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**Protected Area Update**  
**Vol. XXIX, No. 1, February (No. 161)**

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## EDITORIAL

### Electrocuted!

*Those elegant lumbering giants  
Magnificent and rare  
Then those high tension wires  
Only bones now, all bare*

The word electrocution has a very interesting history. And a rather simple one. You put together the first half of the word electricity with the second half of the word execution and you had 'electrocution'. It goes back to late 19th century America when electricity was first used for 'executions' and it was considered a humane alternative to remove people that law, and by extension society, considered undesirable. It was a legitimate state-mandated tool to kill.

Words and language, we know, have their own trajectories and this journey is particularly evident in the evolution of the idea of 'accidental' electrocution. What was once an explicit and pre-meditated tool to execute, has with changing times and changing configurations, been accepted quite easily as accident. Electricity is so ubiquitous today and death by accidental electrocution so normalised that we are barely aware of its scale. A staggering 30 people die daily in India due to electrocution; that is nearly 15,000 people yearly and we don't even notice.

If this is the case with humans, one can only imagine what is happening to wild animals. The scenario is a scary one, and one where the magnitude has perhaps not been fully recognised even in the conservation world, leave alone the rest. Of the nearly 500 elephants killed in India in the last five years, an astonishing 348 or 75% died due to electrocution (see pg. 18). Importantly such incidents are reported regularly from across the range of the elephant. One also needs to look at the response. The environment minister when reporting these numbers recently in

parliament also said that the centre had 'requested' state governments and power transmission companies to take steps to prevent these deaths. It is a matter of record that little has been done to address this problem and there is virtually no legal action, leave alone prosecution. The deaths would not have continued otherwise.

Killing a wild elephant is one of the biggest crime's under the Wildlife Protection Act - so what is there to request? And this is not just the elephant - we are regularly electrocuting some of this country's rarest creatures including birds such as flamingos, Sarus cranes (see pg 21) and the iconic Great Indian Bustard. Why can't we immediately prosecute the electricity board officials for negligence, the forest department officials for allowing this and relevant ministers because this is happening under their watch? Why not the same alacrity with which all concerned - the police, the FD, the media and the world of conservation - pounce on a case when labelled as 'poaching'? If one looks at the discourse in the world of conservation it appears there is no bigger threat to wildlife in India than poaching. The situation on the ground however appears to be a rather different one and yet the same urgency and concern appears missing?

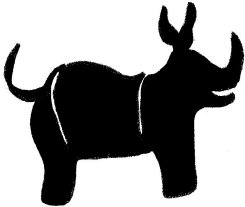
Is this because the class of people who are purportedly involved in instances labelled poaching is different from the class of people who kill by electrocution. One might argue that this is an elephant death by omission, and not the same as the pre-meditated execution by electrocution. It does not matter for the creature killed, but more importantly we have to recognise that this is indeed death by commission because no action is taken and the guilty are allowed to go scot free.

And also so that we don't continue to blame poaching and certain set of people for the loss of our wildlife when actually other reasons and other sets of people are actually responsible.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ASSAM

#### No rhino poaching in Assam in 2022



No rhino was poached in Assam in the calendar year 2022, making it the first such since the year 2000. The last incident of poaching

was on December 28, 2021 at Hilakunda, Kohora in Golaghat district.

The rhino is found in the Brahmaputra valley, parts of North Bengal, and parts of southern Nepal. Assam's Kaziranga National Park (KNP) alone has 2,613 animals, according to a census carried out in March 2022. There are more than 250 other rhinos in the Orang, Pobitora, and Manas NPs.

In 2019, the Assam government constituted a Special Rhino Protection Force to keep a check on rhino poaching and related activities in Kaziranga. On September 22, World Rhino Day, in 2021, almost 2,500 rhino horns were burnt publicly at Bokakhat in KNP to bust myths about rhino horns, and to send out a loud and clear message that such items have no value.

Authorities have claimed that zero poaching in 2022 is an outcome of a combination of these efforts.

Source: 'For first time in many years, no rhinos poached in Assam in 2022', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 03/01/2023.

### GOA/KARNATAKA

#### Goa asks Karnataka to stop Kalasa-Banduri project work inside Mhadei WLS

The chief wildlife warden of Goa has issued a stop-work notice to the Karnataka State Board

for Wildlife (SBWL) as the Kalasa-Banduri project site falls within the jurisdiction of Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The notice issued under the wildlife protection act 1972 (WLPa) states that water flowing inside the sanctuary cannot be diverted.

Section 29 of the WLPa prohibits diversion of any flow of water from within the sanctuary. Exercising the powers conferred under the WLPa, the Goa government has asked the Karnataka SBWL to stop the diversion of the flow of Kalasa and Banduri rivulets and the construction of dams, canals and other structures in Mhadei WLS.

The chief minister (CM) of Goa, Pramod Sawant, has demanded that the Centre form a Mhadei Water Management Authority to stop illegal diversion of water. The CM informed that the water resources department minister Subhash Shirodkar has submitted a memorandum to Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat objecting to the unilateral technical clearance given to Karnataka for the diversion of the Mhadei by the Central Water Commission. Further, the State has demanded that the Centre withdraw the approval given to revised detailed project report (DPR) to divert Mhadei water.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), it is expected, will grant forest and environment clearances to Karnataka as the forest land to be used under the project has been reduced drastically in the revised DPR. As per the revised DPR, the forest land that falls under the Kalasa project has come down from 166 ha to 37 ha and for the Banduri project, it has been reduced from 183 ha to 24 ha.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 1)

Source: Naushad Bijapur. 'Goa forester issues notice to Karnataka', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 11/01/2023.

'Mhadei diversion: Goa issues notice to Karnataka wildlife board', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 10/01/2023.

## GUJARAT

### Lion reported in Barda after 143 years

A male lion that was camping near the coastal Madhavpur village of Porbandar district for the past few months moved further north and crossed into the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) on January 18. The entry marks the return of lions into the Barda forest after 143 years. The lion's presence in Barda was last recorded in 1879, said a press release issued by the Rajya Sabha Member Parimal Nathwani, who is also a member of the advisory committee for Gir National Park and Sanctuary (GNPS).

Forest officers said that the lion, which is around three-and-a-half years old, was tagged with a radio transmitter in October 2022 and is part of a coastal population of the lions near Mangrol in Junagadh. It was tagged after it started venturing into new territories. It was in the Ratanpar village for some time before moving into Barda.

As part of its lion conservation efforts, the state forest department opened a lion gene pool centre at Barda WLS. That facility has some lions in captivity. A breeding centre of spotted deer is functioning there and now, there is said to be a sufficient prey base for lions in that forest.

Lions are reported to have started moving east from the Gir landscape in the early 1990s along the banks of River Shetrunji. Later on, they established territories along the coastal parts of Amreli, Bhavnagar, Gir Somnath, Amreli and Porbandar districts.

The lion population was estimated to be 674 in 2020 and more than half of them were found to have settled outside protected forest areas. In 2013, the Supreme Court had ordered translocation of the lions to Kuno-Palpur in Madhya Pradesh to give the Asiatic lion a second home. None, however, were shifted with Gujarat government raising different objections to the move.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XIII, No. 2)

Source: 'Potential second home in making: Gir lion crosses into Barda Wildlife Sanctuary after 143 years', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 20/01/2023.

