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**Protected Area Update**

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## EDITORIAL

### **A one newspaper *Protected Area Update***

There has been more than an occasional criticism in the past that the *Protected Area Update (PA Update)* does not carry news and information of particular themes, that certain regions and even states are under-represented, and that all possible sources of news are not tapped to the extent they should be. The related argument is that relying on newspapers and mainstream media reporting is not sufficient and even here representation is unfair and disproportionate.

Admittedly, these are all acceptable assessments of what the *PA Update* does. There is, for instance, much more sourcing of news from mainstream sources like *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *The New Indian Express*, *The Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* and much less, relatively, from other equally prominent sources like the *Deccan Chronicle* and the *Deccan Herald* published mainly in the South, the *Tribune*, which is prominent in North India and publications like *The Telegraph* and *The Statesman* whose imprint is much more prominent in the eastern part of the country. That there are vast gaps in the geographical representation in the *PA Update* is also undeniable. In the case of many states like Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh, the reporting is dominated by certain PAs while others never get any attention at all. Similar is the case with states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the south that don't see as much reporting as is seen from Karnataka. Where the North East is concerned, we barely hear from states other than Assam, and the same can also be said of other states in the East like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal.

The reasons for this are indeed wide ranging and varied. There is on the one hand the issue of the coverage in the news media itself of these PAs, states and regions. It is

difficult to say how much the media reports on them but one can assume safely there is an imbalance due to multiple reasons. Surely all that is happening in all the PAs cannot be reported given the challenges and various limitations. There is also the limitation of the *PA Update* itself - a 24-page newsletter, published every two months by a small team can only do this much. The *PA Update* is finally a small subset of the media universe and can provide only a small window into both, conservation issues in PAs as also the priorities of the media.

It is with the above in mind that we decided to experiment this time and create 'A one newspaper *Protected Area Update*'. It is literally that. This issue of the *PA Update* is based exclusively on news published over two months in just one newspaper - *The Telegraph*. And there are two broad inferences that can be drawn from what you will see and read in the pages that follow. We realised, first and foremost, that there is so much media interest and reporting on issues of wildlife and PAs that one issue of this newsletter can easily be crafted from just one such newspaper. The oft-repeated concern that the media does not give enough importance to wildlife and conservation could/should perhaps be laid to rest. More is welcome for sure, but there is quite a lot already out there.

The second key insight is that geography matters. It appears to matter hugely, in fact. Nearly half the stories carried this time are from West Bengal alone and nearly 80% of the *PA Update* is from the eastern and north eastern part of the country - states like Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Odisha. This is clearly not a coincidence considering the newspaper we have sourced the stories from is *The Telegraph*. We also see a prominent focus on stories related to elephants - mostly incidents related to conflict - a function perhaps of the landscape and the key issues being experienced there.

One obvious learning from this experiment is that a single *PA Update* is clearly not enough. It cannot not do justice to the

volume and diversity of what is otherwise easily available as information and insight to understand the country's conservation landscape. It suggests we need more and varied kinds of efforts in this direction. Change one axis and a different picture appears to emerge. What would this picture be, for instance, if we were to use a newspaper from another geography of the country, say the south? Or a South Asia *PA Update* minus India? Or a newsletter with a focus on just one state or a bio-region? What if we looked at the non-English media of a particular region - say Odia or Bengali or Kannada? And what would happen if we start to look at the world of social media and the tsunami of information that comes from there?

Would the world of wildlife and conservation look very different? Or just marginally? Or not at all? We won't know until we try and these might be interesting experiments worth attempting. The *PA Update* could be the template, or some other structure could be thought of. Either way there are interesting possibilities waiting for us around the corner.

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### **Pakke TR to assess status of rehabilitated Asiatic black bears**

Authorities of the Pakke Tiger Reserve (TR) have in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) embarked on a survey of Asiatic black bears to assess habitat preferences and occupancy patterns of the species. The exercise is aimed at assessing the status of Asiatic black bears released in the reserve forest after rehabilitation at the Centre for Bear Rehabilitation and Conservation (CBRC).

Supported by the Union environment ministry, the CBRC was established jointly by the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department,

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and WTI in 2002 to rehabilitate displaced bear cubs back into the wild.

