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EDITORIAL

Doomed to fail The cheetah reintroduction project

There can be no other way of saying this - the last year and a half has seen the playing out of one big farce in the name of wildlife conservation in India. Many reasons were given justifying re-introduction of the cheetah in India - one argued for the return of lost glory, another was the apex predator logic - bringing the cheetah back would help conserve grasslands and everything else with it. These were flawed to begin with and many had argued that this re-introduction would be an exercise in futility.

If only someone had listened to the many voices of sanity, much heart burn and wastage of precious resources could have been avoided. That a large number of the imported animals should be gone in just a few months shows how under-prepared the system was for the project. That the latest deaths should happen because of infection under the collars of the animals shows how even the basic science was not in place.

There was much fanfare when the cheetahs first came in with those at the very top taking claim for a 'path-breaking' initiative. Much chest thumping was seen in the media in a process where optics clearly overtook content. Many have even called the cheetah re-introduction a vanity project that had no conservation value in the country.

The *PA Update* had itself made this point more than a decade ago. This is what the editorial of the October 2009 issue had to say about the idea of bringing the cheetah back:

"Rather than spending huge amounts of time, human resources, energy and money towards an 'esoteric' bringing back of the 'dead' the effort has to be concentrated on preventing it happening again – with other species. That would be a far more worthwhile and valuable endeavour.

We can't undo the extinctions we have caused already. Let the fate of cheetah be a grim pointer to that reality."

Saying we told you so in such a situation is not a pleasant thing to do because nothing is gained by that. But the fact is that we and many others did indeed warn of this. Those who pushed for bringing back the cheetah against all logic should stand up now and take responsibility.

There is also a larger problem that this episode points to: translocations in wildlife conservation be it of deer, tigers, elephants, trees or of coral reefs is gaining rapid prominence and acceptance in policy circles. If conservation is successful there should not be a need for relocation in the first place. That this is becoming a default option points to a much deeper problem and one that should raise concern. We have a situation now in many cases in fact where infrastructure and other large projects in rich and sensitive biodiversity hotspots are justified by invoking translocation and other mitigation measures. It is just another version of the 'fence that ate up the crop'.

The cheetah became extinct in India many years ago. What we are seeing now is a repeat of that history and there is nothing at all to be proud of here. Maybe the drama can stop now and we can return to more meaningful and more sensible things in the battle for conservation that we are losing fast anyway.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

BIHAR

Two Gangetic dolphin deaths at Sangat Ghat in Patna district

Two Gangetic dolphins were found dead at Sangat Ghat near Mokama in Patna district within a time span of 72 hours in the last week of May.

According to local people, the first dolphin killed was about eight feet long and weighed 80 kg, informed Gopal Sharma, a

senior scientist and joint director, Zoological Survey of India, Bihar and Jharkhand. Some locals had thrown this carcass into the river, fearing punishment as the dolphin is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The forest department was unable to recover the carcass.

Both the animals are reported to have been killed due to the ongoing mechanised dredging to deepen the riverbed. However, additional principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), said that the cause of death could be confirmed only after the post-mortem. The FD has sent the carcass of the 2nd animal for a post-mortem.

Source: Mohd Imran Khan. 'Two Gangetic dolphins found dead in Bihar in the last 3 days,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 30/05/2023.

CHHATTISGARH

Hasdeo Aranya's Tara coal block withdrawn from commercial mining auction process.

The Tara coal block in the Hasdeo Aranya forest area in Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district has been withdrawn from the commercial mining auction process. This follows the objection to the mining by the state government on multiple grounds including the fact that the block has 15.96 sq km of very dense forest with a forest cover of 81%. A notice of the withdrawal from auction was issued by the Union coal ministry on July 28.

On June 23, the Chhattisgarh government had written to the ministry to refrain nine coal blocks out of the 23 coal blocks (in Chhattisgarh) from the auction for commercial mining citing environmental reasons. Tara was the only block from Chhattisgarh which had received bidders according to the list issued by the coal ministry on June 28. The bidders of the Tara coal block were the Gujarat Mineral Development

Corporation, Jindal Steel and Power Limited and Raigarh Natural Resources Limited.

The Chhattisgarh assembly, had on 26 July 2022 passed a resolution to oppose mining in the entire Hasdeo forest area.

Sudiep Shrivastava, a Chhattisgarh-based advocate who is also main litigant against mining in Hasdeo Aranya No-Go Area said, "The withdrawal was very important for the biodiversity of Hasdeo Aranya as around 10 lakh trees were there in this block which is densely forested. Centre's policy of auction also says that it avoids mining if blocks have more than 30% forest cover and in Tara it was 81%."

Activists also lauded the State government's efforts in the withdrawal of the Tara coal block. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, Nos. 6, 5 & 4 and Vol. XVIII, No. 5).

Source: Ritesh Mishra. 'Hasdeo Aranya's Tara coal block withdrawn from commercial mining auction process', www.hindustantimes.com, 01/08/2023.

Chhattisgarh uses AI-based App to curb the human-elephant conflict

Chhattisgarh has launched an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based App to track the movements of elephants and alert villagers. The App receives inputs from the elephant trackers who are residents of the affected villages. They have been engaged by the forest department for the purpose.

The trial of the App was conducted in the Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve and evoked a successful response, informed a forest official in Chhattisgarh.

Source: Hrusikesh Mohanty. 'Elephants killed 6 people in Odisha last week,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 12/06/2023.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Increase in Himalayan brown bear sightings in human habitations



A Himalayan brown bear was captured by the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Department on May 13, at Rajwara in Handwara, days after it was found wrecking graveyards. It was, reportedly, in search of human cadavers to eat. The animal also roamed residential areas.

More such incidents have been reported from villages such as Behnipora, Budshungi and Shatigam, making residents fear that more than one bear might be out there looking for food. The villagers have been taking turns to guard their cemeteries after dusk. Wildlife conservationists in Kashmir have noted increasing sightings of the brown bear in the last two to three years in the hills of Sonamarg, Drass, Kupwara, Pahalgam, the Pir Panjal range and Gurez in the Bandipora district.

One explanation for the bears' behaviour is the insufficient food in their habitats. Last year, a study carried out by Wildlife SOS, a New Delhi-based non-government organisation, revealed that 75% of food items in the Himalayan brown bear's diet in Kashmir was scavenged from garbage including plastic carry bags, milk powder, chocolate wrappers and biryani. The normal food of brown bears is insects, small crustaceans, alpine bulbs, roots of plants, shoots of young grasses, domestic goats, sheep, and voles.

The survey was conducted in areas which included Thajwas (Baltal) Wildlife Sanctuary, Sonamarg, Laxpathri and Sarbal villages since they are critical bear habitats and prime tourist destinations. Sonamarg in particular was chosen due to its role as a bear habitat extending up to the Zoji La Pass that connects Srinagar with Leh, stated the study.

Himalayan brown bears are found in various parts of the subcontinent, including Pakistan, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. Threatened by habitat destruction their population has been steadily declining in the past century with the estimated population in India now being 500-750. In India, brown bears are found in 23 protected areas in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, and the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

According to a study carried out in the western Himalayas by scientists of the Zoological Survey of India in 2020, there will be a decline of about 73 per cent of the bear's habitat by 2050. The increasing incidents of conflict between Himalayan brown bear with people in Kashmir are reported to have been supporting this study.