## HARYANA

### Defunct water channels converted to wildlife underpasses between Asola Bhati WLS & Sariska TR: FD

Defunct storm-water channels below seven culverts along the 66 km Gurugram-Faridabad expressway have been converted to function as wildlife underpasses. The road cuts through the Aravalis, and falls on the route taken by animals to move between the Asola Bhati Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Delhi and Sariska Tiger Reserve (TR) in Rajasthan. The chief conservator of wildlife, South Haryana, informed that the storm-water outlets along the Gurugram-Faridabad road were blocked. The forest department (FD) removed the debris to turn them into animal corridors.

While some experts said that the location and the width of these underpasses was not favourable for animals, others noted that it made sense to come up with cost-effective ways to create wildlife corridors.

Over the past few years, almost a dozen leopards have been hit by vehicles on this road. In June 2020, a two-year-old female leopard died after being hit by a vehicle on Pali road near the Asola Bhati WLS. In October 2019, an 18-month-old female leopard was crushed to death in Pali, while another female was run over in Faridabad in January 2019. Earlier, in April 2014, four leopards were found dead within a week in and around a private golf resort located along the road in Gurugram.

A 2017 study by the Wildlife Institute of India had pointed out that the Gurugram-Faridabad expressway is dangerous for wildlife in the Aravalis.

Source: Ipsita Pati. '7 drains off Gurugram-Faridabad road now wildlife underpasses', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 03/01/2023.

## KARNATAKA

### **Wildlife forensic laboratory to be set up in Bengaluru**

The Karnataka government has approved a Rs. 2.7 crore project for setting up a wildlife forensic sciences laboratory in Bengaluru. The laboratory will have two main areas of focus: DNA analysis and morphological analysis. DNA analysis will provide details on the origin of confiscated samples, such as nails, hair, and teeth, and the species they come from, while morphological analysis will help in the identification of animals through the study of their physical features and textures.

At present, samples from wildlife crime cases in Karnataka are sent to Dehradun or Hyderabad, thus, slowing the investigation process down in many instances. The establishment of the laboratory is expected to provide a major boost to the investigation and prosecution of wildlife crimes in the state.

Source: 'Karnataka to get first wildlife forensic laboratory in Bengaluru', [www.thenewsminute.com](http://www.thenewsminute.com), 05/01/2023.

### **Bandipur Yuva Yatra to increase wildlife awareness in school children**

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) early January 2023, launched a three-year programme early called Bandipur Yuva Yatra to create wildlife related awareness in school children in villages bordering Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR). The programme, according to officials, is expected to create close coordination among different stakeholders like the FD, education department, social welfare department, District Mineral Fund, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Environment Programme.

The reserve is surrounded by 136 villages within a distance of one km from its boundary. There are over 800 government

schools and 30 colleges in the taluks and villages abutting BTR. The programme aims at promoting learning through field visits and classroom sessions related to forest, wildlife, forest ecosystem services and its conservation importance.

Source: 'Karnataka forest dept. reaches out to school kids to educate them about Bandipur Tiger Reserve', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 04/01/2023.

## KERALA

### **Rising tiger population in, around Wayanad WLS raises concern**

Recent incidents of tiger presence and attacks on humans in and around Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) have created fear and raised concerns in the region. A tiger that had killed a farmer in Mananthavady in Wayanad district was tranquilised and captured on 14 January. Another tiger's presence was reported almost immediately in the same area.

Forest officials and wildlife experts had warned the forest department (FD) about an imminent increase in tiger population in the region, especially in the sanctuary but the department is said to have failed to take note of the cautions. According to a chief conservator of forests, who had worked in the district, there are around 180 tigers in Wayanad's forests spread over 756 sq. km. However, most of these tigers are based in Wayanad WLS, which has an area of 344 sq. km.

Forest officials point to the stringent conservation methods adopted by the state government under Project Tiger as having played key role in the population increase.

Source: KS Sreejith. 'Wayanad witnessing an explosion in tiger count', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 16/01/2023.



**DETAILS OF THE VILLAGES INCLUDED IN THE BUFFER ZONES  
AROUND PAs in KERALA**

No	Name of WLS/NP & Ref No. of the Buffer Zone Draft Notification	Area (sq km)	Year	Proposed Buffer Zone Area with area in sq km & villages included in Buffer Zone
1	Neyyar WLS, Trivandrum District (Dt); SO 1361(E) dated 25.03.2022 common with Peppara WLS	128	1958	0 to 2.72 km wide; 70.906 sq km Kallikkadu, Neyyattinkara Tk, TVM; Amboori, Neyyattinkara Tk, TM; Vazhichal, Kattakada Tk, TVM
2	Peppara WLS, Trivandrum Dt, SO 1361 (E) dated 25.03.2022	53	1983	Area Common with Neyyar WLS; Mannoorkkara, Nedumangad Tk, TVM; Vithura, Nedumangad Tk, TVM
3	Shenthuruni WLS, Kollam Dt, SO 2939(E) dated 24.08.2020	172	1984	0 to 6.5 km wide; 116.457 sq km Aryankavu, Punalur Tk, KLM; Thenmala, Punalur Tk, KLM; Kulathupuzha, Punalur Tk, KLM
4	Periyar Tiger Reserve	575	1950	Not Available
5	Periyar NP, Idukki Dt	350	1982	Not Available
6	Eravikulam NP, Idukki Dt; SO 124 (E) dated 12.01.2021 (Combined Notification along with Pampadumchola NP, Chinnar WLS, Anamudi Shola & Kurinjimala WLS details of which are below)	97	1978	Total Area of 5 WLS+NP = 264.643 sq km Kannan Devan Village Partial, (Eravikulam NP); Marayoor Partial, (Eravikulam NP); Marayoor Partial, (Chinnar WLS); Kilanthoor Partial, (Chinnar WLS); Kanthalloor Partial, (Anamudi Shola NP); Kottakampoor Partial, (Anamudi Shola NP); Kilanthoor Partial, (Anamudi Shola NP); Kannandevan village Partial, (Anamudi Shola NP); Kottakampoor Partial, (Kurinjimala WLS); Vattavada Partial, (Kurinjimala WLS); Vattavada Partial. (Pampadum Shola NP)
7	Pampadum Shola NP	1.3	2003	
8	Chinnar WLS	90	1984	
9	Anamudi Shola	7.5	2003	
10	Kurinkimala WLS	32	2006	
11	Idukki WLS, Idukki Dt.; SO 2772(E) dated 13.8.2020	105	1976	450 M to 1.0 km; 88.238 sq km out of which 24.317 sq km is agricultural land; Upputhara, Peerumedu Tk; Vagamon, Peerumedu Tk; Ayyappankovil, Udumpanchola Tk; Kanchiyar, Idukki Tk; Idukki, Idukki Tk; Arakkulam, Thodupuzha Tk

