

Vol. XXIX, No. 5

October 2023 (No. 165)

## **LIST OF CONTENTS**

### **EDITORIAL**

The State of India's Tigers and Birds

### **NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES**

#### **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

A&N admin floats draft luxury tent policy for adventure, wildlife and heritage tourism

#### **Assam**

Five poachers & smugglers arrested in Nagaon district in August

#### **Karnataka**

FD initiates Bandipur Yuva Mitra program around TR

Hakki Pikki, Iruliga tribals get land rights adjoining Bannerghatta NP

FD wayer accidentally trampled by injured elephant in Hassan Forest Division

State needs CAMPA funds for curbing human elephant conflict: Karnataka forest minister

#### **Madhya Pradesh**

MP records 32 tiger deaths from January to August 2023

State's wildlife action plan urges proper planning for tiger tourism

Centre eyes Nauradehi WLS for releasing cheetahs

FD proposes TR status for Madhav NP, Nauradehi & Ratapani WLSs

#### **Maharashtra**

8000 ha of forests handed over for timber extraction in lieu of Kanhargaoon WLS

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

	NTCA panel to investigate tiger deaths in Vidarbha	
3	Complaint against online booking firm at TATR for embezzlement; contract terminated	
	<b>Odisha</b>	<b>9</b>
4	55% fall in Odisha tiger numbers since 2006	
	Odisha to conduct its own tiger census	
	<b>Rajasthan</b>	<b>10</b>
4	NTCA approves expansion of three TRs in Rajasthan; new TR in Dholpur-Karauli	
	<b>Tamil Nadu</b>	<b>10</b>
4	Madras HC asks Tamil Nadu govt. to acquire all private forests within notified elephant corridors	
	<b>Uttarakhand &amp; Himachal Pradesh</b>	<b>11</b>
	Tiger from Rajaji TR walks through four states to reach Renuka forest	
	<b>Uttar Pradesh</b>	<b>11</b>
	FD suspects that deaths due to murders in Bijnor being attributed to leopard attacks	
6	<b>West Bengal</b>	<b>12</b>
	FD seeks funds for tiger conservation in Neora Valley NP	
	South 24-Paraganas Forest Division in Sunderbans gets new tranquilliser guns	
	Fishing cat breeding program proposed at multiple sites	
	<b>NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA</b>	<b>13</b>
7	3,682 tigers in India: Tiger census 2022	
	State of India's Birds 2023: An overview	

150 elephant corridors in India: Project Elephant study	<b>INTERNATIONAL NEWS</b>	<b>19</b>
SC permits Centre to replace CEC with a permanent body of experts	Asian elephant expert R Sukumar elected as a vice-chair of IPCC	
<b>SOUTH ASIA</b>	Alien species invasion at unprecedented rates around the world: IPBES study	
<b>18</b>	<b>OVERHERD – A visual comment</b>	<b>20</b>
A project to restore tree cover on one million hectares of land in Eastern Himalayas	<b>IN MEMORY</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Aditya 'Dicky' Singh	
Studies & awareness generation initiatives for tiger conservation in Sundarbans	S Jayachandran	
Bangladesh pauses plan to reintroduce tigers in Chittagong Hills	<b>FROM THE ARCHIVES</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>24</b>
	Undocumented and unacknowledged: marine diversity of Mumbai's coastline	

**Protected Area Update**

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## EDITORIAL

### **The State of India's Tigers and Birds**

The last few months have seen the publishing of two important and very interesting all India assessments of what are without doubt the most popular wildlife in the country - tigers and birds.

The outcome of the tiger census, one of the most anticipated and reported upon exercises in India was officially released on International Tiger Day, July 29. At first glance the report provides positive news - the tiger population in India has grown 24% in the last four years: from 2,967 in the 2018 census to 3,682 tigers in 2022. While the numbers do provide hope and some cheer, relying just on such quantitative assessments has problems and limitations.

This is particularly true when one considers the larger macro-level trends such as those of habitat loss and degradation, the overall development trajectory that continues to sacrifice sensitive natural ecosystems for economic growth and the even larger global concern of climate change that is bound to impact ecosystems and species in ways that we cannot imagine. While tiger numbers might be rising in pockets because of greater protection and better management, the key long-term concerns would need to be addressed at the landscape level. The numbers do reveal a lot but we should be looking out also for what they conceal or miss out completely.

One interesting side-story here, for instance, is about specific States. Odisha has decided to conduct its own tiger census because for them the national census does not depict the real Odisha picture. They believe they have far more tigers than have been documented. Similar is the story from West Bengal where the state authorities are not convinced of the numbers of tigers reported from Buxa and Neora Valley.

The other all India report that comes from within a completely different set of methodologies and institutions is the 'State of India's Birds'. A collaborative effort of at least 13 organisations including government bodies, it uses crowd sourced and citizen-science data contributed by 30,000 bird watchers from across the country. It is based on a staggering 30 million observations and provides important insights on multiple bird-related issues: population trends for particular species (the expanding foot-print for e.g., of the Indian Peafowl and the Asian Koel); a decline in populations of at least 204 species with raptors, migratory shorebirds and ducks suffering the most; and of open ecosystems, rivers and coasts seeing the bigger declines. The report also identifies the key threats to birds in India and has recommendations for species of high conservation priority, neglected habitats and to promote research and monitoring.

The task of getting a national-level macro picture for any species or family of animals in a country as diverse, rich and complicated as India is undoubtedly a very difficult and complex one. There is also an important optics role that such assessments and reports play. In an increasingly crowded world of the media they provide an opportunity to draw attention to issues and denizens of this country that are otherwise at the bottom of the priority pyramid. For these reasons and for their impact, these efforts have to be commended. This, even as we should ask for more financial, technical and human resources for studies that help us understand our wild world and also make a case for their conservation and better management.



## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

#### **A&N admin floats draft luxury tent policy for adventure, wildlife and heritage tourism**

The Directorate of Information, Publicity & Tourism (IP&T), Andaman & Nicobar Islands, has prepared a draft luxury tent policy for adventure, heritage, wildlife and eco-tourism in the islands. The draft policy outlines guidelines for establishment, operation and management of luxury tents in remote areas. It aims to enhance tourist's experience, preserve ecological sustainability, promote responsible tourism and maintain the ecological balance.

October 15 was set as the last date for receiving citizen comments on the draft policy.

Source: Sanjib. 'Directorate of IP&T prepares draft Luxury Tent Policy with increasing demand for eco, adventure, wildlife and heritage tourism in A&N Islands,' [www.andamansheekha.com](http://www.andamansheekha.com), 15/09/2023.

### ASSAM

#### **Five poachers & smugglers arrested in Nagaon district in August**

The Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF) in collaboration with the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) arrested five poachers and smugglers in Nagaon district and seized body parts of different wild animals. Based on specific information, the STF planned a joint operation with WCCB on August 22 and conducted a raid in the Kaliabor area. 12 elephant tusks, two tiger canine teeth, 15 rhino hooves, one deer antler and more than one kg of pangolin scales were seized during the operation. The team also found five mobile

phones used for networking and communication.

The STF handed the arrestees to the Jakhalabandha Police Station along with the seized items. Three of the arrestees are residents of Jakhalabandha area of Nagaon district while the other two are residents of Guwahati.

This is said to be one of the biggest seizures in Assam in August and the fourth recovery of smuggled animal body parts including elephant tusks in the state in the 10 days between August 12 and 22.

The same day (August 22) the Government Railway Police also seized an elephant tusk weighing 2.3 kg from the Lachit Express at Kamakhya Railway Station. Earlier, on August 18, forest officials in Morigaon recovered an elephant tusk weighing 2.5 kg, while on August 13, the WCCB and STF arrested three suspected poachers from Chirang district near the Bhutan border and recovered a large amount of elephant tusks.

While frequent recoveries of smuggled body parts of wild animals have raised concern over the safety of those species, a senior official of Assam police said the increased number of recoveries were due to additional operations being carried out by the authorities.