Source: Riyaz Wani. 'Encroachment pushes Himalayan brown bears into Kashmir's villages,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 31/05/2023.

KARNATAKA

RTI reply reveals extent of encroachment of forests in Karnataka; PIL in HC

Thousands of acres of forest have been lost to encroachments in Karnataka in the past 43 years with no appropriate action taken by the government officials, claimed a public interest litigation (PIL) filed with the Karnataka High Court on June 26, 2023. The PIL was supported by information gained from a right to information (RTI) query to back the claim.

The RTI which was filed by Gireesh Achar had asked for the number of cases

disposed and action taken on forest encroachments since 1980 under the relevant sections of the Karnataka Forest Act 1963. It also asked about the number of first information reports (FIRs) and chargesheets filed in the 29 ranges under jurisdiction against the encroachment of forests. The query evoked responses from 12 range forest officers (RFOs) revealing that 2,212 FIRs and 130 chargesheets had been filed so far. An area of 204,229.762 acres of forest was lost to encroachment while another 104,065.96 acres of land were illegally granted by the State, revealed the RTI reply.

Virendra Patil, the petitioner's lawyer, said that since 1980 only 5% of chargesheets have been filed by all RFOs in their tenure who also permitted the use of forest land for non-forest purpose. He pointed out that no record of the non-cognisable report has been maintained by the forest department.

The PIL appealed that all RFOs of the State be directed to file chargesheets within the prescribed period. It also requested concerned officers to take disciplinary action against the forest officials who failed to discharge their duties by not filing chargesheets within the prescribed period fixed by law. Further, it requested to upload FIRs online according to the directives of the Supreme Court, register cases for violations against the spirit of the Forest Conservation Act 1980 and ensure survival of existing saplings planted before more plantation is taken up to save taxpayers' money.

Source: Himanshu Nitnaware. 'Karnataka Forest Department has filed just 130 chargesheets on forest encroachment since 1980: RTI,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 02/07/2023.

MADHYA PRADESH

Seventh TR in MP comprising Nauradehi and Durgavati WLSs

Madhya Pradesh is poised to get its seventh tiger reserve (TR). To be called the Durgavati

TR it will include the Nauradehi and Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs). To be located about 20 km from Bhopal the reserve will be spread over an area of 2,339 sq km and straddle three districts — Narsinghpur, Sagar, and Damoh.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) granted preliminary approval for the creation of this new reserve during a recent meeting of its technical committee, confirmed JS Chouhan, Madhya Pradesh's chief wildlife warden. Establishment of this reserve is a crucial requirement for the approval for Ken-Betwa River linking project.

Source: P Naveen. 'Nauradehi to get tiger reserve tag, seventh in Madhya Pradesh', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/06/2023.

FD reintroducing gaur to Sanjay Dubri TR; 28 already translocated from Kanha

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) is reintroducing 50 gaurs to the Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (TR) without any help from external wildlife experts. 35 of these will be moved from Kanha TR, while the remaining will come from the Satpura TR. Gaurs were last spotted in Sanjay Dubri TR in 1997-98.

The first batch of 28 gaurs was translocated from Kanha TR in the first week of June. After completing a 15-day acclimatisation and observation period in an enclosed 30 ha area, they were released into the wild on June 23, said Amit Dubey, field director of Sanjay Dubri TR. A few of the 28 gaurs have been tagged with very high frequency (VHF) collars while others have been fitted with colour bands. They will be monitored over the next few months until they establish themselves in the forest.

MP's chief wildlife warden JS Chouhan said that the State has been trying to reintroduce the species in areas where they have gone extinct, but progress has been slow. The translocation to Sanjay Dubri TR comes

11 years after the first such exercise for 50 gaurs was undertaken from Kanha TR to Bandhavgarh National Park (NP) in 2012 with assistance from South African experts. Since then, Bandhavgarh NP has seen its gaur population grow to approximately 170.

Chouhan said that translocation of gaur to Sanjay Dubri is an important step in the capacity building of forest officials for the reintroduction of animals, especially large herbivores. He added that this effort could reap benefits in neighbouring Chhattisgarh as well as these forests are contiguous to those of the Guru Ghasidas NP in neighbouring Chhattisgarh.

Source: Iram Siddique. 'Gaurs make grand return to Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve after 25 yrs. It's a 'Made in MP' feat,' www.theprint.in, 23/06/2023.

Workshop on wildlife corridor conservation

The Madhya Pradesh (MP) Forest Department (FD) and the Coalition for Wildlife Corridors organised a recent workshop on wildlife corridor conservation planning. Held over two days in the month of June in Pachmarhi, the workshop was attended by representatives from various agencies and was focused on two significant corridors – Satpura-Pench and Satpura-Melghat. These corridors, stretching across vast expanses, connect protected areas in MP and Maharashtra.

Those participating represented the FD, 13 conservation NGOs and other government agencies such as the National Highways Authority of India, Western Coalfields, the agriculture department, and the tribal welfare department

Source: P Naveen. 'Madhya Pradesh forest department and Coalition for Wildlife Corridors unite to address corridor conservation challenges,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 09/06/2023.

MAHARASHTRA

Villager dies in tiger attack; forest staff attacked by villagers in Bhandara district

An assistant conservator of forest (ACF) and two forest guards were seriously injured on June 28 after a group of residents attacked them in Khatkheda village. This followed the killing by a tiger of a 52-year-old man in the village in Paoni tehsil of Bhandara district. The forest staff had reached the village in order to capture the tiger which had attacked the villager. This being the second incident in one week, villagers were angry. They attacked the ACF and the guards. The injured were taken to a hospital in Nagpur.

The tiger was later tranquilised and sent to the Gorewada Rescue Centre.

Source: 'Maha: After tiger kills villager, angry locals attack forest official, two guards; trio hospitalised,' www.newindianexpress.com, 29/06/2023.

'पवनी तालुक्यात वाघाने घेतला आणखी एक बळी; संतप्त जमावाचा वनरक्षकावर हल्ला,' www.loksatta.com, 28/06/2023.

Olive Ridley turtle tagged in Ratnagiri swims to Sri Lanka

One of the Olive Ridley turtles, named Bageshri, who was satellite-tagged in Ratnagiri's Guhagar beach on 23 February earlier this year was reported off the waters of Sri Lanka in the first week of July. She was one of two (the other was named Guha) that were fixed with transmitters by a team comprising the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Mangrove Foundation, and the Maharashtra Forest Department's Ratnagiri division in February.

The Maharashtra coast has sporadic nesting of Olive Ridley turtles. Till now Olive Ridley turtles have been tagged only on the east coast of India. This is the first satellite tagging project of Olive Ridley turtles on the Western coast of India. This study is expected

to help understand its movement, migration patterns, and the population (See detailed timeline below).

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav. 'Maharashtra: Ratnagiri se Kanyakumari in just four months,' www.mid-day.com, 18/06/2023.

‘गुहागरचे ऑलिव्ह रिडले कासव पोहोचले थेट श्रीलंकेत; उपग्रह टॅग केलेल्या ‘बागेश्री’चा अवघ्या चार महिन्यातला थक्क करणारा प्रवास,’ www.loksatta.com, ०६.०७.२०२३.

