesh Tripathi, Ashish Kumar Jangid, Dhruv A. Prajapati, Manju Siliwal, Ambalaparambil Vasu Sudhikumar

Keywords: Aranei, jumping spiders, taxonomy, distribution, Thar Desert, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

Summary: *Afraflacilla miajlarensis* sp. nov. has been described from the Desert National Park, while *Afraflacilla kurichiadensis* sp. nov. from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, with detailed species-identification characters.

Link: <https://tinyurl.com/25tpwa6w>

3. Dietary preference of Assamese Macaque *Macaca assamensis* McClelland, 1840 (Mammalia: Primates: Cercopithecidae) in Dampa Tiger Reserve

Author(s): Ht. Decemson, Sushanto Gouda, Zothan Siama, Hmar Tlawmte Lalremsanga

Keywords: conservation, diet, feeding behaviour, food selection, primate, richness

Summary: Assamese Macaques were observed feeding on 57 plant species, between 2018 to 2020. They majorly fed on leaves followed by fruits. Seasonal variations in time invested in feeding behaviour were also

recorded. It is further emphasised that health of the forest will significantly affect Assamese Macaques.

Link:

<https://threatenedtaxa.org/JoTT/article/view/8030/8731>

4. Vegetation dynamics and soil nutrient availability in a temperate forest along altitudinal gradient of Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Western Himalaya,

Author(s): Ajay Maletha, Rakesh Kumar Maikhuri, Surendra Singh Bargali, Ajay Sharma, Vikram S Negi, Lakhpat S Rawat

Keywords: vegetation, Himalaya, soil, temperate forest, vascular plants

Summary: Two hundred twenty-three species of vascular plants were recorded in Bhyundar-Ghangaria and Tolma-Lata-Raini sites of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. The study assessed the forest structure, composition, regeneration patterns, vis-a-vis altitude, soil properties and aspect. Species richness and composition significantly decreased with increase in altitude.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275051>

5. Calculating forest species diversity with information-theory based indices using sentinel-2A sensors of Mahavir Swami Wildlife Sanctuary

Author(s): Pavan Kumar, Manmohan Dobriyal, Amey Kale, A. K. Pandey, R. S. Tomar, Elizabeth Thounaojam

Keywords: species diversity, Bundelkhand, wildlife sanctuary, Sentinel-2A sensor

Summary: Four important ecological indicator indices, viz. Shannon-Weiner (H'), Simpson's (D), Margalef (SR) and Pielou's (J), were used in Mahavir Swami Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh, to measure species diversity and evenness. The data was collected using Sentinel-2A Sensor. The Shannon-Weiner index was found to be best suited to determine species richness, while Simpson's index was for species diversity.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268018>

6. Impact of Energy Flow on Dry Deciduous Forest of Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary of Central India

Author(s): Shailendra Pratap Singh, Lalji Singh, and J. S. Singh

Keywords: energy flow, energy efficiency, firewood, forest degradation, fodder, livestock
Summary: Household survey in five villages inventoried factors such as cropping patterns, labour input, crop yield, fuelwood, and livestock, to examine the energy flow and its impact on the forest. The authors have suggested measures for environmental conservation.

Link:

<https://nieindia.org/Journal/index.php/ijees/article/view/2567>

7. A new species of the freshwater crab genus *Ghatiana* Pati and Sharma, 2014 (Brachyura: Gecarcinucidae) from the Central Western Ghats, India

Author(s): Sameer Kumar Pati, Tejas Thackeray, Parashuram Prabhu Bajantri, Gopalkrishna Dattatraya Hegde

Keywords: Crustacea, Decapoda, Gecarcinucoidea, Karnataka, Oriental region, taxonomy

Summary: *Ghatiana divivarna* sp. nov. is a new species of freshwater crab described from

the Western Ghats of Karnataka. Distribution maps and diagnostic characteristics have been documented.

Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ycxk59y6>

8. Role of protected area in reducing marine and plastic litter: A case study from India's first Marine Protected Area and comparison with Non-Protected Areas

Author(s): Anju Baroth, Sonalika Mamgain, Kuppusamy Sivakumar, Prachi Sachchidanand Hatkar, Sameeha Pathan

Keywords: Gulf of Kachchh, marine litter, marine protected area, non-protected area, plastic pollution, industrial ecology

Summary: Standing-stock surveys and informal interviews were conducted at Gulf of Kachchh Marine Protected Area, Okha Beach and Beyt Dwarka, to estimate and compare litter and plastic pollution. The latter two were found to be highly littered.