Source: Biswa Kalyan Purkayastha. 'Five arrested with body parts of rhino, tiger, elephants in Assam,' [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 23/08/2023.

### KARNATAKA

#### **Hakki Pikki, Iruliga tribals get land rights adjoining Bannerghatta NP**

114 members of the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga tribal communities were recently granted title deeds for two acres of land each on the edges of the Bannerghatta National Park (NP). In 1962, the Hakki Pikki community had been granted 350 acres of land, denotified from the Ragihalli forest near Bannerghatta. The land

has been handed over after declaring it a no-development zone to block the entry of the real-estate mafia here.

The allocation happened due to the efforts of the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga Tribal Society with the help of the Society for Informal Education and Development Studies and the Environment Support Group.

Source: Chiranjeevi Kulkarni. 'Hakki Pikki, Iruliga tribals get land rights in Bannerghatta', [www.deccanherald.com](http://www.deccanherald.com), 25/08/2023. Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed, 'In a historic victory, Hakki Pikki, Iruliga tribes secure land ownership on the edge of Bannerghatta National Park', [www.frontline.thehindu.com](http://www.frontline.thehindu.com), 24/08/2023

### **FD wagger accidentally trampled by injured elephant in Hassan Forest Division**

An expert in firing tranquilizer darts at elephants, HH Venkatesh aka Aane Venkatesh, succumbed to injuries after he was accidentally trampled upon by an injured elephant near Alur. Venkatesh was working on daily wages for decades with the forest department (FD).

Bheema, the 40-year-old tusker who trampled Venkatesh, had injuries on his back. The elephant had sustained injuries during a fight with another tusker in the forest in July. The Hassan Forest Division had taken permission from the principal chief conservator of forests to tranquilize Bheema for treatment. A team of doctors had treated Bheema with the help of two tamed elephants two days earlier.

At the time, Venkatesh was standing 20 feet away from the elephant after darting the animal from the rear. The elephant turned back instead of moving ahead and trampled Venkatesh who stumbled and fell to the ground while trying to save himself. The seriously injured Venkatesh was immediately admitted to HIMS Hospital where he breathed his last on August 31. According to the villagers, Bheema

had been roaming in and around the border villages with a lot of pain since he was injured. They said, however, that he did not attack any person or animal since being injured.

Source: BR Udaya Kumar. 'Aane Venkatesh, expert in firing tranquilizer darts at elephants, trampled to death by tusker,' [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 31/08/2023.

### **State needs CAMPA funds for curbing human elephant conflict: Karnataka forest minister**

Karnataka minister for forest, ecology and environment, Eshwar Khandre, said recently that his department requires at least Rs. 500 crore to take up works aimed at preventing human-animal conflict. He pointed out that 11 people had died in incidents involving wildlife in 15 days in August and early September. The minister was speaking to reporters after a meeting with officials from the forest and home departments in the first week of September.

38 elephants have also died in the state this year. One of elephants died in train collision, 10 due to electrocution, two elephants were killed by gunshots while 25 are said to have died of natural causes.

There is a need to construct railway barricades with a total length of about 640 km, but only 312 km could be completed, the minister informed. He cited a report by experts from the Indian Institute of Science, which has recommended railway barricades as an effective and long-term measure to prevent elephants from entering human habitations.

Construction of railway barricades will cost about Rs. 1.5 crore per km and the state does have Rs. 500 crore funds collected by the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). However, the Centre is not releasing CAMPA funds, the minister said.

According to the state's data, there are 6,395 elephants in Karnataka.

Source: '11 people died in past 15 days in Karnataka due to human-animal conflict: Minister,' [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 05/09/2023.

### **FD initiates Bandipur Yuva Mitra program around TR**

The Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities have initiated a Bandipur Yuva Mitra program to connect with people living in and around the forests of the TR. The program that was initiated in the month of June includes a day-long workshop where people attend a three-hour indoor session, a three-hour field session and a safari. A quiz is conducted and they are given certificates of participation at the end of the day.

The target audience of the program are residents of five taluks surrounding the forest - Chamaraajanagar, Gundlupet, Kotte, Nanjangud and Saragu. The aim is to make at least 15,000 people take part in the programme annually. The program is said to have become popular in the local community and has also caught the attention of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). They have recognised it and shown interest to be knowledge partners for the programme. Many government schools have also shown interest to partner with the forest department.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Bandipur Yuva Mitra a hit with forest dwellers', [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 20/08/2023.

## **MADHYA PRADESH**

### **MP records 32 tiger deaths from January to August 2023**

32 tiger deaths have been reported from Madhya Pradesh (MP) from January to August 2023. The state had reported a total of 34 tiger deaths for the calendar year 2022.

Of the 32 deaths reported this year, nine have been reported from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.

As per official figures, 130 tigers have died in the country in the past eight months. In 10 years between 2012 and 2022, 270 tiger deaths have been reported from MP, which is the highest for the country.

Source: Amarjeet Singh. 'In 2023, Madhya Pradesh reported one tiger death every week,' [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 04/09/2023.

### **State's wildlife action plan urges proper planning for tiger tourism**

Madhya Pradesh (MP) government's recently released State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) 2023-2043 has recommended measures to ameliorate impacts of tourism in wildlife areas. It has stressed on an urgent need to plan and develop other wildlife rich areas which have remained untapped so far as ecotourism destinations. Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench Tiger Reserves (TRs) are the most visited wildlife destinations, primarily because of the high chances of sighting a tiger and easy accessibility by rail, road and air.

Since 2005, these well-known reserves have been experiencing a rapid increase in tourist footfall and consequent mushrooming of eateries, hotels and big resorts. As a result, the buffer zones and corridors are now beginning to feel the pressure of growth in tourism infrastructure, and access to some corridors is reportedly threatened.

The other major driver of tourism in some protected areas (PAs) such as Satpura and Bandhavgarh is pilgrimage. Satpura receives a large number of visitors during certain festivals. Two religious congregations at Nagdwari and Mahadeo take place in August and February and thousands of pilgrims visit these areas. 4,000 vehicles enter Pachmarhi and 400 makeshift shops are built by locals and religious trusts during these congregations. The festivities are for 12 days but the after effects continue for much longer.

The SWAP has stated that the issue needs to be addressed to reduce the adverse

impacts on forests and wildlife. Further, it has suggested inclusion of detailed ecotourism sub-plans as a part of the tiger conservation places of TRs, the management plans of PAs and working plans in case of territorial divisions. The SWAP has suggested a regular review to ensure that tourism development in TRs, PAs and territorial divisions follows the principles of ecotourism and strictly adheres to the guidelines given by the national and state wildlife action plans and the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Source: 'Bhopal: Tourist Influx At Tiger Reserves Taking Toll On Natural Resources,' [www.fresspressjournal.in](http://www.fresspressjournal.in), 10/09/2023.

### **Centre eyes Nauradehi WLS for releasing cheetahs**

A study conducted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has deemed Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) as a suitable location for the translocation of cheetahs. Union minister for environment, forest, and climate change, Bhupendra Yadav, is said to have recently sent a letter to the state minister Gopal Bhargava, highlighting Nauradehi as a prospective release site for cheetahs in the near future.

A four-member team from the WII conducted a six-week study in Nauradehi two years ago. They examined the climate, grassland characteristics, cave availability for shelter, water sources, and the presence of prey species. Their investigation led to a report that endorsed Nauradehi as a habitat suitable for cheetahs. Experts have also noted that the grasslands in Nauradehi are, in fact, better suited for cheetahs than that at Kuno National Park. The grass in Nauradehi is of medium height — ideal for cheetahs as it provides the right balance between cover for stalking prey and visibility for spotting prey from a distance. In contrast, Kuno's tall grasses limit a predator's ability to spot prey from a distance.