Satellite tagging for monitoring Olive Ridley turtles nesting on the beaches of Maharashtra

A Timeline

October 2020

The governing body of the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra, an autonomous body of the State government, approved Rs. 9.87 lakh for the satellite-tagging of Olive Ridley turtles that visit the State coast for nesting. The project is to be carried out with the help from scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

January 2022

Two female Olive Ridley turtles named Prathama and Savani were satellite-tagged at Velas and Anjarle beaches respectively. They were released back into the ocean from their respective beaches. Both these beaches are in northern Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra.

February 2022

Three more Olive Ridley turtles, named Vanashree, Rewa and Laxmi, were satellite-tagged and released from the Guhagar beach in Ratnagiri district.

Prathama, who was tagged in January, travelled 75 km south of the coast, and then towards Gujarat waters while Savani remained in shallow waters closer to the shore. Further, Savani is reported to have nested on Anjarle beach for the second or possibly third time in the same nesting season.

April 2022

Prathama's location was recorded at 65 km from the Diu coast; she had moved a straight-line distance of 330 km northwest of Velas beach since she was released. Savani was

located at about 90 km from the Maharashtra coast while Vanashree continued to move south along the coast and was located at about 25 km from the Ambolgad beach in Ratnagiri district. Rewa crossed Goa and entered the waters of Karnataka. She was located 40 km offshore of Karwar.

May 2022

Prathama was spotted at 80 km distance from Velas beach. She was reported to have returned to near her nesting beach of Velas.

Dr. R Suresh Kumar, senior scientist from the WII, said that this was not the anticipated trajectory for Prathama. The initial hypothesis was that these solitary nesting turtles will move into the deep sea to return now and then. However, all the tagged turtles remained within the continental shelf.

August 2022

Only one of the five satellite-tagged turtles, Vanashree, remained in contact. Radio-contact with the other four turtles named Prathama, Savani, Rewa and Laxmi was lost. According to an official at the Mangrove Foundation, transmitters attached to the turtles were lost.

February 2023

Two more female Olive Ridley turtles were satellite tagged at Guhagar beach in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. They were named Bageshri and Guha.

June 2023

Guha was located offshore from the coast of Karnataka and was reported to have been

moving south while Bageshri travelled even further down south, and reached near Lakshadweep waters.

July 2023

Bageshri was reported off the waters of Sri Lanka in the first week of July.

Source:

‘गुहागरचे ऑलिव्ह रिडले कासव पोहोचले थेट श्रीलंकेत; उपग्रह टॅग केलेल्या ‘बागेश्री’चा अवघ्या चार महिन्यातला थक्क करणारा प्रवास,’ www.loksatta.com, 06/07/2023.

Ranjeet Jadhav. ‘Maharashtra: Ratnagiri se Kanyakumari in just four months,’ www.mid-day.com, 18/06/2023.

Sandeep Bodwe. ‘अॅटिनावाले कासव पोहोचले लक्षद्वीप समुद्रात, दुसऱ्या कासवाचा वेग मंदावला,’ www.lokmat.com 15/06/2023

Vijay Singh. ‘Two more Olive Ridley turtles satellite tagged in Ratnagiri,’ timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 23/02/2023.

Arun Adiwarekar. ‘सॅटेलाईट टॅगिंग केलेले वनश्री कासव संपर्कात, सहा महिन्यांपूर्वी सोडले होते समुद्रात,’ www.lokmat.com, 23/08/2022.

Sanjana Bhalerao. ‘Maharashtra: First Olive Ridley turtle satellite-tagged on state

coast returns near nesting beach,’ indianexpress.com, 18/05/2022.

Ranjeet Jadhav. ‘Tagged turtles reach Gujarat, Karnataka from Maharashtra,’ www.mid-day.com, 08/04/2022.

‘Maharashtra’s 1st satellite-tagged Olive Ridley turtle swims 250 km from state, may soon enter Gujarat waters,’ indianexpress.com, 25/03/2022.

Sanjana Bhalerao. ‘Maharashtra: Tagged turtle returns to lay eggs; confirms nesting behaviour,’ indianexpress.com, 26/02/2022.

Sanjana Bhalerao. ‘Satellite tagging of 5 female Olive Ridley turtles from Maharashtra coastline concludes,’ indianexpress.com, 17/02/2022.

Prayag Arora-Desai. ‘Three more Olive Ridley turtles satellite tagged in Maharashtra’s Ratnagiri,’ www.hindustantimes.com, 16/02/2022.

Sanjana Bhalerao. ‘Rs 9.87 lakh project: Maharashtra govt nod for satellite tagging of Olive Ridley turtles along state coast,’ indianexpress.com, 28/10/2020.



ODISHA

Forest personnel get immunity to use firearms

The Odisha government recently granted immunity to forest personnel for firearm use under section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). Odisha is the fourth state in the country to do so after Assam, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

All forest field staff of the state will get protection from arrest and criminal proceedings unless a magisterial investigation finds the misuse of immunity.

Source: Govt. of Odisha notification No. FE-WL-WLF-0015-2023/13915/F&ACC, dated 05/07/2023.

Email by CR Bijoy, 05/07/2023.

3rd consecutive year of successful breeding of gharial at Satkosia Gorge

Forest officials, on May 25, 2023, spotted around 35 hatchlings of gharial at the Satkosia Gorge in the Mahanadi River in Angul district. This, reportedly, is the third consecutive year of successful breeding of gharial in the river (*PA Update XXVII*, No. 4). The gorge, a designated Ramsar site, is a narrow stretch of the river approximately 22 km in length and is located within the Satkosia Tiger Reserve.

In the last two years, the hatchlings were spotted at a nesting site at Baladamara, close to Tikarpada in the Satkosia Wildlife Division. The hatchlings were sighted via CCTV at the same breeding site as last year. The forest department (FD) has been monitoring the activities of the juveniles round the clock and forest personnel are also patrolling the area at night. The FD has also launched an awareness drive in over 300 villages across five districts - Boudh, Angul, Cuttack, Sonapur and Nayagarh.

On May 22, 2021, 28 gharial hatchlings were spotted at the gorge, reportedly for the first time after a gap of

several years. In 2022, 32 hatchlings were seen on May 11. A fisherman was also reported to have found a juvenile gharial captured in a fishing net at Narasinghapur. On March 5, 2022, forest officials also rescued a 3.35 m gharial near the Puri canal near Hansapal on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar.

According to a senior forest official, the successful breeding of gharial in its natural habitat was attributed to the strict prohibition of fishing around 9 km downstream of the river since 2019; only the fishermen of Tikarpada are allowed to fish using hooks.

Source: Hrusikesh Mohanty. 'Odisha: Gharial hatchlings spotted three years in a row, 35 seen this time', www.downtoearth.org.in, 29/05/2023.

Six human deaths in a week in June in conflict with elephants

At least six persons were killed in human elephant conflict incidents in different parts of Odisha in six days from June 5 to 10. As many as 996 people have been killed in the State in a decade from 2013 to 2023. During the same period, 794 elephants died in the State.

In 2022-23, 150 people died in conflict in Odisha while the number of casualties were 139 in 2020-21, 117 in 2019-20, 113 in 2021-22 and 105 in 2017-18. This year at least 25 people have died between April and June in incidents with elephants. On the other hand, 93 elephants died in 2018-19, while the number for 2022-23 was 92.