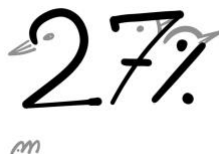
The survey involved three preliminary sign surveys and camera trapping. A 20-member team conducted preliminary sign surveys in November and December 2023, and also in the first week of January 2024 at Rilloh, Nyargoka and Delang ranges and helipad ground route. The final one along with camera trapping started on 9 January 2024, and would continue till March 2024.

The CBRC has, since its inception, rescued and rehabilitated as many as 50 cubs in the reserve. The success of the CBRC will be measured through the current survey.

Source: 'Pakke Tiger Reserve authorities conduct survey on Asiatic black bears', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 11/01/2024.

### ASSAM

#### **Annual bird census at Kaziranga NP & TR records 27% increase in bird numbers**



The fifth Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP & TR) water-bird count was conducted

simultaneously across 115 water bodies spanning three divisions of the TR on 10 January 2024. The preliminary findings revealed the presence of 84,839 birds (both resident and migratory), 27% higher than the last count of 66,776 in 2022.

The Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, comprising mostly the national park area, recorded 37,606 birds. The highest abundance (13,084) of a single species (Bar-headed goose) was recorded at Sohola beel. Rowmari beel under Nagaon Wildlife Division recorded the highest number (19,301) of birds across all wetlands. This division which includes Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife

Sanctuaries and Joysagar Doloni of Kaliabor, recorded the highest abundance of the Northern pintail (8,960 individuals). The highest abundance of birds (2,727) in the Bishwanath Wildlife Division was reported under the Dipora area.

The first water-bird census conducted in Kaziranga in 2018 had counted 10,412 birds belonging to 80 different species. The second census in 2020 covering important wetlands across the TR area for the first time found 34,284 birds belonging to 98 species. The third census was conducted in 2021 across 52 wetlands and 93,491 water birds belonging to 112 species across 22 families were recorded. The fourth census carried out in 2022 for five days across the important wetlands and rivers of the TR counted of 66,776 water birds.

Some of the notable sightings during the census included the Baer's pochard, Baikal teal, Greater scaup, Gull-billed tern, Greater white-fronted goose, Great crested grebe, Pallas's gull, Black stork, Black-headed gull, and Cotton pygmy goose.

Source: Umanand Jaiswal. 'Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve records 27 per cent increase in migratory birds', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 14/01/2024.

## **ASSAM / WEST BENGAL**

### **Five convicted for smuggling ivory**

Five residents of Assam arrested in 2023 for smuggling elephant tusks were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for three years by a local court on 27 December 2023. Jagannath Mondal, Chandan Biswas, Ratneswar Barman, Tilak Barman, and Sanjoy Barman were arrested while they were carrying tusks in a car headed towards Siliguri in June 2023.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of forest officials led by Niladri Kishore Roy, a range officer in Gorumara Wildlife Division, intercepted the car near the toll plaza on the

national highway-27 at Fatapukur. Four tusks, two long and two short, were found in a bag in the car. All five occupants of the car were arrested.

When the proceedings started at the chief judicial magistrate (CJM)'s court in Jalpaiguri, the accused filed bail petitions at the Jalpaiguri circuit bench of Calcutta High Court (HC). The HC, however, rejected the petition and assigned the CJM court to conduct the trial within three months. The CJM court sentenced all five to three years rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 25,000 each.

If they fail to pay the fine, they will have to spend another six months in imprisonment, the court said.

Source: 'Court sentences five residents of Assam to three-year jail for elephant tusk smuggling', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 28/12/2023.

### **Elephant tusks worth Rs. 10 crore seized in New Jalpaiguri; two arrested**

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seized elephant tusks worth Rs. 10 crore and arrested two on 10 December 2023 from the New Delhi bound Rajdhani Express at New Jalpaiguri Railway Station. The duo was carrying the tusks from Assam to Uttar Pradesh and had allegedly planned to smuggle the same into Nepal.

Tusks weighing 7.32 kg, the cost of which is around Rs 10 crore, were found in the possession of Suleman Khan and Ratan Goala, both residents of Hojai district in Assam.