Nauradehi WLS has 15 tigers, and is reported to have maintained a remarkable record of tiger safety, with no losses in the past five years. Ten villages have already been shifted outside Nauradehi WLS, further enhancing its suitability as a potential cheetah habitat. Nauradehi is also slated to be a declared a tiger reserve soon (see accompanying story).

Source: 'NTCA, WII endorse Nauradehi as ideal for cheetah home-II,' [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 09/09/2023.

### **FD proposes TR status for Madhav NP, Nauradehi & Ratapani WLSs**

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has sent a proposal to the state government to declare Madhav National Park (NP) and the Nauradehi and Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs) as tiger reserves (TRs). Nauradehi WLS has at least 24 tigers, while Ratapani is said to have more than 80.

In another recent development, the State government turned down the proposal to declare the Sunewani Reserve Forest in Balaghat as a sanctuary after villagers raised strong objections. An officer in the Balaghat range said that the locals feared that if Sunewani is declared a sanctuary they will not be able to enter the jungles and their villages will be relocated.

Source: 'Proposal moved to declare one national park, 2 sanctuaries as tiger reserves,' [www.freepressjournal.in](http://www.freepressjournal.in), 19/08/2023.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **NTCA panel to investigate tiger deaths in Vidarbha**

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has set up a two-member panel to investigate the surge in tiger fatalities in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Established

on September 13, the panel was given a month to submit its report.

The current count of 33 deaths in the year so far is the highest recorded number in the recent past. The previous year had witnessed 31 tiger deaths in the state. All tiger casualties in Maharashtra over the past three years have occurred within the Vidarbha region.

An NTCA official attributed most tiger deaths to human-animal conflict. An official of the Wildlife Trust of India, a non-profit, suggested that with the increase in tiger population in Vidarbha over the years tigers disperse to areas outside of PAs in an effort to establish their territories. This gives rise to more interactions and more conflict.

Source: 'Panel set up to probe surge in tiger deaths in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region,' [www.theprint.in](http://www.theprint.in), 15/09/2023.

### **8000 ha of forests handed over for timber extraction in lieu of Kanhargaon WLS**



The Maharashtra government recently handed over 7,920.347 ha of prime forest area to the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM), the state-owned corporation that extracts timber for commercial gains. The forests have been leased out to FDCM in lieu of the area it had handed over for Kanhargaon Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Chandrapur district.

In the last 10-12 years, the state government had taken away 750 sq km area it leased to FDCM to notify wildlife sanctuaries to compensate loss of protected areas while de-notifying the 8,496 sq km GIB sanctuary in Solapur (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 2; Vol.

XIX, No. 4; Vol. XVIII, No. 1; Vol. XVII, No. 1 and Vol. XIV, No. 2). This was done as per Supreme Court directions. On March 15, 2021, the state had taken away 251.38 sq km area to notify Kanhargaon sanctuary, which is a crucial link between Tadoba and Kawal Tiger Reserves. The FDCM was since seeking over 220.30 sq. km forest area in lieu of this area. The state has, however, transferred 7,920.347 ha (79.20 sq. km).

The corporation has been asked to start forestry operations in these areas as per the existing working plan of the territorial forest divisions till the management plans are not approved by the MoEFCC. The move has been opposed by wildlifers and conservationists. They have asked for the forests surrounding the newly declared sanctuary to be added to it. They have noted that FDCM's monoculture plantations of mainly teak for generating revenue is now outdated and dense mixed forests having cultural heritage values are now more important to maintain biodiversity as well as for the ecological balance. They have also noted that the forests handed over to the FDCM for commercial logging act as food security and habitat for people as well as wildlife.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Amid climate change, state hands over 8k ha forest area to FDCM to cut', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 05/08/2023.

### **Complaint against online booking firm at TATR for embezzlement; contract terminated**

A divisional forest officer has lodged a complaint for embezzlement of an amount of Rs.12 crore against the Chandrapur Wild Connectivity Solution, a firm that was given a contract for online booking at the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). The firm is a partnership venture of two brothers Abhishek and Rohit Thakur, who are residents of Chandrapur city. A case was registered under

Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 420 (cheating) and 406 (criminal breach of trust) at the Ramnagar police station on August 18.

According to the police, a detailed audit at the firm conducted for the years 2020-21 to 2023-24 revealed that the firm was supposed to pay Rs. 22.80 crore to the TATR management. It had however paid only Rs. 10.65 crore - a difference of a little more than Rs. 12 cr. The firm has not been able to provide an explanation when asked for by the authorities.

The TATR management has terminated the contract with the firm and appointed a new agency for online booking.

Source: 'Rs.12 Crore Fraud In Online Booking At Tiger Reserve Unearthed, Case Filed,' [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com), 19/08/2023.

## ODISHA

### 55% fall in Odisha tiger numbers since 2006

The all-India tiger census 2022 figures released on July 29, 2023 show a drop of over 50% in tiger numbers in Odisha since 2006. Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR), one of the two TRs in the state reported no tigers in the 2022 census.

As per the All India Tiger Estimation 2022, Odisha has 20 tigers, down from 28 in 2018, and a 55% fall since 2006, when the number was 45. While the number of tigers has doubled from 8 in 2018 to 16 in 2022 in Similipal, Satkosia TR, which had only one tiger in 2018 has reported none this time.

The only increase in tiger numbers in Odisha in the past 16 years was in 2010, when the census recorded 32 tigers.

While experts believe rampant poaching is the main reason for the sharp decline in tiger numbers, some officials have raised questions on the methodology of counting the tigers. Convinced that there are more tigers than recorded in the census, the state government said it will conduct its own

survey later this year (see accompanying story; also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIV, No. 5)

Source: Sujit Bisoyi. 'Roar falling silent in Odisha: 45 tigers in 2006, 20 now; one reserve left with none,' [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 29/07/2023.

### Odisha to conduct its own tiger census

20 forest personnel have been trained as master trainers at Chandaka Godibari in Bhubaneswar to carry out the state's tiger census. The laying of pugmark impression pads and survey of tiger signs is to be carried out between October 15 and October 31 followed by the deployment of camera traps between November 1 and January 15. The results would be compiled for an announcement on the total number of tigers in the state by the end of January 2024.

Odisha announced its decision to carry out its own tiger count after the 'All India Tiger Estimation' report released in July put the number of tigers in the state at 20, down from the 45 estimated in 2006. Odisha's chief wildlife warden (CWLW) said that the latest estimation may not be a true reflection of the tigers' number in the state as the sampling intensity was relatively low.

The forests account for 39.31% of the state's total geographic area, however, only 733 camera traps were deployed, which is relatively low compared to 6,894 and 4,872 deployed in Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Maharashtra respectively. No tigers were reported in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR), where a pair of tigers were translocated from Madhya Pradesh in June 2018.

The CWLW further pointed out that the latest estimation did not take into account large inviolate areas and suitable habitats in districts such as Gajapati, Rayagada, Koraput and Malkangiri, and in areas adjoining Chhattisgarh such as the forests of Khariar. He said that though the Similipal TR in Odisha is the only known source of tiger population, there have been recent instances of movement of tigers in various areas such as the Hirakud

and Keonjhar wildlife divisions, and also Sundargarh. Most of such tigers are possibly dispersing individuals - immature males moving across the landscape either in search of mates or a disturbance-free habitat with a good prey base. It is important that these tigers are detected, identified and tracked.

The state will also count sub-adult tigers which the country-wide estimation did not take into account. Indirect signs would be used to identify areas having tiger presence, following which camera traps will be deployed.

A former member secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and a wildlife conservationist have however said that the exercise will not lead to any dramatic increase in the number of tigers. The former NTCA official said that the grids to deploy camera traps are chosen based on the probability of tiger presence based on indirect signs. In MP and Maharashtra, more camera traps were used because there was a likelihood of more tigers being present in the TRs there as compared to Odisha. He said further that no area other than Similipal has a good prey base for tigers in the state.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 5)

Source: Debabrata Mohanty. 'Odisha begins training of master trainers for its tiger census,' [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 15/09/2023.