Of the total 794 elephant deaths in the last decade, 38 were due to poaching, three by poisoning, 117 by electrocution, 22 in train accidents, six in road accidents, 140 in other accidents like infighting, falling from hills etc., and 281 due to diseases. While 93 died a natural death, the reasons for the death of the others were unknown. Angul and Dhenkanal districts, where mining and quarrying activities are high, have reported the highest number of human casualties, said Biswajit Mohanty,

secretary of the Wildlife Society of Odisha, a non-profit.

Changing human attitude towards elephants will help to reduce human elephant conflict. Instead of teasing the herds, local people should help them pass through the villages peacefully said Jitshatru Mohanty, the trustee of Elephant Foundation Trust and a retired senior forest officer.

Odisha chief secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena had recently directed the forest department (FD) to evolve a mechanism for issuing an early warning system to alert the villagers and thereby reduce human animal conflict as well as casualties. Around 170 anti-depredation squads have been engaged to track elephants in the state. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 5, 3 & 2 and Vol. XVII, Nos. 4 & 3).

Source: Hrusikesh Mohanty. 'Elephants killed 6 people in Odisha last week,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 12/06/2023.

Forest staff refuse patrolling over forester's killing by poachers in Similipal

Members of the Odisha Non-Gazette Forest Services Association organised a symbolic protest over the killing of forester Mati Hansda, who had been shot dead by poachers on June 16 in Karanjia of Mayurbhanj district. The police force was called out to patrol the Similipal forests on account of this cease-work protest involving nearly 600 forest staff.

Hansda had been killed when poachers fired upon a team of forest officials that had intercepted the poachers in the Karanjia forests. This is the 2nd such death in Similipal in recent months. Another forest guard had been similarly shot by poachers in the month of May (See *PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 2).

Source: Mrunal Manmay Dash. 'Cease-work protest by forest protection assistants: Police personnel deployed to patrol Similipal,' www.odishatv.in, 03/07/2023.

State approves modernisation plan for Nandankanan Zoo

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, on June 23, approved a proposal by the forest department (FD) to transform the Nandankanan Zoo into a modern facility. The zoo will have a modern frontage and landscaping, a tunnel aquarium, a water bird aviary, and immersive enclosures. The project will be completed in two phases; the first phase by 2025, and the second by 2028. While the zoo and the botanical garden will be developed in the first stage, Chudanga forest will be developed in the second phase which will include the night safari and the safari complex.

At present, there are a total of 4,012 animals of 161 species in the zoo. After the transformation, the FD is planning to bring in more animals from different parts of the country and the world including Hoolock gibbon, Pig-tailed macaque, Asian rhino, cassowary, kangaroo and wallaby.

Source: Mrunal Manmay Dash. 'Nandankanan Zoo to get world-class facilities including tunnel aquarium,' www.odishatv.in, 23/06/2023.

New State scheme to work in parallel and strengthen FRA implementation

The Odisha government, on July 3, announced the launch of a scheme to strengthen forest rights among tribals and forest dwellers across the State. The scheme named *Mo Jungle Jami Yojana* is aimed to function in parallel with The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA).

The scheme aims to ensure livelihood and food security for the scheduled tribes and forest dwelling population. The implementation of the scheme will provide ownership of land and access to forest resources to the beneficiaries according to their entitlement and join them with mainstream development programmes of the government.

All eligible claimants — mainly single women and particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) will receive land titles. Under the scheme, all unsurveyed forest and zero area villages will be converted into revenue villages, thus enabling all households access to water supplies, road connectivity, schools and healthcare.

The scheme would be entirely funded by the State government for which an allocation of Rs 26 crore was made during the budget of 2023-24. The State would also establish Forest Rights Cells across the districts for periodic assessment, monitoring and review of the scheme. The scheme aims at bridging the gaps and addressing critical issues not targeted in the central scheme for the past 15 years since implementation of the FRA. The scheme delivers the benefits for community rights and community forest rights (CFR) that are lagging in the FRA, informed a member of the Foundation for Ecological Security, a non-profit. The member further said that the scheme would also include digitising records of title holders.

Source: Himanshu Nitnaware. 'Odisha announces state forest rights scheme to benefit over 7 lakh people,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 04/07/2023.

RAJASTHAN

SC concern over lakhs of devotees visiting temple in Sariska TR

Voicing concern over lakhs of devotees visiting the ancient Pandupol temple situated in the core area of Sariska Tiger Reserve (TR), the Supreme Court (SC) constituted a high-level panel to suggest an “ever lasting solution” for effective management of the reserve.

The bench constituted a panel of the additional forest secretary (forest administration), principal chief conservator of forest and chief wildlife warden of Rajasthan, a joint secretary rank officer of the Union

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and a representative of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The court said the chief wildlife warden would be the convener of the committee, which was asked to submit its report to the court in six weeks.

Advocate K Parameshwar, who was appointed amicus curiae (friend of the court) in the matter, said the Rajasthan government has filed an affidavit suggesting some solutions to the issue.

On Parameshwar's suggestion that entry to the tiger reserve be allowed only in electric buses, Manish Singhvi, counsel for Rajasthan, said the state government has proposed stationing such vehicles at two of the three entry points leading to the protected area. While 19 electric buses will be parked at Sariska Gate, two will be present at Tehla Gate to carry the devotees. The forest department has also tied up with ICICI Foundation for operating the electric buses. On the amicus curiae's suggestion that wildlife corridors be created from Siliberi Gate to Pandupol Temple, Singhvi said the proposal has been prepared and sent for necessary consideration of the competent authorities

Singhvi also said that progress has been made towards preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the construction of a 23 km elevated road from Thanagazi to Natni Ka Baran on the Jaipur- Alwar state highway to ensure free movement of wildlife. He said the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will start construction work after getting the necessary approvals. Singhvi noted further that the state is looking at relocating villages which are situated inside the TR.

Source: Marziya Sharif. 'SC concerned over lakhs of devotees visiting temple in Sariska Tiger Reserve', www.siasat.com, 12/07/2023.



TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu notifies 24 new reserve forests in two years

The Tamil Nadu Department of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has notified 24 new reserve forests (RFs) in the State in two years from 2021 to 2023. Notified under Section 16 of the Tamil Nadu Forest Act, 1882, these RFs are located in the Dindigul, Dharmapuri, Madurai, Kallakurichi, Theni, Sivaganga, Namakkal and Nilgiris districts.

The move has added an area of 3585.38.56 ha of RFs in the State; Dindigul - 1374.35.06 ha, Madurai - 58.12 ha, Theni - 35.95 ha, Sivaganga - 166.62 ha, Dharmapuri - 106.01 ha, Kallakurichi - 1138.95 ha, Namakkal - 703.36 ha and the Nilgiris - 202.5 ha.

Source: Komal Gautham. 'Tamil Nadu has added 24 new reserve forests in last two years,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 30/06/2023.