12	Mathikettan Shola NP, Idukki Dt; SO 2771(E) dated 13.08.2020	13	2003	0 to 1 km wide; 17.5 sq km; Poopara , Udumbanchola Tk
13	Mangalavanam, Ernakulam Dt SO 3033(E) dated 07.09.2020	0.03	2004	0 to 1.0 km wide; 0.53 sq km; Southern Railway, BPCL, HUL, GCDA, HPCL, Port Trust, KSEB Sub station, Pundi Karuppan Smarakam, LMCC Convent and other private lands
14	Thattakad WLS, Ernakulam Dt, SO 3454(E) dated 29.09.2020	25	1983	1 km uniform wide; 28.444 Sq Km Kuttampuzha (Partial), Kothamangalam Tk, EKM; Keerampara (Partial), Kothamangalam Tk, EKM
15	Chimmini WLS, Trisoor Dt; SO 4269(E) dated 25.11.2020	85	1984	0 to 7 km wide & 92.53 sq km; (90.65 sq km forest and 1.88 sq km non-forest) Varantharapally (Chalakudy Tk); Kizhakkancherry ( Alathur Tk, Palakkad Dt
16	Choolanoor, Trisoor Dt; SO 4270(E) dated 25.11.2020	3.4	2007	100 m to 3.0 km wide; 8.86 sq km (6.58 sq km forest and 2.28 sq km non-forest Thiruvilwamala (Thalapally Tk, Trisoor Dt); Peringottukurissy II (Alathur Tk, Palakkad Dt); Kuthannur II (Alathur Tk, Palakkad Dt); Tarur I (Alathur Tk, Palakkad Dt)
17	Peechi Vazhani WLS; Trisoor Dt; SO 4271(E) dated 25.11.2020	125	1958	0 to 6.2 km wide; 131.54 sq km (116.04 sq km forest and 15.50 sq km non forest area); Panamcherry, Thrissur Tk, TSR; Manalithara, Thalappilly Tk, TSR; Attoor, Thalappilly Tk, TSR; Peechi, Thrissur Tk, TSR; Kannambra, Alathoor Tk, PLKD; Kizhakkancherry, Alathur Tk, PLKD
18	Parambikulam WLS; Palakkad Dt; SO 440(E) dated 28.01.2021	643	1973	0 to 10.09 km wide; 331.352 sq km; Sholayar Power House; Mukundapuram Tk, TSR; Thavalakuzhipara, Mukundapuram Tk, TSR; Malakkapara, Mukundapuram Tk, TSR; Anakayam, Mukundapuram Tk; TSR; Kalchadi, Chittoor Tk, PGT; Kadappara, Alathur Tk, PGT; Thalikkallu, Alathur Tk, PGT
19	Silent valley NP, Palakkad Dt; SO 3880(E) dated 27.10.2020	238	1984	0 to 9.8 km wide; 148 sq km; Kallamala. Padavayal, Palakayam, Payyanadam, Mannarkkad, Allanallur 2, Kottopadam 1. Kottopadam 2 (All Mannarcade Tk, Palakkad Dt); Karuvarakundu , Nilambur Tk; Kerala Estate, Nilambur Tk; Chokkad, Nilambur Tk; Kalikavu, Nilambur Tk, (Malappuram District)
20	Malabar WLS, Kozhikode Dt; SO 2634(E) dated 5.08.2020	74	2009	0 to 1.0 km wide; 53.60 sq km; Chembanoda, Koilandy Tk, KKD; Chakkittapara, Koilandy T, KKD; Changaroth, Koilandy Tk, KKD; Perambra, Koilandy Tk, KKD; Koorachund, Koilandy Tk, KKD; Kanthallad, Thamaraserry Tk, KKD; Puthupadi, Thamaraserry Tk, KKD; Kedavoor,



				Thamaraserry Tk, KKD; Kattippara, Thamaraserry Tk, KKD; Thariyod, Vythiri Tk, Wayanad; Pozhuthana, Vythiri Tk, Wayanad; Achooranam, Vythiri Tk, Wayanad; Kunnathidavaka, Vythiri Tk, WYD
21	Kadalundi CR, Kozhikode Dt	1.5	2007	Not Available
22	Wayanad WLS, Wayanad Dt; SO 438(E) dated 28.01.2021	344	1973	0 to 3.4 km wide: 118.59 sq km of which 19.09 sq km is revenue land; Thirunelli, Mananthavady Tk; Thrisileri, Mananthavady Tk; Pulpally, Sulthan Bathery Tk; Irulam, Sulthan Bathery Tk; Kidanganad, Sulthan Bathery Tk; Noolpuzha, Sulthan Bathery Tk (All in Wayanad Dt)
23	Aralam WLS, Kannur Dt; SO 2393(E) dated 20.07.2020	55	1984	0 to 3.06 km wide 10.136 sq km; Aralam, Kelakam, Thirunelli
24	Kottiyoor WLS, Kannur Dt; SO 2940(E) dated 24.08.2020	30	2011	0 to 2.1 km wide; 12.91 sq km area; Kottiyoor, Thalasserry Tk; Kelakam, Thalasserry Tk; Thirunelli, Mananthavady Tk
25	Karimpuzha WLS	228	2019	Not Available

Source: *Environment Conservation and Climate Change: Will Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) address the issue*, Published by Save Western Ghats People Foundation, Kozhikode, Centre for Consumer Education, Pala and Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, Kerala State Committee, December 2022.

## KERALA/KARNATAKA

### FD to buy private lands to re-establish elephant corridor in Kodagu

The Kodagu division of the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) is planning to buy private lands to re-establish the elephant corridor between Kodagu and the neighbouring state of Kerala. Over 150 acres of two private coffee estates have fragmented the corridor and the FD officials said that they are in discussion with the respective estate owners to explore the possibility of purchasing their lands.

They noted that a huge gap between the Bramhagiri and Wayanad forests had forced the elephants to tread through villages and on roads to continue their migration. An estimate of Rs 25 crore has been drawn to procure private lands even as the department is

planning to invest in the construction of a flyover to ensure smooth vehicle movement

Source: Prajna GR. 'Mapping of elephant corridor under way in Kodagu', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 07/12/2022.

## MAHARASHTRA

### Six allocated mining blocks fall in tiger corridors in Vidarbha

Data procured from the website of the Ministry of Mines shows six allocated mineral blocks fall in the tiger corridor identified by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in its Eastern Vidarbha Landscape (EVL) report. Some blocks lie within corridors identified under the Tiger Conservation Plans (TCPs) of tiger

reserves (TRs) and eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) of protected areas (PAs).

The six mines coming in Pench-Nagzira, and Umred-Karhandla-Bramhapuri-Ghodazari-Tadoba-Kanhargaon tiger corridors will be spread over 1,655 ha, of which 1,050 ha is rich forest area. The Bamhani mine falls within the buffer zone of Tadoba Andhari TR and is located in a corridor between the TR and the Sindewahi forest range of Bramhapuri division. The Dubarpeth mining block lies within the Kanhargaon Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), while the Gajoli mine is situated on its edge. The Devalmari-Katepalli block lies within the Pranhita WLS. These forest areas are key sites maintaining wildlife connectivity between Indravati-Kawal-Tadoba Andhari TRs. The Pardi (Kinwat) mine on the outskirts of Painganga WLS lies on the edge of the corridor connecting Painganga and Kawal.

These mining blocks were auctioned separately from April 12, 2018, to January 11, 2022, for extraction of manganese, iron ore, copper, limestone, and kyanite. The companies are reported to have applied for forest clearance. All allocated mineral blocks are inhabited by tigers and other Schedule-I species, thus requiring wildlife clearances.

However, once forest clearances are granted, getting wildlife clearance is just a formality, say wildlife NGOs and experts. They pointed out that several of these mines will lead to secondary infrastructure for transportation of material and it will cause further habitat fragmentation. These mines will impact wildlife connectivity and affect dispersion of tigers from one PA to another. Consequently, it will be an additional pressure to the existing pressure of linear infrastructures in wildlife areas. It has also been alleged that there has been a demand to de-notify Kanhargaon WLS for the mines; another reason for the demand for denotification is the Rajura airport.

Further, bids were also invited for four other limestone, base metal, and copper mines on September 16, 2022 in sensitive areas of Bamhani and Minzari (TATR), Devalmari

Katepalli (Pranhita WLS) and Kinwat (Painganga WLS). However, the directorate of geology and mining, Maharashtra, on November 14, annulled the auction without specifying any reasons.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Six mines pose threat to tiger corridors in and around Tadoba', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 07/12/2022.