The DRI had received a tip-off that ivory would be illegally transported through Siliguri by train. A DRI team reached New Jalpaiguri station, raided the New Delhi-bound Rajdhani Express and apprehended Khan and Goala. They were taken to the office of the DRI with their baggage, which when searched revealed three pieces of ivory found covered with thick adhesive tapes. DRI officials called

representatives of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau for the verification of elephant tusks.

The duo was arrested under the Customs Act, 1962, and produced in the additional chief judicial magistrate's court in Siliguri on December 10. The court remanded them in judicial custody for one day.

The latest in the matter is not known.

Source: 'Elephants' tusks worth over Rs 10 crore seized, two Assam residents arrested', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 11/12/2023.

## BIHAR

### **Incubation-cum-nature interpretation centre for gharials and turtles in Gandak River**

The Bihar state government has given in-principle approval for establishing an incubation-cum-nature interpretation centre for gharials and turtles in the Gandak River in Bettiah in West Champaran district. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) will soon be signed with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in this regard, informed the principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) and chief wildlife warden of the state, PK Gupta. He also said that the Los Angeles Zoo in the USA has agreed to strengthen the ongoing conservation effort through ex-situ incubation and release of the hatchlings back to the river.

The Gandak River has become the second successful breeding site for gharials in India after the National Chambal Sanctuary on the Chambal River. The Gharial Conservation Project in the Gandak, launched by the state government in association with WTI in 2014, yielded positive results as 217 gharials were sighted in its 284-km stretch as compared to 30 earlier, the PCCF said. He added that forest officials in West Champaran have been asked to coordinate with the district administration, and complete all formalities for the transfer of the identified land to the forest department for

the centre at the earliest. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXVIII, No. 4)

Source: 'Bihar to set up first incubation centre for gharials, turtles; Los Angeles Zoo roped in', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 06/01/2024.

## JHARKHAND

### **Palamau TR seeks tigress for relocation**

The Palamau Tiger Reserve (TR) authorities are considering approaching the National Tiger Conservation Authority for the translocation of a tigress to the reserve. This is on account of the fact that three male tigers were sighted here in 2023.

According to a tiger census conducted in 2018, Palamau TR did not have any tigers. It had also not recorded any significant presence of tigers until recently, when the three males were sighted in 2023. One was reported in March while the other two came more recently in October 2023.

Authorities have expressed concern that they would not stay put here if they did not find mates for a long time.

Source: Achintya Ganguly. 'Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand needs tigresses: PTR authorities', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 15/12/2023.

### **Five elephants electrocuted in Mosaboni forest range; second incident in one month**



Five elephants, including two calves, were electrocuted in Mosaboni Forest Range under Jamshedpur Forest Division after coming in contact with high voltage wires. Carcasses of the elephants were noticed by the villagers in the forest around noon on 21

November 2023. Forest staff noted after looking at the bodies that the deaths might have happened a day earlier. According to Mosaboni forest officials, the incident took place in the Benasol Uparbandha forest area where 33 kV high-tension electric wires are laid for supplying electricity to the mines of Hindustan Copper Limited in Mosaboni.

Officials said that villagers had intimated the forest department (FD) about a herd of 12 elephants that was roaming in the area in the evening of November 20. Elephants in an attempt to feed on paddy in farms might have come in contact with the electrical wires that were at low heights.

In a similar incident earlier in November, two adult female elephants had also been electrocuted some 40 km from Mosaboni - in Chakulia in the same Ghatshila subdivision.

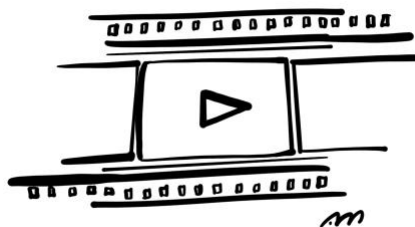
Sanjay Srivastava, principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) and head of forest force (HoFF), Jharkhand, said that the FD had written to the electricity department (ED) to adhere to the minimum heights mandated for electrical cables in forest areas after the Chakulia incident in November. However, two incidents in the same month and in the same forest division suggest that ED has not followed that mandate. The minimum height to be maintained for electrical cables in forest areas is 8 m. However, the FD has noticed the high-tension wires at 3 m height, said the PCCF.

The FD has now planned to form a joint team of forest officials and the officials of Jharkhand Bidyut Vitran Nigam Limited, a state government agency which looks after the electricity supply in the region, to conduct a survey of all such areas having low-height wires and take corrective steps.