Contaminated water & nutrient-less grass cause elephant deaths; electrocution threat increases: Study

A study conducted by B Ramakrishnan, assistant professor, Department of Wildlife Biology, Government Arts College, Udthagamandalam, and Sivasubramanian, Assistant professor of Department of Wildlife Biology, Kongunadu Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, has concluded that infection of the gastrointestinal tract due to contaminated water and consuming nutrient-less grass were the common causes of wild elephant deaths in Tamil Nadu. The study was based on the examination of the post-mortem reports of 1,544 wild elephants that died in 28 years from 1992 to 2019.

Of the 1,544 deaths, 636 were caused by gastrointestinal tract infection.

The research duo also observed that poaching of elephants has come down due to the efforts of both central and state governments. However, the electrocution of wild elephants is increasing, they noted.

Source: S Senthil Kumar. 'Contaminated water, non-nutritive grass led to 636 jumbo deaths in 28 years: Study,' www.newindianexpress.com, 16/06/2023.

UTTARAKHAND

Tigress from Corbett TR shot dead was not a man-eater: NTCA report

A committee of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has said that an adult tigress that was shot dead by forest staff in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) in November 2022 on grounds that it was a man-eater, was, in fact, not a man-eater.

The committee was constituted in December 2022 and its report was prepared in March 2023. The report states that it is quite evident that the tigress had shown calm behaviour, had not attacked any human and that it did not appear to be a threat to human life. In its concluding six points of the report, the committee mentions that during the whole incident of killing of the tigress in Marchula market, the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, guidelines and standard operating procedures issued by NTCA were blatantly violated.

It also noted that the State government should take action against all the forest officers responsible for the violation of rules and guidelines meant for conservation of tigers. The report also recommended training of CTR staff.

Source: Shivani Azad. 'Corbett tigress killed by foresters wasn't a man-eater: NTCA,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 02/07/2023.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

NTCA seeks clarity on SC stay on construction within PAs

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has raised concern over the Supreme Court's (SC) February 2023 order restraining authorities from making any construction within the areas notified as tiger reserves (TRs), national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. In an affidavit filed before the apex court, the NTCA asked the court to clarify its order as it can have a bearing on the implementation of infrastructure projects of national and strategic importance.

Ban on construction undertaken in accordance of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, inside the forest area could also impact the progress of important welfare activities, such as providing drinking water, construction of roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, for tribals and marginalised communities, the NTCA said, even as it defended the construction of a zoo/tiger reserve in the buffer zone of Corbett TR.

Categorising it as a forest activity, the NTCA said zoos play a significant role in conservation, breeding and keeping of rescued, sick and injured animals. A zoo and safari on forest land will help visitors to sight different animals in near natural surroundings, providing them with an "absorbing and rewarding experience."

A Supreme Court bench led by Justice BR Gavai had on February 8 put on hold construction activities within core areas of tiger reserves, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The order came on a petition filed by advocate Gaurav Bansal who alleged illegal construction in TRs and questioned the establishment of a tiger safari/zoo in the buffer area of Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand. (*PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 2).

In a report to the court, the central empowered committee (CEC) had also

acknowledged the irregularities that were pointed out in Bansal's petition and suggested that Uttarakhand be directed to dismantle all illegal structures constructed for the safari.

Source: Bhadra Sinha. 'Tiger conservation body seeks clarity on SC stay on construction within reserves, national parks', www.theprint.in, 13/07/2023.

WCCB issues alert to TRs after tiger body parts seized & four arrested in Guwahati

Tiger reserves (TRs) and their adjoining forest areas including Tadoba (Maharashtra), Satpura (Madhya Pradesh), Corbett and Rajaji (Uttarakhand), Pench (MP & Maharashtra), Amangarh and Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh), Valmiki (Bihar), and pockets of tiger habitats in Gadchiroli, Chandrapur districts of Maharashtra and Balaghat district of MP were put on alert by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB). These areas are said to be on the radar of organized gangs of poachers from the Bawaria community in Haryana, the WCCB has said.

The alert issued by HV Girisha, additional director, WCCB, has asked field directors of TRs and territorial areas adjoining them to intensify patrolling. It further said that the immediate trigger to sound an alert was the seizure of a nine-foot-long tiger skin and around 18 kg bones from four accused in Guwahati, on June 28. The skin is suspected to be from the Chandrapur landscape in Maharashtra and verification was being carried out by the WCCB.

All four accused including two women are from Pinjore in Haryana. The tiger skin was to be smuggled to Myanmar through a trader from Shillong in Meghalaya.

Source: Mukut Das & Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Centre alerts reserves after tiger's skin seized in Assam,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/07/2023.

Centre to install transponders on vessels to protect turtles, marine animals

The Centre has approved a project for the national rollout of vessel communication and support systems including transponders on approximately 1,00,000 fishing vessels in all coastal states and union territories to help avoid marine animals and avoid injuries suffered because of encounters with boats and fishing trawlers. The announcement was made in an affidavit filed by Manas Kumar Sinha, officer on special duty, National Fisheries Development Board, Bhubaneswar in Orissa High Court (HC), on behalf of the secretary, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying on June 26, 2023.

The affidavit stated that the project will be implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) with the funding on a 60:40 cost-sharing basis between the Centre and State. The specific requirement of transponders for Odisha has been catered for in the national rollout plan, said Sinha.

The Central government filed the affidavit before the court in response to a notice issued by the Orissa (HC) on March 1. The court had issued a notice to the Centre on the issue of transponders that Odisha plans to install in mechanised fishing vessels and trawlers for protection of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles on the State's coast. The court issued the notice after perusing an affidavit filed by the State.

In the affidavit, joint director (coastal), Directorate of Fisheries had stated that the State wants to procure 1,740 transponders from the Indian Space Research Organisation to install in its registered mechanised fishing vessels. But the PMMSY scheme in its present form did not accommodate the procurement process.

The Orissa HC was hearing the public interest litigation registered *suo motu* on February 23, 2021 in the matter of the high mortality rate of the Olive Ridley turtles. The court had directed for the notice to be issued to

the joint secretary (marine), Union Ministry of Fisheries Animal Husbandry and Dairying, to file a response in relation to the modification of guidelines in the PMMSY scheme by June 26.

Gahirmatha in Kendrapara district, Rushikulya River mouth in Ganjam district and Devi River mouth near Astaranga in Puri district in Odisha have been identified as the major mass nesting sites of the Olive Ridley turtles. Many of the Olive Ridley turtles which visit these beaches in large numbers for nesting are caught in the fishing nets cast by the trawlers and die.

Source: Hrusikesh Mohanty. 'Transponders to be installed in sea vessels across India's coastal areas to protect marine life,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 30/06/2023.

Project Tiger prevented deforestation, reduced carbon emission: study

India's 50-year-long tiger conservation efforts have resulted in reduced carbon emission by preventing deforestation, a study has claimed. The study by six conservation scientists from the National University of Singapore and Princeton University, USA, found that tiger protection measures led to an estimated USD 110.29 million in carbon emission savings between 2001 and 2020.

The scientists evaluated the forest carbon storage co-benefits of India's conservation policies and Project Tiger along with activities of apex bodies like the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) which are crucial to the long-term survival of tigers and the persistence of their associated habitats. Of the 45 tiger reserves (TRs) that underwent the conservation policy intervention, 15 showed significant but mixed results and 11 among them exhibited significant 'avoided deforestation' since 2007.