Link:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jiec.13248>

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

Email: sproutsenvtrust@gmail.com



NATIONAL NEWS

Concern over threat to vultures from veterinary painkiller Aceclofenac

A new research paper has found out that Aceclofenac, a new veterinary painkiller widely used for treating cattle and dogs, can be potentially dangerous to vultures that feed on cattle carcasses. In the paper titled 'Aceclofenac as a potential threat to the critically endangered vultures in India', published in the Journal of Raptor Research, author Pradeep Sharma has noted that like Diclofenac, Aceclofenac is equally dangerous to vultures as it gets metabolised into Diclofenac.

Sharma works in the Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Science, Bikaner. His research found that practitioners considered Aceclofenac a cost-effective and clinically effective substitute for Diclofenac and that its market share of Aceclofenac had increased in the past two years. The paper highlights the presence and involvement of Diclofenac and its metabolites in monkeys, rats, humans and dogs suggested qualitative similarities in Aceclofenac metabolism.

Source: 'Aceclofenac: the new drug dangerous for vultures', *Hindustan Times*, 23/08/12.

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Coast Guard radar project on Narcondam Island rejected

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has rejected the application of the Coast Guard to install a radar on Narcondam Island in light of the impacts this could have on the endemic and endangered Narcondam Hornbill. The decision was announced recently by the Minister, Ms Jayanti Natarajan. She said that the decision had been taken in light of the serious concern expressed within the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in the matter.

In October 2011 the NBWL had prescribed a site inspection team including Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society; K.B. Singh, Conservator of Forests, Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department; and others to look into the matter. The field report rejected the Coast Guard's proposal, but it was up to the minister to take the final decision.

The memorandum of the MoEF rejecting the radars proposal states that while the Indian Coast Guard has an option of setting up the radar on some other island, "there is no such option available for the hornbill whose survival may get seriously threatened." For the full order see <http://moef.nic.in/assets/wl-04092012.pdf>

Source: Neha Sethi. 'Wildlife board denies approval to coast guard project in Narcondam', *Mint*, 07/09/12.

MAHARASHTRA

Six wetlands proposed as Ramsar sites

The Maharashtra State Government has proposed the inclusion of six wetlands in the state as Ramsar sites. These are the Sewri Creek (Mumbai), Jayakwadi (Aurangabad), Ujni (Solapur), Navegaon Bandh (Gondia), Nandur Madhmeshwar (Nashik), and Lonar (Buldhana). The Itiadh lake in Gondia district is to be listed under the National Wetland Conservation Program (NWCP).

The proposals have been made in response to a request by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for a list of wetlands for notification under the new Wetland Regulatory Rules 2010, for inclusion on the Ramsar list and also high-altitude wetlands for protection and conservation.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Navegaon, Itiadh wetlands to get state, national recognition', *The Times of India*, 27/08/12.

PERSPECTIVE

Stories - windows to a learner's mind

While conducting workshops with middle school students covering various aspects of water - physical, social, environmental - we asked students to express through art and storytelling what they had learnt and enjoyed over our two-month interaction with them.

Payal*, a 13 year old, told me that she liked to write stories. "Wonderful!", I said, "Why don't you pick a topic from the water sessions and write a story about it." "What kind of story should it be?", she asked. "Hmm... Do you live with your grandparents, Payal?", I asked. "Yes", she replied. "Well, why don't you ask your grandmother how she used water in her childhood and compare it with your lifestyle. You might find a story there", I suggested.

Indeed, Payal wrote an engaging story that illustrated how differently she and her grandmother accessed, stored and cooled their drinking water. But Payal could not decide how to end her story. We both re-read the story and then it occurred to me, "Payal, with this story you have brought forth two kinds of knowledge about drinking water - traditional and modern. Why do you think this may be important?" Payal looked unsure, so I continued, "It is through our past and present knowledge, that we may pave the way to a more sustainable water future. In this way, we may also address United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 6 - clean water and sanitation for all."

While this inspired the ending to Payal's story, it was the first time I was able to satisfactorily contextualise SDGs for a middle school student. This was more satisfying than when I described the SDGs with slide presentations or gave students written exercises about them.

Whether it was discussing water values and practices, production of electricity or understanding riparian ecosystems,

visual/illustrated stories have allowed us to effectively navigate into conversations about livelihoods or equity in the same sessions where we discussed science or technology.

On the other hand, storytelling has also served as a tool to assess our efforts at disseminating interdisciplinary pedagogies. For instance, a skit prepared by students included a diversity of perspectives - environmental, social, economic, scientific and historical - to problematize water issues within their action group. Such feedback derived from stories told by students could be crucial in informing pedagogical approaches in environmental studies that enable students to reimagine sustainable futures from an interdisciplinary lens and motivate them towards informed action.

*name changed

- Chhavi Mathur

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Email: chhavi@livingwatersmuseum.org
<https://www.livingwatersmuseum.org/mainpage>



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From: **Kalpavriksh**, Apt. 5, Sri Dutta
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