Source: Animesh Bisoe. 'Five elephants, including two baby jumbos electrocuted to death in Jharkhand', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 22/11/2023.

## KARNATAKA

### HC frames charges for broadcasting of 'Wild Karnataka' documentary



A division bench of the Karnataka High Court (HC) has framed charges against documentary filmmakers Amoghavarsha JS, Kalyan Varma and Sarath Champati, and broadcast companies BBC, Discovery and Netflix among others in a civil contempt of court petition. The charges were framed on 18 January 2024, in a case where the filmmakers and broadcast companies are accused of disobeying a 2021 interim order of the court regarding the release and telecast of the documentary film 'Wild Karnataka'. The original complainants in the case are Ravindra N Redkar and Ullash Kumar RK.

Mudskipper Labs and ITV Studios Global had approached film makers Kalyan Varma and Amoghavarsha to create a documentary in 2014. After signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Karnataka Forest Department (FD) to shoot a documentary, the film makers are alleged to have used the services of the FD like transport and shooting permissions without paying any charges.

While the MoU vested the copyrights of the documentary and raw footage with the FD, the film makers are alleged to have brought Icon Films of England and Wales on board without the FD's knowledge. The companies then entered into agreements with BBC, Discovery, and Netflix for the broadcast though the FD had specified the film would not be commercially used. The film was also released in theatres. According to the petitioners, the original footage shot was of a

length of 400 hours and the FD had copyright over all the raw footage.

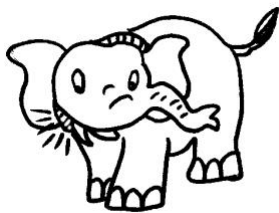
The HC had on 29 June 2021 passed an interim order in the petition forbidding all the respondents from telecasting the film. However, the film was released in theatres and telecast on broadcast companies' platforms. The complainants then filed the contempt petition before the HC. While the original petition is still pending before the HC, the respondents submitted on 17 January 2024 that they are willing to pay compensation to the FD. The BBC offered Rs. 3.5 lakh as compensation and Netflix, Rs. 4.5 lakh. Icon Films and Discovery also offered Rs 3.5 lakh each to the Tiger Conservation Foundation. The film makers too promised to pay a compensation.

The HC, however, agreed with the advocate of the petitioners that the "apology appears to be sham in the light of the compensation offered by the accused," and went ahead with the framing of charges.

The latest in the matter is not known.

Source: "Wild Karnataka" documentary: HC frames charges against filmmakers, BBC for violating court's orders', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 19/01/2024.

### **FD resumes operation to radio-collar elephants in Belur taluk**



The Karnataka Forest Department (FD), 11 January 2024, resumed 'Operation Jumbo' in Belur taluk to capture wild elephants for radio collaring them. The exercise had been suspended after tamed elephant Arjuna involved in the operation died in a fight with a wild tusker in December 2023.

Eight tamed elephants would be part of the operation which would be centred in and around Belur taluk in Hassan district.

According to a senior forest official, approximately 50 wild elephants which came around two months ago into Belur taluk area have to be driven away. The FD had in November 2023 carried out a week-long operation to drive back the elephants that had come to the area. They however returned once the operation was suspended.

The elephant capture operation was launched in Belur taluk on November 24 following a number of human deaths in elephant attacks and in response to local pressure to find a solution. The 64-years-old elephant Arjuna, who carried the golden 'howdah' during the Mysuru Dasara procession for years, died on 4 December 2023 during one such capture operation.

The eight elephants that are part of 'Operation Jumbo', will now be led by elephant Abhimanyu.

Source: 'Karnataka forest department resumes 'Operation Jumbo' to capture wild elephants', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 11/01/2024.

## **ODISHA**

### **Record numbers in bird counts in Chilika Lake and Bhitarkanika NP**

More than 11 lakh birds from across 187 species were counted in the Chilika Lake area during the census conducted on 4 January 2024. About 40,000 of these were from 79 resident species while the rest were migratory birds. A notable sighting included the Pallas' fish eagle, which was spotted here after a gap of about a decade.