## RAJASTHAN

### **NTCA approves expansion of three TRs in Rajasthan; new TR in Dholpur-Karauli**

The National Tiger Conservation Authority has approved the proposal of the Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) for the expansion of three tiger reserves: Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (TR) by around 35 sq km, Sariska TR by 600 sq km and Mukundra Hills TR by 1,100 sq km. Approximately 1,900 sq km will be added as a consequence to these reserves as buffer.

The Centre also recently accorded its approval to state's fifth TR in Dholpur-Karauli that is spread over an area of 1,000 sq. km. This is the 53rd TR in the country.

An in-principle approval has also been granted to declare 2,500 sq km of the Kumbhalgarh forests as a tiger reserve.

Source: Sachin Saini. 'NTCA approves expansion of three tiger reserves in Rajasthan: Official', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 05/09/2023.

## TAMIL NADU

### **Madras HC asks Tamil Nadu govt. to acquire all private forests within notified elephant corridors**

Observing that elephants and other animals cannot be deprived of food and shelter, grown either spontaneously or silviculturally, in their natural habitat, the Madras High Court (HC) has directed the State government to acquire all private forests that fall within the notified elephant corridor on Sigur Plateau in the Nilgiris district.

Justice C. Saravanan also directed the state government to conduct a thorough examination as to how ryotwari (farming) or other kinds of Patta (revenue document to prove land ownership) were granted to the owners of private forests during the British era and take steps for cancellation, if necessary, by following due process of law.

The orders were passed while denying permission for cutting around 12 lakh bamboo shoots from 107 acres of private forest land which formed part of Singara Estate spread over 800 acres at Masinagudi village in Udthagamandalam taluk and had been notified as an elephant corridor through a government order issued on August 31, 2010.

The judge dismissed a writ petition filed by the estate owner M. Guruchand Vaid seeking permission to cut the silviculturally matured, flowered bamboo from his private

land and concurred with Additional Advocate General V Arun that the elephants would be deprived of food if the bamboos were allowed to be cut. Though the petitioner had contended that his land would not fall within the purview of the elephant corridor, the judge said, the dispute raised by the petitioner was still pending before the Sigur Plateau Elephant Corridor Inquiry Committee constituted by the Supreme Court on October 14, 2020 under the chairmanship of Madras HC retired judge K Venkataraman. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 6 and Vol. XXIV, No. 5).

Source: Mohamed Imranullah S. 'Madras High Court directs Tamil Nadu govt. to acquire all private forests situated within notified elephant corridors', [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com), 17/08/2023

## UTTARAKHAND & HIMACHAL PRADESH

### **Tiger from Rajaji TR walks through four states to reach Renuka forest**

An adult male tiger that made its way from Rajaji Tiger Reserve (TR) in Uttarakhand through to Himachal Pradesh (HP) in four months from October 2022 to February 2023, has moved another 35 km and seems to have settled in the Renuka forest in HP.

According to the forest officials, the tiger might have begun its journey by crossing the Ganges River from Rajaji's Chilla range to Motichur in October 2022. The tiger had been spotted in Simbalbara National Park in Sirmour district of HP in February 2023. It was subsequently sighted in Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Haryana in May 2023 before reaching the Renuka forest in HP, where it was spotted in mid-August, earlier this year.

The Rajaji TR director Saket Badola said that the tiger's long, uninterrupted migration through Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, HP and Haryana shows that there is a functional tiger corridor through these four states. He also pointed out that it was the first

time in the last 100 years that a tiger was sighted in Kalesar WLS as well as in the Renuka forest.

Source: Pankul Sharma. 'Tiger from Uttarakhand that travelled 4 states spotted in Renuka forest in Himachal Pradesh,' [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 27/08/2023.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### **FD suspects that deaths due to murders in Bijnor being attributed to leopard attacks**



At least 15 incidents of recent human deaths in Bijnor district said to have been caused by leopards are being closely scrutinised by the forest department (FD). Forest officials fear that deaths due to other causes, including murders, may be getting passed off as deaths due to leopard attacks.

The FD has requested the Bijnor district administration to ensure the presence of wildlife experts during post-mortem to rule out any foul play. A letter has been sent to the district magistrate by a divisional forest officer in this regard.

A forest officer said that criminals sometimes commit murder and dump the body in sugarcane fields. Scavenging animals like jackals consume the dead too. During the post-mortem, such incidents also look like leopard attacks.

The official said that a leopard attack can be confirmed by on-the-spot analysis, by studying the eating pattern, and the post-

mortem in which the big cat's canine impact can be closely studied before confirming it as a leopard attack. However, this can only be done by a wildlife expert and forensic investigations.

Source: Harveer Dabas. 'Murders being passed off as leopard attacks in UP's Bijnor?'  
[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com),  
16/09/2023.

## WEST BENGAL

### South 24-Paraganas Forest Division in Sunderbans gets new tranquilliser guns



Two new tranquilliser guns were recently handed over to the South 24-Parganas Forest Division. These are said to be lighter and more effective than ones currently with the forest department (FD). The viewing scope, which helps shooters to hit targets with long-range accuracy, is better in the new guns. One of the guns is double-barrelled, meaning a shooter can immediately fire a second shot if the first shot misses the target. The new guns have carbon capsules in the cartridge, each of which can be used to fire around 25 darts.

The staff members in the division have undergone basic training in using the guns. An advance training is due.

The tiger habitat in South 24-Parganas in Sunderbans comprises the Matla, Raidighi and Ramganga ranges, covering an area of around 1,100 sq. km. At least eight tigers are reported to have strayed into human habitations in the Sunderbans between December 2021 and February 2022.

Source: Debraj Mitra. 'Better tranquilliser guns in Sunderbans for tigers,'  
[www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com),  
21/07/2023.

### FD seeks funds for tiger conservation in Neora Valley NP

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) has sent a letter to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) seeking funds for tiger conservation at Neora Valley National Park (NP).

A cab driver had in 2017 clicked a photo of a tiger crossing a road in Lava on the fringes of the park, prompting the FD to install camera traps at different locations in the park in 2018. These camera traps recorded presence of tigers at approximately 22 locations from 2018 to 2022. The FD collected scats and pugmarks, and sent those to the Wildlife Institute of India along with the photos for analysis. The report is yet to come, said the divisional forest officer of Gorumara Wildlife Division.

The FD, which has continued to underscore the presence of tigers in Neora Valley, pointed out that four experts from the Zoological Survey of India had installed camera traps in the NP as a part of 'Himalayan Biodiversity Monitoring Project' in 2018. The report of the project confirmed the presence of tigers here. A copy of the report has been attached with the letter sent to NTCA.

A senior forest official said that NTCA's recently published estimate of tigers in India has mentioned one tiger at the Buxa Tiger Reserve; it had however completely omitted a mention of Neora Valley. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 3; Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5 & 1 and Vol. XXIV, No. 1)

Source: 'Funds plea to National Tiger Conservation Authority for big cats at Kalimpong park,'  
[www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com),  
12/09/2023.

## Fishing cat breeding program proposed at multiple sites



The conservation breeding programme for the Fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus*, which has started at Garchumuk Zoological Garden in Howrah district will be extended to Bankura and Jhargram districts in the southern part of the state and a few places in the north as well.

The cats born as part of the program will be released into their natural habitat by 2024, informed the state forest minister Jyotipriya Mallick. She said further that some of these animals will also be displayed at the Bengal Safari Zoo at Siliguri. A total of six to eight pairs of fishing cats are expected to be released into their natural habitat in 2024. A study is underway to identify the places where the animals born in captivity could be released.

Initially, Jharkhali in the Sundarbans in South 24 Parganas district has been selected for the release. Studies to find habitat suitability for release are also being conducted in Howrah, Hooghly, Purba and Paschim Bardhaman.