### **HC allows felling of over 20,000 mangroves for bullet train project**

The Bombay High Court (HC), in December 2022, allowed the plea of National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd. (NHSRCL) to allow felling of 21,997 mangrove trees in Mumbai, Palghar and Thane for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project. The HC refused a request by the NGO Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG), an intervenor, to stay operation of its order. A division bench of the HC reserved the order in a plea filed by NHSRCL in 2020, seeking to cut trees for the project. It had sought to bring down the number of trees needed to be felled for the project following a direction from the union and state environment ministries and other authorities.

The bench was informed by the advocates appearing for NHSRCL, that the number of mangroves to be felled has been reduced. The plea stated that the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in its March 29, 2019, direction, had requested to shift the Virar and Thane stations of the project so that the number of affected trees could be reduced. As per the directions, the NHSRCL changed the alignment and shifted these stations, resulting in the requirement of removing 21,997 trees instead of the 53,467 proposed earlier.

The NHSRCL assured the HC it would plant five times the total mangrove trees that were earlier proposed to be felled and the

number would not be reduced for the same. It also submitted that it had paid the mangrove cell for the planting as a compensatory measure. It further said that it has taken permission from all authorities concerned.

BEAG had however objected to granting such a permission and said that the NHSRCL cannot use explosives for construction in the prohibited area and relaxation for such activities should not be granted. The NGO also said that no study was undertaken about the survival rate of saplings to be planted as a compensatory measure and the environmental impact assessment report for felling trees has not been provided.

NHSRCL denied the objections and claimed that it had availed required approvals for the felling of trees and would compensate the loss occurring due to the same by planting of saplings as undertaken, which the HC accepted. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 5 and Vol. XXV, No. 3)

Source: Omkar Gokhale. ‘Bombay High Court allows felling of 22,000 mangrove trees for bullet train project ‘in public interest’’, [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 15/12/2022.

## ODISHA

### **Biodiversity Heritage Site tag proposed for Gandhamardan hill**

The Odisha State Biodiversity Board (SBB) has sent a proposal to the state government to declare the 189.639 sq. km Gandhamardan Reserve Forest area as a ‘Biodiversity Heritage Site’ (BHS). Officials of the SBB are reported to have received proposals from the Biodiversity Management Committees of Nandupalla, Telenpalli, Bartunda, Mithapalli as well as proposals from the divisional forest offices of Balangir, Bargarh and other stakeholders to declare Gandhamardan hill as a BHS.

Accordingly, the SBB carried out a detailed inventory of the flora and fauna in the

forest ranges of Harisankar, Lathore and Patnagarh in Balangir and Nursingnath and Paikamal in Bargarh. It has recorded 1,200 species of plants and 500 species of animals, in the hill ecosystem. Around 209 trees, 135 shrubs, 473 herbs, 77 climbers and 300 species of medicinal plants have also been recorded. One of these is endemic while 18 species are reported to be threatened.

The Gandhamardan hill range is famous as an ‘Ayurvedic paradise’. It will be the 3rd BHS in Odisha after Mahendragiri, which was declared a BHS in November 2022 and before that, the Mandasaru Gorge in Kandhamal.

Source: ‘Biodiversity heritage site tag for Gandhamardan soon’, [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 09/12/2022.

### **FD deploys drones for tracking elephants in Keonjhar**

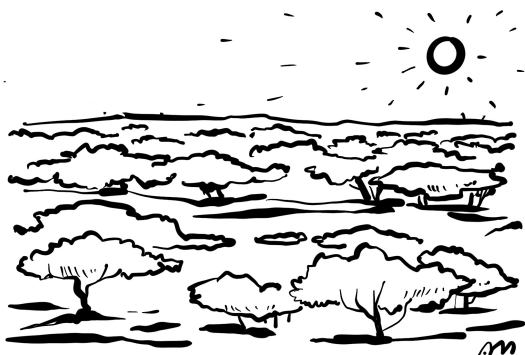
The Odisha Forest Department (FD) has deployed a thermal drone for night-time tracking of elephant movement in the forests of Keonjhar district. The thermal sensing system in the drone detects live objects and also records the temperature of their bodies. Two drones are also being used during the daytime to track the movement of elephants.

The drones have the facility to put a spotlight from a height on the herd. They are also loaded with recordings of a siren or of human voices. FD officials said that they have used the spotlight and the sound to scare away the elephants. They have also claimed that the drones are effective in detecting poachers.

Source: Subhashish Mohanty. ‘Odisha forest department deploys thermal drone to track tuskers’, [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 07/12/2022.

## RAJASTHAN

### Villagers in Jaisalmer district seek re-categorisation of “oran” lands



Villages in Jaisalmer district have asked the government to re-categorise community-conserved spaces, regionally known as *orans*, as “*oran* land”. At present, these spaces are classified as “wastelands” in the revenue records, thus, resulting in allotment of huge chunks of these lands for setting up solar plants.

Villagers from around 40 villages in Jaisalmer district walked 225 km to the district headquarters and submitted a letter to the collector on December 19, 2022, requesting this re-categorisation. A group of 20 people started walking on December 11, 2022, from the Rasla village getting residents of different villages to sign the letter. Several people also joined them as they progressed.

The representation to the authorities states that *orans* have trees like rohida, bordi, kumbhat, and desi babool and different varieties of grasses like sevan and murath. These lands are home to more than 250 species of birds and animals, including the Great Indian bustard, McQueen bustard, chinkara, Indian desert cat, and desert fox. Most people in the Jaisalmer district are dependent on animal husbandry for employment, the representation said. Almost all the ancient *orans* of the district are located in the middle of livestock-dominated villages, where agriculture is prohibited due to ancient social and religious beliefs.

The Degrai Oran is around 10,000 ha, but only 4,000 ha are recognised as *oran*, which are listed as common land. The rest is categorised as wasteland, said a villager from Sanwata village. The villagers have raised this issue of conservation and correcting the land records to accommodate the *orans*. If corrected, local people can take their cattle to graze and depend on them for livelihood, but so far, no action has been taken, said the villager.

Rajasthan-based NGO - Ecology, Rural Development & Sustainability Foundation (ERDSF) had documented 100 *orans* and identified 30 more with the help from the Jaisalmer Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in 2021. All legal documents were procured from revenue records of Rajasthan and corroborated with locals to identify the land on sites, the ERDSF has said pointing out that the *orans* have not been properly recorded.

Source: Shuchita Jha. ‘Jaisalmer villagers march 225 kilometres to get sacred groves listed as ‘oran land’’, [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 19/12/2022.

### State delaying TR tag for Kumbhalgarh WLS: Rajsamand MP

A member of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and member of parliament (MP) from Rajsamand, Diya Kumari, raised the issue of declaring the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) a tiger reserve (TR) in the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the NTCA held on 3rd January in Bandipur TR.

The MP pointed out that the NTCA had already sent the feasibility assessment report for appropriate action for declaring Kumbhalgarh WLS a TR. The Rajasthan government had to take action on the report and send it to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change along with its recommendation. However, no action has been taken so far in the matter by the Rajasthan government. She said she had written two

letters to the State government for sending its recommendations to the ministry, but there had been no response.

The other points discussed at the meeting pertained to the development of tiger corridors, tiger relocation from one State to another, opening new zones in Ranthambore, Sariska and Ramgarh TRs and increasing the allocation of funds.