The three most valuable TRs in terms of ecosystem service valuation were Nawegaon Nagzira in Maharashtra, Simlipal

Hadagarh in Odisha and Udanti Sitanandi in Chhattisgarh. The three worst-performing TRs in terms of additional emissions were Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh, Anaimalai in Tamil Nadu and Dampa in Mizoram.

The study which was published in the recent issue of *Nature Ecology and Evolution Journal* stated that avoided carbon emission from TRs that prevented deforestation was 1.28 metric tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent. These protected reserves provided ecosystem services through climate change mitigation of USD 110.29 million based on a USD 86 per tonne social cost of carbon estimate in India.

Source: Hemant Kumar Rout. 'Tiger reserves saved carbon emissions worth USD 110 million,' www.newindianexpress.com, 23/06/2023.

15 convicted of poaching pangolin, FD cracks international network



In a historic ruling, 15 accused from five states were convicted of being involved in poaching pangolins. They were sentenced recently to three-year jail sentences along with a fine of Rs. 10,000 by a trial court in Seoni district in Madhya Pradesh (MP). Additionally, seven other accused have been declared proclaimed offenders in this case.

The gang was apprehended by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) led by assistant conservator of forest, Ritesh Sirothia. The SIT was formed in March 2015 by the then principal chief conservator of forest (Wildlife) Narendra Kumar, in consultation with the then

additional principal chief conservator of forest (Wildlife) Suhas Kumar. Forester Shekar Sharma and two range officers - Nitin Nigam and Inder Singh Bare - played a major role in cracking the network of poachers and smugglers. The SIT operated under the guidance of chief conservator of forest Chitranjan Tyagi of Chhindwara. The SIT exposed interstate and international gangs operating in over 10 states in India and abroad. Initially, three cases were registered in Balaghat, Seoni, and Chhindwara, leading to the arrest of 42 accused individuals from various states.

Considering the extent of the syndicate's involvement, the wildlife wing dissolved the SIT and formed a Special Task Force (STF) for pangolin-related offenses. Subsequently, the STF apprehended over 170 individuals, including two foreign citizens, from more than 14 states. Officials revealed that an international poaching syndicate, involved in smuggling pangolin scales to China and Vietnam, had a well-established network in MP.

According to a recent Interpol report, 26% of pangolin scales are being channelled into the USA's party circuit. While the Chinese demand for pangolins was widely known and had prompted the crackdown on the racket with connections to Myanmar, the escalating use of pangolin scales in the production of crystal methamphetamine, a key ingredient in the party drug commonly known as crystal meth, crank, speed, or ice has presented another challenge for the STF.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, No. 1; Vol. XXVI, Nos. 3 & 1 and Vol. XXV, No. 1).

Source: P Naveen. 'Pangolin poaching: 15 from five states sentenced to 3-yr jail term,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/06/2023.

Cheetah Reintroduction at Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh A Timeline: February 2022 - July 2023

07 Feb 2022	Government of India (GoI) holds meeting with African countries for bringing in cheetah.
02 Aug 2022	Indian Oil signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). This was in continuation with the MoU signed on July 20, 2022 between GoI and Government of the Republic of Namibia for re-establishing the cheetah in India. Indian Oil to contribute Rs.50.22 crore in four years for the project.
07 Sep 2022	Eight cheetahs transported from Namibia to India and released into quarantine
07 Oct 2022	Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) constitutes a Task Force for monitoring cheetah introduction.
27 Jan 2023	GoI signs an MoU with the Republic of South Africa for the re-introduction of cheetah to India.
18 Feb 2023	Twelve cheetahs brought from South Africa released at Kuno National Park.
27 Mar 2023	Namibian cheetah named Sasha dies due to a kidney ailment.
29 Mar 2023	Namibian cheetah named Jwala gives birth to four cubs.
23 Apr 2023	South African cheetah named Uday dies just over a week after it was released from its quarantine enclosure to the larger enclosure. An initial examination reveals terminal cardio-pulmonary failure as a cause of death.
09 May 2023	Female cheetah from South Africa named Daksha dies. The cause of the death seems to be a fight with a male cheetah kept in her enclosure.
23 May 2023	Death of three cheetah cubs.
26 May 2023	NTCA constitutes a Cheetah Project Steering Committee and dissolves the Cheetah Task Force that was constituted earlier.
11 July 2023	South African cheetah named Tejas dies. Prima facie, officials say, serious injuries on the neck seem to have cause its death.
14 July 2023	South African cheetah named Suraj dies.

Source: Online archive of the Press Information Bureau

‘Cheetah Sasha dies due to kidney ailment in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park,’ www.thehindu.com, 27/03/2023.

‘Namibian cheetah Siyaya gives birth to four cubs,’ timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 30/03/2023.

Shruti Tomar. ‘Uday, cheetah brought from South Africa, dies; 2nd in a month,’ www.hindustantimes.com, 24/04/2023.

‘South African cheetah Uday did not die of infectious disease, 5 more cheetahs to be released in June: Environment ministry,’ indianexpress.com, 09/05/2023.

Rahul Noronha. ‘Third cheetah dies at Kuno National Park,’ www.indiatoday.in, 09/05/2023.

Jacob Koshy. ‘Two more cheetah cubs die at Kuno Park, one unwell,’ www.thehindu.com, 25/05/2023.

Anand Mohan J. ‘One more African cheetah, Tejas, dies in MP’s Kuno National Park; 7th since March,’ indianexpress.com, 12/07/2023.

P Naveen. ‘Eighth Cheetah found dead in Kuno National Park,’ timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/07/2023.

Funding for Special Tiger Protection Force: 2019-20 to 2022-23 (Rs. in lakhs)

TR	State	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pench	Maharashtra	286.18	354.14	315.16	330.00
Tadoba-Andhari		298.53	397.41	423.64	423.60
Melghat		303.92	361.31	374.95	420.00
Nawegaon-Nagzira		283.56	356.56	472.03	501.60
Similipal	Odisha	120.84	122.86	20.86	126.30
Bandipur	Karnataka	192.00	38.52	51.37	99.00
Ranthambhore	Rajasthan	0.00	0.00	214.65	154.38
Kaziranga	Assam	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

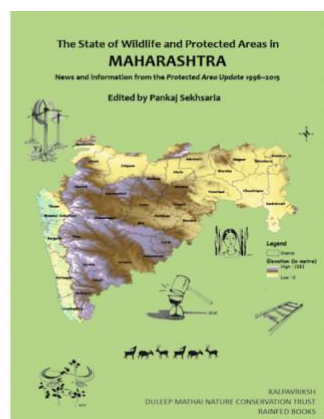
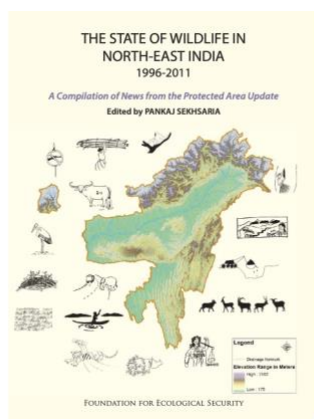
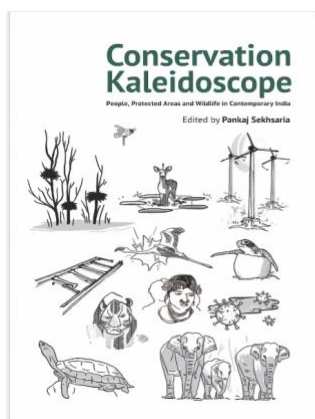
Source: Statement in parliament by Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State, MoEFCC, 08/08/2023