The Alipore Zoological Garden and Garchumuk Zoological Garden had been selected for the setting up of a Fishing cat conservation centre at the 20th technical committee meeting of West Bengal Zoo Authority held in April 2021.

Source: 'Hope for fishing cats: West Bengal's new breeding effort aims to bolster population,' [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 13/08/2023.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### 3,682 tigers in India: Tiger census 2022



There are 3,682 tigers now in India, up from 2,967 in 2018, a rise of almost 24% in four years. The latest tiger numbers are mentioned in the *Status of Tigers: Co-Predators & Prey in India-2022* report released at Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) by Union minister of state for environment, forest and climate change Ashwini Kumar Choubey on the occasion of International Tiger Day on July 29, 2023.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced in Mysuru on April 9, 2023 at a programme to commemorate 50 years of Project Tiger, that India had 3,167 tigers. He had also cited the 2022 census. Wildlife Institute of India director VK Tiwari explained that 3,167 was the minimum count as per photographs of tigers while 3,682 is the population estimate arrived at after extrapolation from all data, including pictures, pug marks and other indicators like scat.

The revised figures follow detailed analyses of census data collected during the fifth cycle of estimation conducted in 2022. Madhya Pradesh retained its number one spot with 49% increase in its tiger population from 526 to 785. Karnataka, at second place, has 563 tigers with an increase of 7.4% from 2018. Uttarakhand stands third with 26.7% growth - 560 tigers, up from 442 in 2018. Maharashtra has 444, up from 312 in 2018, a rise of 29%. The count in Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala stood at 306, 227 and 213, respectively. Uttar Pradesh, saw a rise of 32 tigers with 205 in 2022, up from 173 in 2018.

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State-wise tiger numbers in 2022 census; only the states in which numbers have increased significantly:

Rank	State	Tiger numbers
1	Madhya Pradesh	785
2	Karnataka	563
3	Uttarakhand	560
4	Maharashtra	444
5	Tamil Nadu	306
6	Assam	227
7	Kerala	213
8	Uttar Pradesh	205

Landscape-wise numbers:

Landscape	2022 Census
Central India & Eastern Ghats	1439
Western Ghats	1087
Shivalik Hills & Gangetic Plains	819
North East Hills & Brahmaputra Plains	236
Sunderbans	101

TR-wise tiger numbers:

Rank	TR	2022 Census
1	Corbett	260
2	Bandipur	150
3	Nagarhole	141
4	Badhargarh	135
4	Dudhwa	135
5	Mudumalai	114
6	Kanha	105
7	Kaziranga	104
8	Sunderbans	100
9	Tadoba Andhari	97

States that recorded decrease in tiger numbers:

State	2018	2022
Telangana	26	21
Chhattisgarh	19	17
Jharkhand	5	1
Odisha	28	20
Arunachal Pradesh	29	9

Source: Shivani Azad. 'Pegged at 3,167 in April, India's tiger population now placed at 3,682,' [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 30/07/2023.

### State of India's Birds 2023: An overview

The 'State of India's Birds 2023', a citizen science effort put together jointly by 13 organisations was released on 25 August 2023 in New Delhi. The 2nd edition of this report (the 1st one was published three years ago) is based on 30 million field observations from over 30,000 birdwatchers spanning across the country. It presents an assessment of the status of 942 species.

The overall outcome of these assessments largely reflects the global trend: some generalist species are doing well, while the many bird species show various degrees of decline. The International Union for Conservation of Nature IUCN Red List shows that 49% of bird species worldwide are declining in population, compared with only 6% increasing. In India, generalist species like feral Rock pigeon, Ashy prinia, Asian koel and Indian peafowl are doing very well. Other common species like the Baya weaver and Pied bushchat are relatively stable. But the larger picture is grim: 60% of species show long-term declines (out of 348 species that could be assessed for long-term trends), and 40% of species are declining currently (out of 359 species assessed for current annual trend). The declines are not spread uniformly across different types of species; examining differences across groups of species that share common characteristics reveals informative patterns.

Habitat specialists—particularly birds of grasslands and other open habitats, wetlands, and woodlands—are declining rapidly. In terms of diet, carnivores, insectivores, and granivores are declining more rapidly than omnivores or fruit- and nectar-eaters. Separately, migratory species appear to be under greater threat than non-migrants. And

species endemic to the Western Ghats–Sri Lanka region are faring worse than others.

Certain groups of birds are faring particularly poorly, including open habitat species like bustards and coursers, riverine sandbar-nesting birds like skimmers and some terns, coastal shorebirds, open-country raptors, and a number of ducks. The report notes with concern that a large number of common species are in trouble. Equally worrying is that a considerable number of species lack the data to be assessed. Insufficiency of data meant that of the 942 species covered in this report, long-term trends could not be calculated for 44% and current annual trend could not be estimated for 31% of the species.

Following are the highlights of the report:

- 942 Indian birds assessed for conservation priority
- 30,000 birdwatchers contributed 30 million observations analysed for trends and distribution
- 217 species stable or increasing in the last eight years
- 204 species declining in the past three decades
- 178 species classified as High Conservation Priority
- 14 species, including Indian roller, recommended for IUCN Red List reassessment
- Asian koel has increased in the past three decades
- Indian peafowl continues to thrive
- Birds that live in key habitats like open ecosystems, rivers, and coasts have declined
- Raptors, migratory shorebirds, and ducks have declined the most
- Eight major threats to birds in India are synthesised
- Case studies from sites across India illustrate the vital role of systematic bird monitoring
- Policy and action must align to highlight species of high conservation priority, address problems of neglected habitats, and promote research and monitoring

The 13 organisations that collaborated to put together the report are the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bombay Natural History Society, Foundation for Ecological Security, Nature Conservation Foundation, National Biodiversity Authority, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Wetlands International—South Asia, Wildlife Institute of India, Wildlife Trust of India, Worldwide Fund for Nature–India, and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)

The full report can be accessed from:  
<https://stateofindiasbirds.in>

Source: 'State of India's Birds 2023 report',  
Press note,  
<https://stateofindiasbirds.in>,  
25/08/2023

### **150 elephant corridors in India: Project Elephant study**

India has at least 150 elephant corridors spanning 15 range-states across four elephant-bearing regions, according to a new report published by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The central government's 2010 Elephant Task Force report (Gajah) had listed 88 corridors in the country.

The new report, titled "Elephant Corridors of India", is an outcome of a collaborative effort between the MoEF&CC's Project Elephant and state forest departments, with technical support from the Wildlife Institute of India. According to the report, the intensity of elephants using the corridors has increased in 59 corridors, remained stable in 29 and decreased in 29 others. Information regarding the current use of 18 corridors was unavailable. Of the total corridors, 15 have been impaired and require efforts to restore functionality. The report is based on ground validation work carried out over two years.

Following are their details of the 150 corridors documented in the report:

- within the political boundaries of states: 126
- located across two states: 19
- transnational: six (these are between India and Nepal, primarily in Uttar Pradesh)
- in the east-central region: 52
- in the northeast: 48
- in the southern region: 32
- in the northern region: 18

West Bengal leads with the highest number of 26 elephant corridors, accounting for over 17% of such land patches in the country. Data on elephant movement was found to be limited in many northeastern states that host relatively small elephant populations.

There are also states in which elephants have recently expanded their ranges. These include the Vidarbha region in Maharashtra adjoining Chhattisgarh, southern Maharashtra adjoining Karnataka, Bandhavgarh and Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserves in Madhya Pradesh, and northern Andhra Pradesh where elephants move in from Odisha. Assessing the long-term viability of habitats to support elephant populations and adopting a data-driven approach to identify corridors is crucial in these new areas, says the report.

As per the last estimation conducted in 2017, there are around 30,000 elephants in India.

Source: 'India has 150 elephant corridors spanning 15 range-states, West Bengal tops list: Report,' [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 13/09/2023.