Source: 'Raj. Govt. sitting over Kumbhalgarh tiger reserve project, says Diya Kumari', [www.business-standard.com](http://www.business-standard.com), 03/01/2023.

## **TAMIL NADU**

### **Expert committees to identify elephant corridors in north & south of Palakkad**

The Tamil Nadu government has constituted two expert committees to identify the elephant corridors in two landscapes, one to the North of Palakkad and the second to the south of Palakkad. The government informed the Madras High Court (HC) on January 10 that the two expert committees would provide a consolidated list of elephant corridors by the end of March. This would include both new potential corridors and also those that have already been identified.

The landscape in the north of Palakkad comprises Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Erode, Sathyamangalam, Hassanur, Hosur, and Dharmapuri forest divisions while that to the south comprises Pollachi, Tiruppur, Dindigul, Kodaikanal, Theni, Srivilliputtur, Megamalai, Tirunelveli, Kalakkad, Ambasamudram, and Kanniyakumari divisions.

The HC had earlier directed the forest department to also consider taking over the land of people who have settled for long in the elephant corridors as these corridors could be used for the free movement of elephants.

Source: 'TN forms two expert panels to identify new elephant corridors', [www.dtnext.in](http://www.dtnext.in), 11/01/2023.

## **TELANGANA**

### **Environment charge for vehicles passing through Eturnagaram WLS**

From December 14, 2022, the forest department (FD) has started collecting environment maintenance charge (EMC) from the tourists and non-locals passing driving through the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). While Rs. 200 are charged per heavy motor vehicle, Rs. 50 are charged per light motor vehicle and Rs. 20 per two-wheeler on the Pasra and Eturnagaram road which runs for 30 km through the sanctuary.

Mulugu district forest officer (DFO) said that EMC is being collected as the tourists have been littering several places inside the sanctuary. Plastic bags containing food are also thrown by the tourists on the road. The FD is forced to remove this garbage regularly to ensure wild animals are not harmed. In view of this, it was decided to start collecting the charges to meet the expenditure on the manpower involved in cleaning the roads. Government vehicles, vehicles of state government owned corporations and Telangana State transport buses are however exempted from the EMC.

The FD has also decided to collect a parking fee for the vehicles at the tourist spots located in the forest areas in the district.

Source: 'Vehicles passing through Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary to now pay EMC charges', [www.telanganatoday.com](http://www.telanganatoday.com), 27/12/2022.

### **Increase in tiger movement from Maharashtra: Telangana FD**

Telangana Forest Department (FD) officials have noted that there is an increased incidence in recent years of tigers moving from Maharashtra to Telangana (*PA Update* Vol. XXVIII, No. 6). The reasons they have cited



for this include better green cover and prey base in Telangana and a spill-over of tigers from Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary and Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TR) in Maharashtra. The tigers have been recorded in established wildlife areas of Telangana and in particular the Kagaznagar Forest Division in Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district. Some of these tigers are also reported to have settled down in the Telangana forests.

A team of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), which took up evaluation of the Kawal Tiger Reserve (KTR) and Amrabad Tiger Reserve (ATR) in November 2022 had appreciated the work being taken up in the KTR corridor. Around eight tigers have been reported to be moving in the KTR corridor area. An official said that in the last five to six years they have seen that the tigresses have given birth in the area, and now movement of tigers is also reported from new areas such as Eturnagaram, Kinnerasani and Pakala.

The officials further informed that the FD is trying to improve the prey base by relocating the animals from areas like national parks and zoos, where they are in excess. A team of trackers also monitor movement of tigers and if they are found to be moving near human habitations then the local people are alerted to be careful. The process of rehabilitation of villages from the core of TRs has begun and the government is confident of taking up more villages for relocation in the two TRs, which will increase the availability of inviolate areas for wild animals.

Source: 'With increased green cover, Telangana forests rolling out red carpet to tigers from Maharashtra', [www.telanganatoday.com](http://www.telanganatoday.com), 19/12/2022.

### **FD takes steps to improve tiger habitat in Mancheria district**

The Telangana Forest Department (FD) is taking measures to improve tiger habitat in

Mancheria district as the neighbouring Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district has been attracting tigers from Maharashtra (also see story above). The FD has developed grasslands in over 10 sq. km in Jannaram, Chennur and Bellampalli divisions with the aim of increasing the population of herbivores. It will increase the prey base for tigers migrating from Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district in search of food.

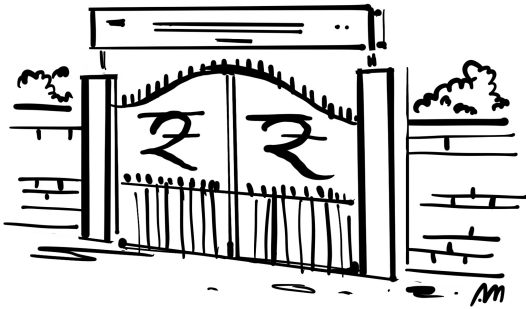
Grasslands have been created over 8 sq. km in Jannaram Forest Division which forms the core of Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) while grasslands of 100 ha each have also been created in the Bellampalli and Chennur divisions. The creation of grasslands has resulted in an exponential rise in the population of herbivores in the forests of this region, said the FD officials.

Solar power-based bore wells were installed at percolation tanks in order to ensure water round the clock in the habitat for tigers. Surveillance of fauna has also been stepped up. A total of 600 CCTV cameras were installed through a grid-based model at entry points and vulnerable locations covering the 1,760 sq. km forest cover of the district. Capacity building of forest staffers is being done through special training at regular intervals given by experts from Tadoba Andhari, Kanha and Pench TRs.

The FD is also planning to introduce nature trails and cycling in the core and buffer areas of Kawal TR and other forests of the district. The FD has procured five safari vehicles spending Rs. 75 lakh recently. Safari tours have also been designed. The vehicles will be utilized in Kawal TR and other parts of the district to carry visitors to explore the forests. Hospitality facilities too will be improved by creating accommodation facilities at tourist spots.

Source: Padala Santosh. 'Measures taken to improve tiger habitat in Mancheria', [www.telanganatoday.com](http://www.telanganatoday.com), 12/01/2023.

## Morning walkers upset over Rs. 50 entry fee at KBR National Park



Morning walkers living in the vicinity of the KBR National Park (NP) and the Gandipet Eco-Park in Hyderabad are upset over the levying of an entry fee of Rs. 50. Residents living in the vicinity of these two parks have pointed out that the entry fee for most other parks was in the range of Rs, 10 - 15; many did not charge a fee at all.

A member of a morning walkers' association said that while entry doesn't have to be free, a single annual pass can be made available to provide access to all parks in the city. Others have pointed out that the middle-class population cannot afford the entry fee of Rs. 50 per day. They noted that the parks are public property and shouldn't even charge an entry fee to taxpayers, ideally.

A few, however, said that an entry fee of Rs. 50 was acceptable due to KBR's 'national park' status.

Source: Rachel Dammala. 'Hyderabad morning walkers' association questions ₹50 entry fee to KBR Park', [www.deccanchronicle.com](http://www.deccanchronicle.com), 12/01/2023

## UTTAR PRADESH

### Skill development, financial inclusion program for Tharu community near Katarniaghat WLS

The Katarniaghat Forest Division is planning for a financial inclusion and a skill

development program for the Tharu community that lives near the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). While some people from the community will be employed by the forest department (FD), others will be given skill-development training, and products made by them will be kept for selling at local souvenir shops. The National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) would fund the skill-development initiative.