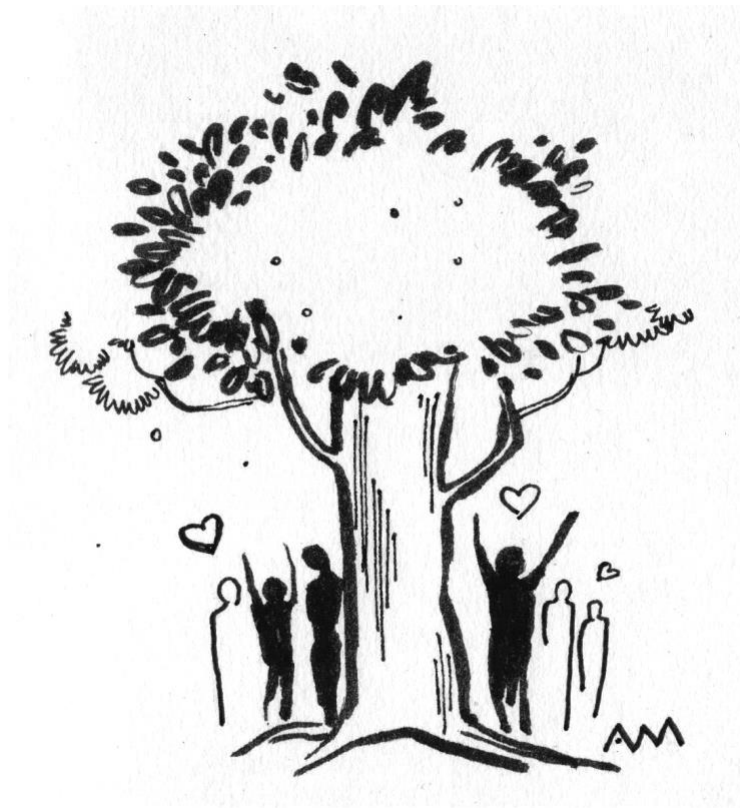
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SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL

Landmark court ruling ends impunity for wealthy wildlife collectors in Nepal

Wildlife collectors in Nepal will have to declare their collections to the government under a landmark ruling spurred by the perceived injustice of the country's strict wildlife protection laws. The May 30 Supreme Court ruling caps a legal campaign by conservationist Kumar Paudel of the NGO Greenhood Nepal to hold to account wealthy Nepalis who openly display wildlife parts and trophies, even as members of local communities are persecuted for suspected poaching.

Under the ruling, the government must issue a public notice calling on private collectors to declare their wildlife collections, and must then seize those made after 1973, the year the wildlife conservation act came into effect.

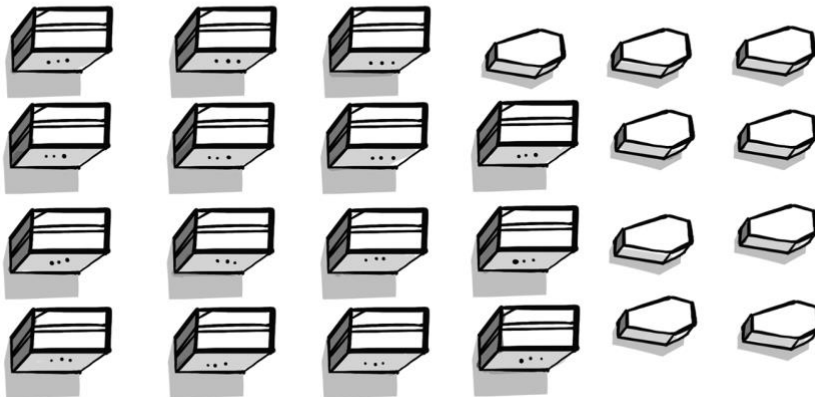
Justices Sapna Pradhan Malla and Til Prasad Shrestha also ordered the government to come up with programs to massively raise awareness about the legal status of private collections, and not incinerate or destroy seized wildlife parts as the country had previously done, but rather to use such items for educational purposes, preferably in a museum.

Paudel had filed the petition on the basis of what he decried as Nepal's double standard in enforcing its laws on wildlife crime. While largely considered among the strictest in the world, the laws tend to apply to the poor and marginalized while ignoring the elite and influential, Paudel said. He gave examples of places where wildlife parts such as tiger pelts and heads were openly exhibited in public spaces, flouting the law and undermining conservation efforts.

Source: Abhaya Raj. 'Landmark Nepal court ruling ends impunity for wealthy wildlife collectors', www.news.mongabay.com, 30/05/2023

OVERHERD By Ashvini Menon

We brought African Cheetahs to India, in wooden boxes...some are making their way back into those...



IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

NATIONAL NEWS

Aceclofenac and ketoprofen banned; demand for ban on several other drugs

The Drugs Technical Advisory Board, in May, decided to impose a ban on use of veterinary drugs aceclofenac and ketoprofen in order to protect vultures. The board in its meeting noted that the veterinary drugs ketoprofen and aceclofenac are as toxic as diclofenac and can kill vultures. Studies have shown that the aceclofenac rapidly metabolises into diclofenac and ketoprofen and is toxic to *Gyps* vultures. The minutes of the meeting further stated that the matter was referred to the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying of the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare for expert opinion. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) supported by Indian Veterinary Research Institute and Wildlife Institute of India, had submitted a detailed dossier requesting a ban on three drugs — aceclophenac, nimesulide and ketoprofen.

Vulture conservationists and experts have welcomed the move; however, they have expressed the need for bans on other drugs as well. S Bharathidasan, secretary of Arulagam and member of vulture conservation committee of Tamil Nadu pointed out that the recent decision has left out nimesulide and another drug flunixin, which is banned in Tamil Nadu has not been included in the demand. The conservationist said that if a separate written demand takes another six years to approve, it will not benefit in protecting the vultures. Diclofenac was banned in 2006 while it took upto 2023 to ban the other two drugs.

Vibhu Prakash, a vulture expert from the BNHS said that nimesulide continues to present a threat and should be banned soon. Premsagar Mestri, a vulture conservationist from Raigad district of Maharashtra, said that data on which drugs affect the vultures is still lacking. A more detailed and wider study to identify more drugs that cause harm to the birds is needed.

Source: Himanshu Nitnaware. 'Ban on more drugs harmful for vultures welcome move, but more stringent steps needed: Experts,' www.downtoearth.org.in, 23/06/2023.

GUJARAT

Three out of four GIBs that went missing during cyclone in mid-June sighted in Kutch

Three of the four great Indian bustards (GIBs) that had gone missing during the cyclone in mid-June, have been spotted in Bhanada village near Naliya. The forest department (FD) officials, who had been fearing the worst after five days of search operations failed to yield favourable results, have now decided to look for the fourth GIB in and around Naliya using a drone.

VS Rana, the chief conservator of forest (CCF), Kutch division, said that the GIB numbers have come down in the state from 20 to just four in the past five years. The carcasses of the 16 birds believed to be dead have not been found yet and the senior officials in Gandhinagar have decided to deploy high-tech drones in GIB territory in Kutch to see if there are more birds there.