### **SC permits Centre to replace CEC with a permanent body of experts**

The Supreme Court (SC), on August 18, permitted the Centre to form a permanent body of experts to be consulted on issues related to environment and forest cases. This will replace the existing ad-hoc experts' panel of the central empowered committee (CEC).

The SC noted that while the final notification is expected to be issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), the permanent body of experts will have additional powers vis-a-vis its predecessor as not only will the body continue to assist the SC in environment-related matters, but even the central government can seek its recommendation on any issue.

Those privy to the decision said that the new panel will be a five-member body with a chairperson and other experts in the field of environment, forest and wildlife. The tenure of members will be for three years. The final notification will include requirement for the newly appointed body to submit quarterly reports to the Centre and every two years, there shall be an audit by the MoEF&CC.

In May 2023, the apex court had expressed its desire to replace the 20-year-old ad-hoc CEC. Part of the reason was the fact that the members were mostly aged between 70 to 80 years and could seldom meet or conduct crucial spot visits. The ad-hoc committee was constituted by a government notification of September 2002 under the Environment Protection Act 1986. The working of CEC had earned the ire of the SC recently; on March 24, 2023, in a case related to the construction of a convention centre at Patnitop in Jammu the CEC gave a recommendation contrary to an order passed by the court (*PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 2). The court had taken serious objection to this.

This is the second such ad-hoc expert body assisting the court that is getting a permanent form under the statute. The Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), an expert panel assisting the SC on matters of pollution relating to Delhi and the national capital region (NCR), was replaced in 2020 by the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and adjoining areas.

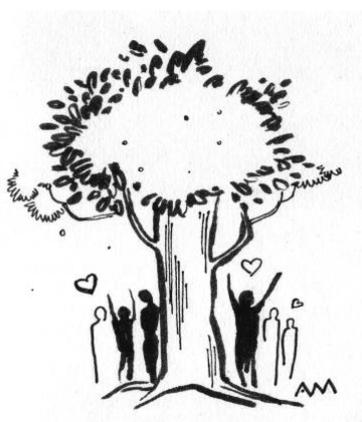
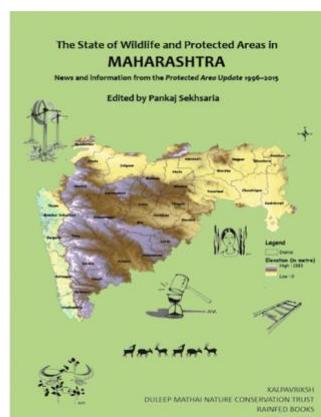
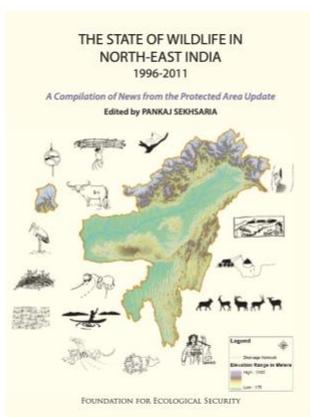
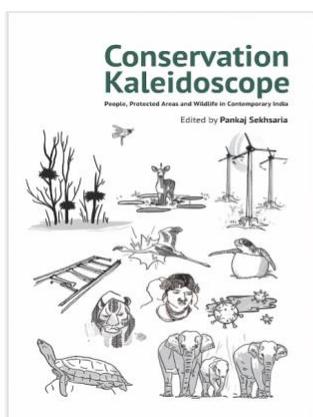
Source: Abraham Thomas. 'SC approves new 'permanent' forest expert body,' [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 19/08/2023.

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## SOUTH ASIA

### **A project to restore tree cover on one million hectares of land in Eastern Himalayas**

The Balipara Foundation, in collaboration with Conservation International, has launched a project titled ‘The Great People’s Forest of the Eastern Himalayas’. This initiative aims to raise \$1 billion to plant one billion trees and restore one million hectares of land across the Eastern Himalayas spanning Northeast India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

According to the Balipara Foundation, this effort will put the Eastern Himalayas, and the one billion people who rely directly on it, on the international conservation agenda. India’s G20 Presidency encouraged the foundation to design this initiative. The Eastern Himalayas is an ecosystem of profound importance, stretching across diverse landscapes.

It is estimated that tree cover over 100,000 hectares disappears annually in this region.

Source: Puja Das. ‘Great People's Forest initiative to raise \$1 bn for reforestation in Eastern Himalayas,’ [www.livemint.com](http://www.livemint.com), 02/09/2023.

## **BANGLADESH**

### **Studies & awareness generation initiatives for tiger conservation in Sundarbans**

Concerned authorities in Bangladesh have taken up various initiatives to protect tigers and curb human-tiger conflict under a special project named ‘Sundarbans Tiger Conservation Project’. The implementation of the project, with a budget of Tk 35.9 crores, began in April 2022. Tigers and prey animals are being surveyed as part of the initiative. A camera trapping survey has been completed in

the Khulna and Satkhira ranges under the Sundarbans West Forest Division and a similar survey in the Sarankhola and Chandpai ranges under the East Forest Division will be conducted in November. The final survey report is expected to be published in July 2024.

Other initiatives include the erection of nylon fencing over five km in critical locations to prevent tigers from entering adjoining human localities. The fencing will be increased to 60 km if it proves to be effective. A tower will be constructed in Dhansagar area of Sarankhola range to monitor fires. Twelve high dunes will be constructed inside the Sundarbans to offer shelter to animals during floods, storms, and high tides. Research will also be conducted to study the canine distemper virus in tigers.

All officers and employees of the Sundarbans East and West Forest Divisions will undergo special training. 340 members of the village tiger response team (VTRT) and 184 members of the community patrol group (CPG) will receive training to resolve situations arising from human-tiger conflicts. Satellite tags will be used to monitor movements of two tigers that often enter human habitations and apps will be provided to CPG and VTRT members to allow them to monitor tiger activity on their mobile phones.

Source: ‘Fence to be erected in parts of Sundarbans to tackle human-tiger conflicts,’ [www.businesspostbd.com](http://www.businesspostbd.com), 11/09/2023.

### **Bangladesh pauses plan to reintroduce tigers in Chittagong Hills**

The Bangladesh government is said to be rethinking a 2020 plan for the re-introduction of tigers to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the south-east part of the country bordering India and Myanmar. The 2020 announcement was consistent with the government’s Tiger Action Plan for 2018-2027, which listed ensuring a “viable tiger population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” as a low-priority goal,

and indicated required resources of 100 million Bangladeshi taka (around USD 914,000) over a 10-year period.

The re-thinking is said to be on account of a 2021 feasibility study has found that conditions - both habitat and prey - were not currently suitable for the reintroduction. The government-funded study was conducted by the forest department with technical assistance from IUCN Bangladesh. The report – which has not been made public – maintains that there is no solid evidence of tigers being present in the CHT. This is despite reports of tigers being seen crossing the Kasalong River, a major waterway that runs through the region, in 2021.

The 1,645 sq. km Kasalong Reserve Forest in the CHT is still relatively undisturbed, and is home to many mammals including Asian elephants, two species of bear, three species of deer, leopards and wild boar. Debate over whether some tigers, too, have survived here has been ongoing for years. Pugmarks seen in the area in 2016 were believed by some experts to be of tigers.

Source: Rafiqul Islam. 'Bangladesh pauses plan to reintroduce tigers in Chittagong Hills', [www.thethirdpole.net](http://www.thethirdpole.net), 18/08/2023

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### **Asian elephant expert R Sukumar elected as a vice-chair of IPCC**

Raman Sukumar, an expert on the Asian elephant, has been elected a vice-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The election for the same was held at the United Nations Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi in July this year. Sukumar was elected as a member of the Working Group II vice-chairs. He is now part of the new IPCC Bureau comprising 34

members, including the new IPCC chair and three vice-chairs.