The divisional forest officer (DFO), Katarniaghat WLS, said that eco-development committees (EDCs) that have been constituted in 47 villages will be given financial assistance under the initiative. The accounts of EDCs will be jointly operated by gram pradhans and forest officials. The DFO also said that the FD aims to achieve three objectives: stop people from going to the jungle to collect firewood, reduce human-wildlife conflicts and get locals' support to promote eco-tourism.

There have been multiple incidents of human wildlife conflict in the area. A man was killed by wild elephants in Verdiya village near Katarniaghat WLS on January 10. Elephants had also damaged several huts in the area. In May 2022, locals had beaten up a forest guard after a leopard killed an eight-year-old boy in Ayodhyapurwa village under Sujauli police station.

Source: 'Forest dept, NABARD to give skill-development training to Tharu people', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 16/01/2023.

### Lucknow Zoo to be shifted to Kukrail forest; no clarity for 5000+ trees in garden

The over 100-year-old "Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Zoological Garden" aka Lucknow Zoo will soon be moved to a new location outside the city to the Kukrail forest area.

In August 2022, the State cabinet had approved a proposal for a night safari park in Kukrail. As per the proposal, the 2,027 ha forest area in Kukrail will have both a zoo and



a night safari park. The State government is also planning to develop a four-lane approach road to improve connectivity besides creating world class facilities for visitors. The forest department (FD) has set a deadline to complete the Kukrail zoo and night safari project by the end of 2023.

While the State government is all set to shift the zoo, environmentalists and nature lovers have started seeking clarity about more than 5,000 trees of over 100 species in the botanical garden. Officials said that authorities are yet to come up with any decision concerning the shifting of the garden. Though there are technologies nowadays wherein entire trees can be moved, it will not be an easy job, besides, Kukrail already has a green cover, said a forest official. The chief scientist of the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow, has warned that tree relocation seldom guarantees success. The zoo range officer said that as far as the zoo is concerned, the direction of the Central Zoo Authority will be followed; however, the government and Lucknow Advisory Committee (LAC) will decide the fate of trees and other plants in the garden.

The garden spread over 29 ha is managed by the Prince Wales Zoological Garden Trust run by LAC with the State forest secretary as its chairman. The garden is even older than the zoo, having been established as a mango orchard in the 18th century by Nawab Nasiruddin Haider, the then Nawab of Awadh. It was known as Banarasi Bagh at the time. The zoo was established in 1921 and till 1950 it ran under various trusts and bodies before coming under an advisory committee of the public health department. In 1966, its administrative control was given to the FD. The zoo initially named as Prince of Wales Zoological Gardens Trust was renamed as Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Zoological Garden in 2015.

Source: 'Lucknow to lose its lungs when zoo is shifted out to Kukrail in 2023', [www.canindia.com](http://www.canindia.com), 17/12/2022.

## UTTARAKHAND

### **Bee boxes to prevent elephants from entering fields, villages in Nainital**

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) recently launched its Re-Hab (Reducing Human Attacks using Honey Bees) Project at village Chausla of Nainital district in an attempt to safeguard humans and crops from elephants. 330 bee-boxes, bee-colonies and toolkits along with honey extractors were distributed to the beneficiaries as part of this initiative in November 2022.

The project involves installing bee boxes in areas from where elephants may enter the human settlements and agricultural areas. It is expected that the bee-boxes fencing will prevent elephants from entering habitations and farms.

Similar one-year projects are being initiated by KVIC at select locations in seven states including Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Assam and Odisha.

Source: Ananya Upadhyaya. 'KVIC launches its Re-Hab project in Nainital to reduce elephant attacks on humans, farmers' crops', [www.financialexpress.com](http://www.financialexpress.com), 30.11.2022.

## WEST BENGAL

### **385 Fishing cats recorded in Sunderbans TR**

The Fishing cat status report released by the forest department (FD) in November 2022 has reported 385 fishing cats in the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve (TR). The study focused on fishing cats only inside the TR and the number was derived from an analysis of images of Fishing cats captured by trap cameras set up as part of the national tiger census. The cameras were installed in December 2021 and retrieved in January 2022. The Basirhat Range recorded the biggest number of Fishing cats at 130, the

Sajnekhali Wildlife Sanctuary Range reported 97, National Park East 60 and National Park West 98.

The Ganga-Brahmaputra basin is the most suitable habitat for the Fishing cat. The Sunderbans delta is a part of the basin and the Fishing cat population in the STR can act as a source population from which animals can trickle down to other places, said a member of The Fishing Cat Conservation Alliance.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the Fishing cat in the 'vulnerable' category. A reassessment is due and this study is going to be crucial for the reassessment, said the member, who is also one of the international assessors for the IUCN Cat Specialist Group. An earlier census held at Chilika Lake in Odisha in January 2022 had recorded 176 of these cats in the lagoon.

Source: Debraj Mitra. 'Study finds 385 fishing cats in Sunderbans Tiger Reserve', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 28/11/2022.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### NBWL committee to re-define water level in Chambal River Sanctuary

Though the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has already defined the limit for the minimum water level required in the 435 km-long Chambal River Sanctuary for sustaining the aquatic life, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has set up a panel to re-define the same. The committee comprises the member secretary and a member of NBWL, representatives of WII, and of the Central Water Commission and irrigation departments of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (MP).

The decision came after Dr. HS Singh, a members of SC-NBWL, during the meeting held on October 11, 2022, opposed MP's

proposal entailing diversion of 0.95 ha of forest land from the sanctuary for construction of intake well, approach bridge and water pipeline. He pointed out that the WII had earlier submitted a report that the flow in Chambal during late winters and summers reduces a lot and is not sufficient for survival of dolphins. In 2011, the SC-NBWL had decided not to consider new proposals for withdrawing water from Chambal River. A report prepared by a team led by the superintendent, National Chambal Sanctuary, Sheopur, which inspected the site on July 4, 2019 too had advised against such projects as well.

According to WII, the minimum flow required to sustain the ideal habitat for gharial in Chambal River is 151-165 m<sup>3</sup>/sec and for the dolphin 266.42 - 289.67 m<sup>3</sup>/sec. However, in December 2017 when WII monitored the discharge of Chambal River, it found the flow had reduced to 67 m<sup>3</sup>/sec.

Source: Archana Jyoti. 'NBWL to decide water level needed for Chambal river sanctuary', [www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com), 23/11/2022.

### India lost 494 elephants in five years; 348 due to electrocution

India lost 494 elephants to train accidents, electrocution, poaching and poisoning for the five year period 2017-18 to 2021-22, the union minister of state for environment, forest and climate change, Ashwini Kumar Choubey informed the Lok Sabha on 19 December 2022. 348 of these deaths were caused by electrocution followed by train accidents (80), poaching (41) and poisoning (25).

Outlining various initiatives to protect elephants, the minister said that the centre had requested states and power transmission agencies to take steps to ensure that transmission lines were at adequate height from the ground to minimise the risk of electrocution. He pointed out that a joint advisory from the environment and railway

ministries issued 12 years ago had suggested measures to minimise the risk of elephants being hit by trains. Guidelines issued six years ago prescribe measures such as underpasses of adequate height for elephants to cross railway lines.

A wildlife expert said that while 494 deaths over a five-year period appeared to be a fraction of India's estimated population of nearly 30,000 wild elephants, such deaths could disrupt herd dynamics and further enhance the risk of human-elephant conflicts. Studies have also revealed that 30% of the country's wild elephants live in large and contiguous forests, while the rest are distributed across fragmented landscapes that have shrunk amid growing human activities, including cultivation. With the expansion of cultivated land along forest boundaries, experts say, elephants are increasingly being drawn to forage for crops such as maize, millets, paddy, sugarcane, and vegetables.