According to the divisional forest officer (DFO) of Chilika Wildlife Division, the demolition of the illegal prawn *gheries* (*PA Updates* Vol. XXVII, Nos. 4 & 2) is one of the reasons for the increase in the number of birds over the last few years. The spaces freed after the removal over an area of 162 sq. km have become the new places of congregation for the birds and for dolphins.



In a census conducted on 06 January 2024, an increase of 11,462 birds has been recorded in the Bhitarkanika National Park (NP) compared to the last census. While about 1.4 lakh birds were counted last year, this time the number was 1.51 lakh. Authorities here too noted that the demolition of the illegal *gheries* and the creation of open spaces were the reasons for the increase in numbers

For the first time officials also used the eBird app for the count.



Source: Subhashish Mohanty. 'Odisha remains the favourite destination for migratory birds, latest census shows', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 08/01/2024.

### **Tiger census affected in Sunabeda WLS due to Maoist insurgency: officials**

Forest officials have said that the tiger census in the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Nuapada district has been affected due to activities of the Maoist insurgents. Enumerators are reluctant to enter the forests for fear of the insurgents. The forests of the sanctuary, which is located close to the Chhattisgarh border, has seen police encounters with the rebels in recent times. Two special operation group (SOG) soldiers were injured on 24 December 2023 in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast while a combing operation was underway in the forest of Kandhamal district. Forest officials have also alleged that the insurgents recently stole a couple of camera traps installed in the sanctuary for the tiger count.

The dense forests for years offered an easy hideout to the rebels. However, the

government has been trying hard to flush them out of the area. The state government recently decided to deploy drones for night operations against Maoists and has also stepped up anti-Maoist operations here.

Source: Subhashish Mohanty. 'Maoist activity hinders tiger census in Odisha's Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary near Chhattisgarh', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 26/12/2023.

## **SIKKIM**

### **Tibetan brown bear sighted in Sikkim; first confirmed record for India**

A Tibetan brown bear *Ursus arctos pruinosus* has been sighted in Sikkim, making this the first confirmed record of the animal in India. Photos of the animal were captured in December 2023 in camera traps set up by the forest department (FD) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) -India in the upper reaches of Mangan district in the northern part of Sikkim.

Over the past decades, foresters interacting with the Dokpas, the nomadic herders in the high-altitude areas of Tso-Lhamo plateau and Muguthang, have heard incidents of a large unidentified animal stealing sugar and oil stored in the herders' camps. Many surveys were conducted to find this elusive animal but they remained unsuccessful. The camera trap images suggest the animal was the Tibetan brown bear

Also called the Tibetan blue bear, this animal has been sighted thus far in some parts of Nepal, Bhutan and the Tibetan plateau.

Earlier, the Sikkim FD had captured photos of a tiger and a gaur in trap cameras that were installed at higher altitudes in Himalayas. Those photos set new records of a tiger being sighted at the highest altitude in India and gaur at the highest altitude across its range world-over (see accompanying story).

Source: Avijit Sinha. 'First sight of rare bear Tibetan brown bear in Sikkim makes it first confirmed record Animal characterised by 'yellow scarf','  
[www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com),  
 15/01/2024.

**Tiger and gaur sighted at record altitudes in Sikkim Himalayas**

The Sikkim Forest Department (FD) has claimed that a tiger and a gaur, photos of which have been recently clicked by camera traps in the upper reaches of the state, have set new national and world records respectively. The photo of a tiger was clicked at an elevation of 3,966 m, making it a national record, and that of a gaur at an elevation of 3,568 m, making it a world record in its range. Gaur have been reported so far mainly upto an altitude of 1,800 m across its range in south and southeast Asia; mostly India.

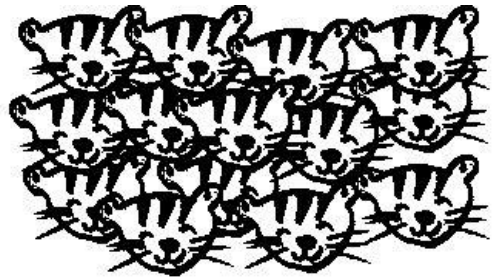
The FD along with the Wildlife Institute of India, had installed camera traps in high-altitude regions of the state in order to understand the impact of climate change on large mammals. Recently, when images were retrieved from the camera traps, multiple pictures of tigers were found in the upper reaches of Kyongnosla and Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs) in the Gangtok and Pakyong districts respectively. Both these sanctuaries share borders with the Neora Valley National Park in the Kalimpong district of West Bengal.