The Panel also elected the 12 members of the Task Force Bureau on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories. Mazhar Hayat of Pakistan was elected as a co-chair of the same. Maheswar Rupakheti of Nepal was elected as one of the Working Group I vice-chairs. The IPCC elected James Ferguson 'Jim' Skea of the United Kingdom as its chairman. The election of the new IPCC Bureau opens the way for work to start on the IPCC's Seventh Assessment Report, expected to be completed in the coming five to seven years.

Sukumar, is best known for his work on Asian elephants and how their presence has affected both human and natural environments. He became a member of the Project Elephant Steering Committee, which provided technical support and advice on matters of elephant conservation to the Indian government in 1993. He also chaired the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union from 1997 to 2004 and has served as director of the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre, of the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, an independent organisation that he had helped to establish in 1997.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Asian elephant expert Raman Sukumar now a Vice-Chair of the IPCC,' [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 07/08/2023.

### **Alien species invasion at unprecedented rates around the world: IPBES study**

The 'Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control has revealed that a large number of invasive alien plants and animal species have been invading at unprecedented rates with potentially serious biodiversity and economic implications. Moreover, it is impacting the well-being of indigenous communities. The report was prepared by representatives of the 143 member states of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

These alien species include plants, shrubs, microbes and others that have been introduced to new regions through human activities and affect the growth of native species, which in turn affects ecosystem function, goods and services.

For instance, In Kerala, the Caribbean false mussel *Mytilopsis sallei* has wiped out native clams and oysters which are important for local fisheries. *Mytilopsis sallei* is originally from the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of South and Central America.

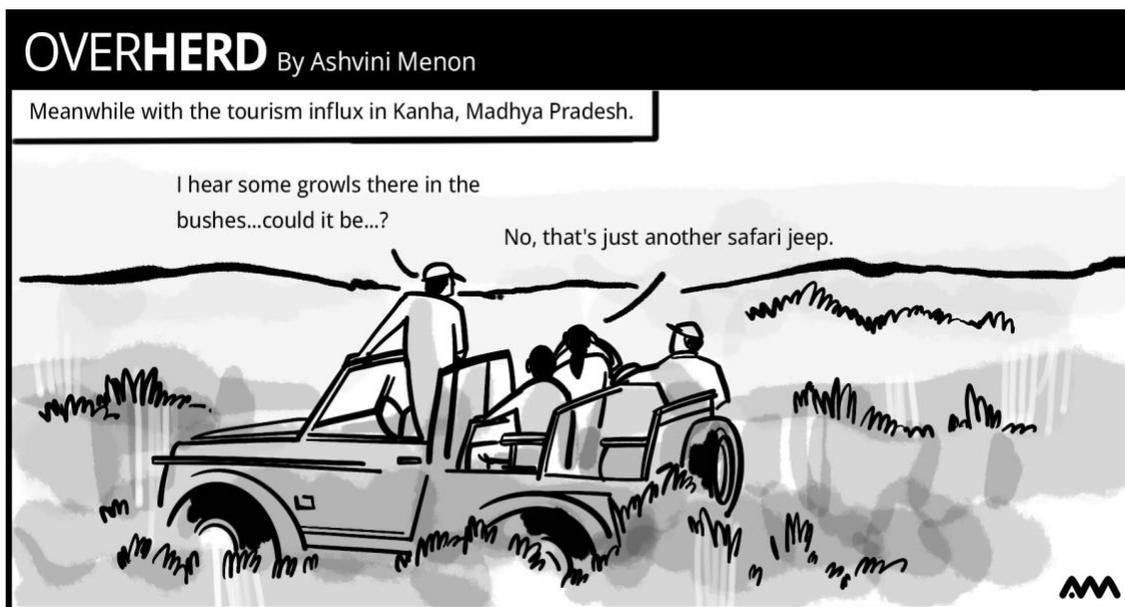
The report says that not all alien species become invasive but a significant proportion do. According to the report, about 6% of alien plants; 22% of alien invertebrates; 14% of alien vertebrates; and 11% of alien microbes are known to be invasive.

The report recorded that there are 37,000 alien species, including more than 3,500 invasive alien species around the world. These invasive alien species are reported to have been responsible for 60% of global plant and animal extinctions recorded. The report

pointed out that Common water hyacinth *Pontederia crassipes* is the world's most widespread invasive alien species on land. Lantana *Lantana camara* and the Black rat *Rattus rattus* are respectively the second and third most widespread globally.

More than 2,300 invasive alien species are found on lands managed, used and owned by indigenous peoples across all regions of the world. Biological invasions negatively affect the autonomy, rights and cultural identities of indigenous peoples and local communities through the loss of traditional livelihoods and knowledge, reduced mobility and access to land, and increased labour to manage the invasive alien species, says the report.

Source: Jitendra Choubey. 'Invasive alien species causing serious biodiversity, economic threats, says report,' [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com), 05/09/2023.



## IN MEMORY

### Aditya ‘Dicky’ Singh

Aditya ‘Dicky’ Singh is a name known for many things - an outdoor enthusiast, a wildlife lover, an incredible photographer, a friend with an open heart, a devoted worshiper of tigers, a compassionate soul towards all living beings, and, a cheerful personality whose *joie de vivre* was contagious.

Aditya was born on May 24, 1966, in Allahabad. He specialized in civil engineering, and decided to become an IAS officer. He soon realized, however, that this was not his true calling. He quit the IAS, something quite unthinkable in the Indian context. During this period, Poonam entered his life. Aditya and Poonam chose Ranthambhore as their new home in 1998, and eventually, this became their tiger abode.

Aditya’s fingers were always on the pulse of Ranthambhore’s successive tiger generations, and a steadily growing section of enthusiasts eagerly awaited his blog posts on the subject. He was a trusted partner of the forest department, bringing with him a unique combination of quality and value - hard work, a complete disinterest in fame, a rare capacity for connecting with people along with a wealth of new ideas. He spoke fearlessly and candidly on the scientific aspects of nature and wildlife - appropriately when needed, harshly when required - yet always truthful.

After the success of the first BBC documentary on which Aditya worked, hardly any film project related to Ranthambhore could have been completed without his inputs. He collaborated with world-renowned wildlife filmmakers, offering advice and support on filming tigers, and working with organizations like National Geographic, Animal Planet, Discovery and Disney.

He was a true and authentic voice for the tigers of Ranthambhore. Aditya and Poonam’s concern for the well-being of Ranthambhore’s wildlife eventually led them

to buy 35 acres of barren land outside the reserve and over 21 years, convert it into a jungle. Today, thousands of trees thrive here along with the tiger and multiple prey species.

On September 6, 2023, Aditya departed for his final abode, leaving those of us who had the privilege of knowing him devastated and mourning his loss. He leaves behind a rich legacy that is matchless and will undoubtedly continue to be a source of inspiration for scores of future wildlife conservationists, photographers, enthusiasts and free thinkers for many years to come. This is especially true for his young daughter Nyra, who has already begun demonstrating that she has inherited her father’s innate proficiency with the camera.

- **Dharmendra Khandal** works with Tiger Watch, Ranthambhore.  
Email: dharmkhandal@gmail.com

### S Jayachandran

Recently we lost S. Jayachandran, a dedicated wildlife conservationist who was at the forefront of most of the important conservation movements in Tamil Nadu since the 1990s.

I had the pleasure of interacting with Jayachandran on several occasions and I found him a passionate naturalist. He was a quiet, soft-spoken man, who never raised his voice, but never shied away from taking a stand on diverse conservation issues. He picked up bird watching in the early eighties in the Nilgiris and quickly developed a deep understanding of the Western Ghats ecosystem. This enabled him to foresee the consequences of indiscriminate destructive activities which were coming up in this eco-fragile region.

In 1990, he organized the Tamil Nadu Green Movement along with his friends. He then tackled several issues like pollution of the Bhavani River, setting up of the Neutrino Observatory at Singara, ill-planned construction of the Karmadai-Coimbatore

road, widening of the Hasanur-Kollegal road, construction of a new road through Sirivilliputhur and Meghamalai Sanctuaries, and the construction of a new railway line Chamrajnagar to Coimbatore through Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR).