Source: Shivani Kava. 'Electrocution continues to be the major cause of elephant deaths in India', [www.thenewsminute.com](http://www.thenewsminute.com), 26/12/2022.  
GS Mudur. '494 elephants killed in five years: Centre', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 20/12/2022.

### **Centre considers Schedule-I status for IUCN critically endangered species**

The Centre is considering the inclusion of all 73 species listed as 'critically endangered' (CR) in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List in the Schedule-I of Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 (WLPA). The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change has also proposed that endangered species be included in various appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora.

The information was provided by the Union minister of state for environment, forest & climate change, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, in response to a question in the matter in the Rajya Sabha on 22 December 2022. Citing a report of the IUCN he said that 73 species in India are listed as CR. Their number in 2011 was 47.

The 73 species include nine species of mammals, 18 birds, 26 reptiles and 20 amphibians. Of the 26 reptile species, five are endemic to India including Island pit viper whose habitat is limited to a single location on the Car Nicobar Island. Among amphibians, several species are limited to habitats in the Western Ghats, the northeast, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

This information is critical in view of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework which was adopted at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in December 2022. Under the deal, 196 members countries agreed to protect 30% of the world for nature by 2030, reduce environmentally harmful subsidies by at least \$500 billion a year, and restore at least 30% (by area) of degraded ecosystems.

However, experts said that most of India's biodiversity is outside protected areas (PAs). They pointed out that only a fraction (~15%) of high priority biodiversity and conservation potential areas are encompassed under India's extant PA network which effectively covers 5% of India. And, to achieve a coverage of 30% of our land and water under biodiversity-friendly management we have to re-imagine conservation beyond the conventional PA approaches.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. '73 species critically endangered in India, says Centre in Rajya Sabha', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 26/12/2022.



## SOUTH ASIA

### NEPAL

#### Sixteen elephants and 56 people die in a decade in Jhapa

At least 56 people and 16 wild elephants have died in incidents of human-elephant conflict in a period of 10 years in Jhapa district. The incident occurred mainly

when the victims were collecting wild roots, fodder and firewood in forests.

The latest victim was the person from Barhadashi Rural Municipality-1; he was returning home after collecting firewood in the nearby forest.

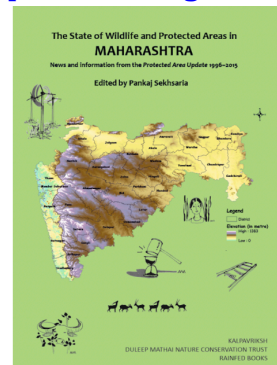
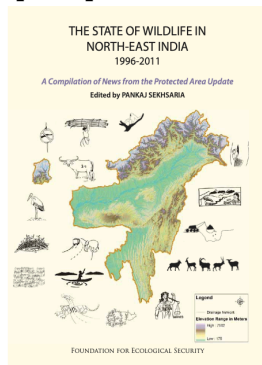
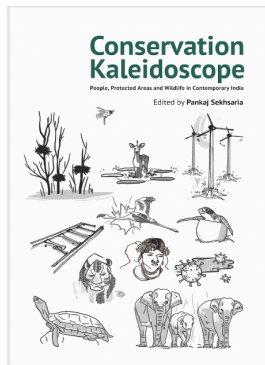
Source: '56 people killed in wild elephant attacks in 10 years', [www.english.khabarhub.com](http://www.english.khabarhub.com), 22/12/2022.

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## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### Potentially new species of wren babbler discovered in Mugaphi Peak area

A potentially new species of wren babbler now named the 'Lisu wren babbler' has been described from the Mugaphi peak region of north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The bird was recorded in March 2022 by a group of bird watchers from Bengaluru, Chennai, and Thiruvananthapuram and their two guides as they were looking for the Grey-bellied wren babbler in the region.

The Grey-bellied wren babbler is mostly found in Myanmar with some birds occurring in adjoining China and Thailand. There has been only one previous report of this bird from India when two specimens were collected from Arunachal Pradesh back in 1988. One of the specimens is now in the Smithsonian Museum in the United States of America.

The team did see the birds that were believed to be Grey-bellied wren babbler; however, their song was quite unlike the trilling song of this babbler. They managed to take some pictures, videos and recorded these songs. A comparison of this data with the available specimen, recordings and photos of the Grey-bellied wren babbler as well as other known species of babbler revealed that this may be a new species or at least a new subspecies.

Their findings were published recently in *Indian Birds*, a peer-reviewed journal of South Asian ornithology.

Source: 'A new song bird in Arunachal Pradesh sighted', [www.arunachal24.in](http://www.arunachal24.in), 09/12/2022. 'Birdwatchers discover new song bird', [www.nagalandpost.com](http://www.nagalandpost.com), 10/12/2022.

### GUJARAT

#### No vultures sighted in Ahmedabad city; nesting sites gone as well



No vultures were sighted in Ahmedabad city in a recently concluded vulture census. Nesting sites in areas like Indian Institute of Management (IIMA), Cantonment, LD College of

Engineering, Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association (ATIRA) and Gujarat College have also gone.

The two-day 'Vulture Population Estimation – 2022' exercise was conducted by the Gujarat Forest Department in collaboration with the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation and other NGOs. The census is conducted every four years.

About 15 years ago, Ahmedabad district had 254 vultures including the white-rumped, Indian and the Egyptian vulture. But the recent census recorded only 21 vultures of resident species and three cinereous vultures (migratory species) in the district near a panjrapol in Viramgam. The Jivdaya Trust that was part of the census exercise in Ahmedabad, confirmed that the city does not have any white-rumped vultures.

According to the scholars who have been studying vultures, lack of food and global warming have contributed to the dwindling in numbers of the vulture population. Construction and development work have also led to the decline. They also attributed the drop in vulture population to the extensive use of drugs like diclofenac, nimesulide, ketoprofen



and aceclofenac. While the government had banned 10 ml and 30 ml vials of diclofenac in 2016, these are still available as 1 ml and 3 ml vials.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Culture shock: Ahmedabad city loses all its vultures', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 15/12/2022.

## MAHARASHTRA

### Two sarus cranes electrocuted in Gondia

A breeding pair of sarus cranes died due to electrocution at Kamtha in Gondia district. The birds were found dead below a power line passing over a farm. The site was then visited on November 22nd by senior forest officials from Gondia forest range and engineers from the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd.

While such incidents would go unnoticed earlier, more attention is being paid now after the Nagpur bench of Bombay high court took *suo motu* cognizance of the plight of the cranes. Electrocution and pesticides are the two major threats to the bird in the region.

Gondia and Bhandara are the only two districts where the species is found in Maharashtra. This year's estimation has recorded sarus crane population here to be 34 birds. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXVII, No. 4)

Source: 'Two sarus cranes die of electrocution', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 23/11/2022.

## MANIPUR

### Greater scaup sighted in Loktak after 90 years

Greater scaup, locally known as *sadangman*, was recently sighted in Loktak Lake in Bishnupur district after a gap of over 90 years.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh took to Facebook to inform about the sighting. 26 individuals of the medium-sized diving duck were sighted by ornithologist Kumam Jugeswor and members of the Wildlife Explorers, Manipur on January 13.