A proposal in this regard has been sent to the State government and will also be sent to the Central government for permission to use drones since the GIBs territory is in the border

area. The drone survey, according to the FD officials, will also help the FD to draft a proposal to set up a GIB breeding centre in Kutch.

In 2022, Union minister for environment, forest, and climate change, Bhupendra Yadav, had asked Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka governments to send a proposal to set up breeding centres for conservation of GIBs in their respective States. The Wildlife Institute of India has also been asked to prepare a framework for the same.

According to the 2007 census report, the GIB count in the country was 48 and their population has been on a steady decline in the past two decades. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 1; Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3 & 1; Vol. XXV, Nos. 6 & 5 and Vol. XXIV, No.1).

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Three of four GIBs missing in Kutch traced,' www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22/06/2023.

KARNATAKA

Siruguppa in Bellary district to have 2nd GIB breeding centre

A breeding centre for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB), the 2nd in the country is to be built in Siruguppa in the Bellary district Karnataka. The centre will come up on 1000 hectares of land that the state's forest department is planning to buy from local farmers for the purpose.

Once found in large numbers in the state the GIB population in Karnataka is now said to be only six birds. A study "The occupancy of Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) using local people's knowledge in the Deccan Plateau, Karnataka, India" published in the *Biodiversitas Journal of Biological Diversity* in March 2023 states that the GIBs were considered locally extinct in the state until the sightings in 2006 from Siruguppa taluk.

Arun S K, wildlife warden, Bellary, said that the five-member committee looking over the breeding-centre project visited the GIB breeding centre in Rajasthan's Desert National Park (DNP) to study and understand the requirements of such a project.

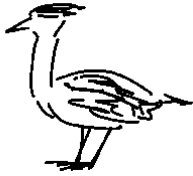
Sutirtha Dutta, a scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) who is leading the GIB breeding project in DNP said while speaking to the media that the GIB population in Karnataka is not enough to raise a captive founder population from the eggs collected from the wild. He noted, however, that if the Karnataka Forest Department can secure around 300 sq km of contiguous grassland habitats for the birds, they can release some captive-bred individuals in the state from Rajasthan with agreements between the two state governments and take steps to conserve the species. (See *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 3; and Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 6 & 5).

Source: 'Karnataka to build India's second breeding centre for endemic bird - GIB -threatened with extinction', www.groundtales.com. 25/07/2023.



RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan launches 'Project GIB'



The Rajasthan State government has launched a project for saving the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). Project GIB is proposed to be implemented with an immediate allocation of Rs.12.9 crore. It will be monitored by a task force that would include wildlife experts and local elected representatives as its members. Chief Minister Mr. Ashok Gehlot launched this project at the Desert National Park (DNP) in Jaisalmer district. He also spent nearly one-and-a-half hours in the region and saw 12 GIBs in addition to spotting three young birds and two females sitting on eggs.

The State Forest and Environment Minister Ms. Bina Kak said that the recovery plan for the critically endangered species, formulated as part of an integrated development programme for wildlife habitat, would be submitted shortly to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests for approval.

She also added that the Forest and Environment Department had constructed enclosures for the GIB in a 400-hectare area in Jaisalmer and Ajmer districts following the budgetary announcement in 2012-13. As part of the new project, enclosures would be built in an area of 2,500 hectares. Other works to be taken up include development of water sources and strengthening of infrastructure with an emphasis on reducing the pressure on the GIB habitat.

The Rajasthan government also plans to make an intervention through the Ministry of External Affairs to ensure that the hunting of GIB and other rare birds in the border areas of Sindh province in Pakistan, adjoining Rajasthan, is stopped forthwith.

During the past five months, Rajasthan has lost three GIBs – two of them due to poaching (see following story and also *PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 1) in the DNP and one due to delay in treatment following an injury. The irrigation activities promoted by the Indira Gandhi Canal in western Rajasthan have also affected the GIB's habitat, even as hunting continues to be a major threat.

Source: 'Plan to protect Great Indian bustard', *The Hindu*, 07/06/13.
Vimal Bhatia, 'Project launched to save Great Indian Bustards in Jaisalmer', *The Times of India*, 09/06/13.

GIB poachers arrested in Sriganganagar

A team of forest officials has arrested three members of a poaching gang active in hunting the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in the Sriganganagar area. The arrests were made in the first week of July. A four-wheeler (gypsy) and cartridges used for hunting were also seized.

Some unidentified poachers had fired on two GIBs in December last year and one of them had died in the Sudasari area of the Desert National Park (*PA Update* Vol. XIX, No. 1). The poachers had managed to get away with the dead bird. The recent arrests were made based on photographs of the poachers with the dead bird that came into the possession of the forest department (FD) recently. Those arrested have been involved in earlier incidents of hunting the GIB, and the houbara as well, in the region.

Source: Vimal Bhatia. 'Three GIB hunters nabbed in Sriganganagar', *The Times of India*, 05/07/13.

PERSPECTIVE

Chadva Rakhhal in Gujarat: Unexpected carnivore diversity and novel protection status

During COP15 (2022), a goal was set for 2030 for every country to safeguard 30% of its terrestrial, inland waters and coastal/marine areas important for biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and services. In addition to State-protected lands, these could include other ownership regimes (individuals, corporates and communities) with the involvement of citizens. Apart from increasing the total protected cover for a developing country like India, it could also promote higher investment in conservation, through partnerships of various kinds.

Gujarat has only 11.6% of its geographical area under forest cover and an equal proportion designated as “wasteland”. A major part of these “wastelands” are concentrated in the Kachchh district, making the natural open ecosystem extremely vulnerable to changes in land use and subsequent degradation of services, especially from large-scale green energy projects.

Chadva Rakhhal (CR), a partially privately owned pastureland located west of Bhuj offers an interesting insight into how conservation can be done differently. The pastureland measuring 12,972 acres, (including the man-made Pragsar Lake, with a catchment area of 1,027 ha) harbours rich wildlife and has a novel protection status. We conducted a survey in CR using camera traps over two winters (2021 and 2022) and recorded 12 carnivores, including five felids, three canids, one hyaenid, one herpestid, one viverrid and one mustelid. Significantly, the felid diversity at this site is on par with the entire Western Ghats.

CR was recognised recently by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, the National Biodiversity Authority and the United Nations Development Program as one of the first fourteen OECM (Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures) sites in India. OECMs are a novel conservation

approach, defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in 2018 as areas distinct from traditional protected areas, where the effective conservation of biodiversity is achieved as a by-product of other area management.

In this case, the land surrounding CR is a matrix of agriculture, reserve forests and large green energy projects and is dominated by an agro-pastoralist community who graze their livestock on the pastureland. The lake and wetland network within CR ensure water for both the human community and the biodiversity around. This OECM can act as a source and corridor for many species, connecting patches of habitats and maintaining population contiguity across a fragmented landscape. Similar areas, rich in biodiversity, perhaps exist throughout the State under varied ownerships and must be identified and brought into the conservation framework through participatory means, including intensive awareness campaigns and dialogue with all stakeholders (BMCs, corporate and private landowners).

- **Shomita Mukherjee**

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