When advocacy and persuasion failed, he approached the courts and invariably got favorable orders such as for curbing the destruction of grasslands around Ooty due to unregulated film shootings, eviction of encroachers from forests of Gudalur Janman lands, protection of shola forests at Mudimund, closure of night traffic through Mudumalai TR, securing the Segur Elephant corridor from indiscriminate construction activities or recovering unused forest lands from TANTEA for regenerating natural forests.

Jayachandran has a long list of successes to his credit. But there were two which are outstanding and most challenging. One was the pioneering and collaborative effort by his small team of converting hardcore elephant poachers of Theni into elephant protectors. He managed in 2005 to establish contact with 23 elephant poachers of Theni and persuaded them to stop poaching and surrender their weapons. He realized that their economic rehabilitation was absolutely necessary to prevent them from reverting to poaching. He got in touch with the Kerala Forest Department, which provided alternative livelihood by employing them as tourist guides. Their first-hand knowledge of the techniques employed by poachers and of forest topography helped in combating poaching in the Periyar TR.

The other outstanding achievement was to motivate the residents of the remote and inaccessible Thengumarada village located on the easternmost boundary of the Mudumalai TR to accept the Voluntary Relocation Program. Jayachandran and his colleagues established contacts with the villagers, stayed with them for several days and informed them about this relocation and rehabilitation package. As a result of his one-to-one

interaction all the 500 families agreed for voluntary translocation to a more accessible area. They are now hopeful of starting a safe new life instead of living in perpetual conflict with wild animals. The relocation will bring an end to their geographical, social and economic isolation and bring to them basic amenities like schools, medical facilities and livelihood opportunities.

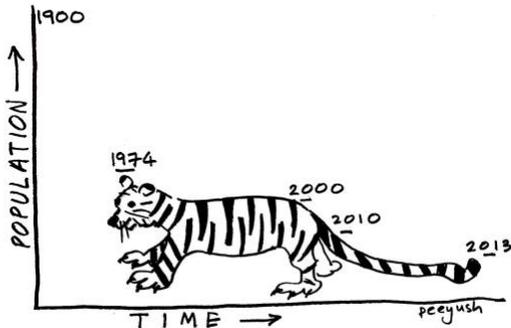
The recent landmark order of the Green Bench of the Madras High Court for release of Rs. 74 crores from Central CAMPA Fund (Compensatory Afforestation Fund) through the National Tiger Conservation Authority for relocation of Thengumarada village was the result of many years of effort by Jayachandran. The sprawling village after it is vacated will help re-wild and integrate about 1,000 acres into a prime elephant and tiger habitat. Although Jayachandran did not live to see the relocation (which is likely to happen soon), the villagers of Thengumarada will be forever grateful to him. Jayachandran with his deep understanding of the needs of the people living in forests, his sincerity and honesty earned the trust and respect of Thengumarada and also the elephant poachers. For these remarkable achievements, he was conferred the Wildlife Service Award by Sanctuary Nature Foundation in 2017.

The untimely passing away of Jayachandran at the age of 65 has dealt a cruel blow to his family and friends. I am sure, his daughter Tamilselvi and son-in-law Santhanaraman, who are advocates and accomplished naturalists in their own right, will keep his legacy alive. Jayachandran will be remembered for his sterling contributions, which will be an inspiration to many budding conservationists for years to come.

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## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### National tiger census to start in December



The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has announced that the all India tiger estimation 2013-14 will start in December, later this year. The census will be carried out using the refined methodology of double sampling and the states of Goa and Nagaland will also be included in the count this time.

The census will be conducted in three phases with Phase I involving collection of ground data using an eight-day protocol. Phase II will include use of remote sensed data to generate landscape and related indices, while Phase III will involve use of camera traps and distance sampling for computing densities of tigers. During this phase, expert teams from Wildlife Institute of India will visit states to monitor the process and to collect data.

Under the ongoing centrally sponsored scheme 100% assistance will be provided for conducting the eight-day field protocol towards primary data collection, besides organizing orientation and training workshops. The important new feature in the estimation this time would be use of tiger reserve level monitoring data.

The regional workshops for forest officials will be conducted from September 4 to October 1, 2013. The first workshop will be held from September 4 to 6 in Dudhwa for Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh; in Kanha from September 11 to 13

for Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand & Chhattisgarh; in Periyar from September 18 to 20 for Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu; in Kaziranga from September 25 to 27 for Assam, Arunachal, Mizoram, Buxa; and in Sundarbans from September 30 to October 1 for West Bengal.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, 'National tiger census to kick off in December', *The Times of India*, 09/08/13.

### 50 tiger deaths in first seven months of 2013

50 tiger deaths have been reported in the country in the first seven months of 2013. Heading the list is Karnataka with the loss of 13 tigers, followed by Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh with five deaths each. Of the five deaths in Madhya Pradesh, two were reported from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, two from Pench Tiger Reserve and one from the Katni forest division.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has also issued a new protocol, according to which the cause of every tiger death will be considered a case of poaching till the time state government proves it otherwise with proper evidence. The move aims at bringing in more transparency in the post-mortem process. This has been done to deal with the trend of hiding the exact cause of the death.

The NTCA is also maintaining a photographic record of every tiger in the country. Recently, three tiger skins seized in Nepal were found to be from Madhya Pradesh based on the pattern of their stripes.

Source: 'Country lost 50 tigers in six months, 5 in Madhya Pradesh', *The Times of India*, 06/08/13.

## PERSPECTIVE

### **Undocumented and unacknowledged: marine diversity of Mumbai's coastline**

Until a few years ago, Mumbai's beaches came up mostly in conversations about sewage or plastic pollution which, to an extent, is justifiable. Mumbai generates a lot of waste and being a coastal city, the city's sewage eventually makes its way into the sea - all 2400 million litres of it per day. In such a scenario, it is natural to assume that any diversity that lived in these waters was long gone.

But in spite of facing high anthropogenic pressures, Mumbai's shores have continued to be a thriving habitat, known as the intertidal zone. It is a unique and highly dynamic ecosystem that exists at the convergence of land and sea, and fosters a complex web of life that has evolved to survive the regular exposure to changes in their environment.

Today, Marine Life of Mumbai's (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/marine-life-of-mumbai>) database pegs the city's intertidal marine diversity at more than 500 species. This includes many ecologically important species like sea cucumbers, sea anemones, zoanths and corals which are protected under the Schedule 1 of the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972. Much like a forest, it has herbivores and carnivores, predators and prey.

Ecologically, intertidal areas are extremely important. Not only are they very diverse, they also act as nursery grounds for a host of marine life that live further out at sea. They also help protect coastal communities during storm surges and cyclones. The question then is why has this crucial habitat not been afforded the \ protection it deserves?

India's coastline continues to face an onslaught of unmitigated development, no matter how remote the shore. Whether it's a road in Mumbai, apartment complexes in Kochi or a port in Great Nicobar, no place is sacrosanct.

Peninsular India's 24 marine protected areas (MPAs) protect just 8214 km<sup>2</sup> and

account for only 5% of the total protected area network of the country. Outside this regulatory framework, a total of 1,878 cases of coastal regulation zone violations were reported across the country in just the last five years, a trend that is only rising.

On one hand, the government must take proactive measures to safeguard this critical ecosystem by revisiting existing policies and enacting regulations that specifically address the protection and conservation of the intertidal zone. On the other, conservation organisations and citizen groups alike must foster a collective responsibility towards preserving this ecosystem by engaging coastal communities and raising awareness about it.

Preserving the intertidal zone isn't just a matter of ecological conservation but also a means of securing a sustainable future for both the environment and the communities that depend on it.

- **Shaunak Modi** is a marine biologist and co-founder of the Coastal Conservation Foundation. His interests lie in understanding the largely undocumented coastal habitats and species of the urban environs.  
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