While there is no record of the species roosting widely in Manipur during the British period, there are records of Captain L Gamble of Gurkha Rifles and Indian Civil Service officer JP Mills shooting the ducks of this species on January 25, 1925, and in December 1927, respectively.

Source: Jimmy Leivon. 'Rare species of duck sighted in Manipur's Loktak lake after over 90 years', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 17/01/2023.

## TELANGANA

### Encroachments threaten Ameenpur Lake in Hyderabad



Once sprawling across 300 acres of land, Ameenpur lake in Hyderabad has now shrunk to just 93 acres. According to the latest data from the Telangana State Pollution Control Board, there are around 900 encroachments identified on the lake.

Retired principal chief conservator of forests of Uttar Pradesh, Koli Praveen Rao during his recent presentation on the importance of wetland conservation at a workshop organised by Telangana State Biodiversity Board, cited Ameenpur as a big victim of catchment degradation due to

encroachments. He pointed out that the encroachments spread over around 210 acres in the catchment area were regularised and the spread of the lake now was only 93 acres. Satellite imagery displayed during the presentation showed the rapid decline of the water body from 1985 to 2022.

Activists and nature lovers said that a private road had been built dividing the lake into two parts and adversely affecting the bird population here. Experts note that a large chunk of these encroachments will have to be removed to ensure that the surplus water doesn't flood the residences built on its full tank level.

The 440-year-old man-made lake surrounded by beautiful rock formations was declared as Telangana's first water body to be recognised as a Biodiversity Heritage Site.

Source: Ujwal Bommakanti. 'Bird's Paradise Lost in Hyderabad, Squatters Usurp Shangri-La', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 09/12/2022.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### Fall in migratory bird numbers at Soor Sarovar WLS

The latest Asian Water Bird Census 2023 (AWC) revealed a fall in the number of migrant birds visiting the Soor Sarovar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) While Great white pelicans and Dalmatian pelicans were both seen at Soor Sarovar WLS this season, their combined number was only 32 compared to 442 recorded last season. There was a decline in the number of species recorded as well - 55 this time as compared to 60 last year.

The count was carried out here on 14 January in collaboration with the National Chambal Sanctuary Project, Uttar Pradesh Wildlife Department and conservation support from the Biodiversity Research & Development Society, Agra. Volunteers of Dr. BR Ambedkar University of Agra, Wildlife SOS in Agra and sanctuary wildlife staff also participated.

Source: Hemendra Chaturvedi. 'Lesser bird diversity at Soor Sarovar this year', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 15/01/2023.





## **The Forest Rights Act, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation**

### **HIMACHAL PRADESH**

#### **Demand for public consultation, implementation of FRA in the Great Himalayan National Park**

The Banjar, Kullu based Himalaya Niti Abhiyan (HNA) has expressed concerns over the proposal and process regarding the declaration of the Great Himalayan National Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS). The concerns were highlighted in a recent letter by the HNA to the Director of IUCN's World Heritage Program. The letter has demanded that:

- 1) There should be a public consultation and public hearing before any process is initiated for the declaration of a WHS
- 2) The Forest Rights Act (FRA) should be implemented first and all forest and Nistar Rights of the local people be duly recognised.
- 3) The socio-cultural rights and access that people have to sites inside the national park should be recognised.
- 4) The park should be a 'people managed national park' and the power to manage, develop, and regulate should lie with the locals under the provisions of the FRA.

Source: Guman Singh. Letter to The Director, World Heritage Program, IUCN, 30/11/12.

### **MAHARASHTRA**

#### **Implementation of FRA in TATR**

A buffer area comprising of 1101.99 sq km was notified for the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in August 2012. In May 2010, 625.82 sq km was declared as 'Critical Tiger habitat, raising the need for an additional buffer. A recent visit to villages in the buffer zone brought out interesting facts. Firstly, most of the 89 villages that fall within the newly formed buffer, did not know of the notification. Villages like Mamla, Vaygaon, Nimbada Chak and Walni were emphatic

about their unwillingness to be included in the buffer area (the unwillingness was endorsed by the gram sabha); others like Mohadi, Jamsala, Wasera, Singadzari were not even aware of the mandatory consultations that the forest department is supposed to organize.

In response to a RTI query the TATR field office has provided resolutions of 12 gram panchayats, all indicating unwillingness to be included in the buffer area in 2008. Yet, the buffer area notified in 2012. It was also found out that in 2008 the range forest officer (RFO) in Chichpalli had held consultations with villages like Pahami, Zari and Peth to find out if the villagers were willing for relocations after the area was declared as buffer. The villagers had rejected the proposition.

There is also considerable confusion about the applicability of the FRA in the reserve as well as in the buffer area. The tribal development department, which is mainly responsible for disseminating information on rights under FRA, reportedly, conducted only a few workshops in the region. This has resulted in filing of only a small number of individual claims and even fewer community claims by the villages in the buffer area. Most of these claims too have not yet been accepted.

Officials of the TATR have also mentioned that all the claims of the five villages located inside the reserve were settled, and FRA is not applicable for these villages as the area has already been declared as 'involute'. Due to this misinformation, individual as well as community claims are almost absent from the villages like Palasgaon and Kolsa. Two villages, Navegaon and Jamni, are ready to be moved out, and hence they have not shown much interest in registering their claims under FRA. Only Rantalodhi village has gone ahead and used the provisions to put in their claims, though there is no progress in the long process of acceptance of these claims.

Source: Note from Rucha Ghatge.

Email: ruchaghatge@gmail.com

## **PERSPECTIVE**

### **Large-scale tree-planting cannot be the core climate policy**

Every passing year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) brings sobering news. The IPCC's most recent report notes ominously that the world is on track to over three degrees of warming by the end of the century, unless countries take radical action. As public awareness has grown, there has been a shift in the goal from zero-emissions to net-zero emissions. Much of these **net**-zero claims are pegged on the promise of sequestering emitted carbon from the atmosphere, primarily by planting trees.

At first, large tree-planting seems a win-win: carbon will be sequestered and communities receive more local ecosystem services such as shade, flood control, and non-timber forest products. So attractive is the idea that governments, NGOs, and firms around the world are competing to outdo each other's tree-planting promises. Organizations like the World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and World Economic Forum have pledged to plant billions of trees. Private companies like the Adani group too have pledged to grow 100 million trees. State governments in India are competing to see who can plant more trees, often in very theatrical ways. The Uttar Pradesh government's 2016 campaign to plant 44 million trees in one day was soon followed by the Madhya Pradesh's commitment to plant over 66 million trees.

Can such large-scale tree-planting initiatives really work? The answer is complicated, and clues are available from India's own Compensatory Afforestation (CA) scheme, the world's largest and oldest ecological offset program. First, much of the funds collected for CA are not being spent. This is partly an issue of government sluggishness, but it also reflects the problem of finding land. Land is a scarce resource, and lands suitable for planting trees

scarcer still. Second, having visited many plantations across the country, I find that even in the best cases, a plantation is a far cry from a natural growth forest. Ecosystem restoration is both a science and an art, requiring intense care and attention that is not easily replicable at the large scale. Third, planting trees to offset some far-off environmental harm, ties the trees to those institutions, rather than the communities who live and rely on the forests, and could potentially steward the forests.

If carbon sequestration is the reason that brings more attention and funds to forest management, that does seem like a win-win. But afforestation and reforestation activities cannot realistically keep pace with these ever-increasing net-zero pledges, with potentially harmful effects on ecosystems and communities. If tree-planting becomes the excuse to continue emitting greenhouse gases elsewhere, we may well be in a lose-lose scenario.

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