In 2019, a tiger was sighted in north Sikkim at an elevation of 3,602 m, while another was sighted at 3,640 m in 2023 in Pangolakha. Pictures of a number of other animals including the sambar, dhole, Himalayan black bear, musk deer, and serow were also captured in the trap cameras.

Source: 'Photos of tiger, gaur set new national and world records: Sikkim forest and environment department,'  
[www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com),  
 04/01/2024.

**UTTARAKHAND**

**314% increase in tiger population in 16 years in Uttarakhand**



The tiger population in Uttarakhand has increased by 314% between 2006 and 2022. There were 178 tigers in the state in 2006 while 560 were recorded in 2022 informed the state's chief wildlife warden Samir Sinha. The increase is attributed to steps taken by the forest department in recent years to improve the habitat conditions.

Sinha also noted that only a slight increase was recorded in 2023 in the number of people killed and injured in tiger attacks.

Year	In tiger attacks, number of people	
	killed	injured
2021	2	8
2022	16	10
2023	17	9

Source: 'Tiger population in Uttarakhand rose by 314 per cent in 16 years: official',  
[www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com),  
 06/01/2024.

**WEST BENGAL**

**FD to provide job to family member of wild animal attack victim**

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) has initiated the process of providing jobs to a family member of each of those who have lost their lives in wild animal attacks.

The first to receive a job under the West Bengal Scheme for Rehabilitation by providing Employment Assistance 2023 was

Lalo Munda, the wife of Ranjeet Oraon, a tea worker who was killed in an elephant attack in Kalchini block of Alipurduar district in June 2023. She was handed over a job letter on 16 January 2024 by Parveen Kaswan, the deputy field director (west) of Buxa Tiger Reserve.

Lalo will serve as a forest volunteer in the FD and get Rs. 12,000 per month as remuneration. She had been provided compensation earlier.

Source: 'Animal attacks: Bengal forest department initiates process of providing jobs to victims' family member', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 21/01/2024.

### **Camera traps record many species in Neora Valley NP; Yellow-throated seen after six years**

Camera traps installed in the Neora Valley National Park (NP) in Kalimpong district have captured photos of the Yellow-throated marten for the first time in six years. The traps were installed in the part at elevations ranging from 670 m to 3200 m approximately.

Other animals photographed between October and December 2023 include the tiger, wild dog, Jungle cat, Red panda, Flying squirrel, Clouded leopard, and the Indian civet.

Source: 'Trap cameras at Kalimpong's Neora Valley National Park reveal wild diversity', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 11/01/2024.

### **Tiger recorded at 3,023m in Neora Valley National Park**

Images of a tiger have been captured in a camera trap in the Neora Valley National Park (NP) at an altitude of 3,023 m above sea level. One image was captured at Rachel Dabda in the hills in October 2023 and is one of the few images of the species found in the secluded isolated forest belt in the past couple of years.

Officials have suggested that one more tiger is present in the area because of the multiple camera trap images of at least one other tiger in that belt. The chief wildlife warden of the state has noted that the tigers might be using the corridor between the Mahananda forest range and Neora Valley. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, Nos. 5 & 3; Vol. XXVI, Nos. 5 & 1 and Vol. XXIV, No. 1)

Source: 'Royal Bengal Tigers spotted at 10,509 feet in Neora Valley National Park, confirming unique habitat', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 28/12/2023.

### **Sudden increase in leopard attacks on livestock in Malbazar subdivision**

A sudden increase in leopard attacks on livestock in three localities of Malbazar subdivision in Jalpaiguri district has prompted the state forest department (FD) to install cages with baits to trap the leopards. Around 100 cattle were reported to have been killed by leopards in the Damdim, Teshimla, and Kumlai localities of Malbazar in one month from October to November 2023.

Easy access to prey particularly for females with cubs is said to be the main reason for an increase in these attacks. Villagers, as a precaution, have been moving in groups through deserted stretches even in the daylight and stay indoors after dusk.

Source: 'Jalpaiguri: Forest department bid to snare leopards amid increase in attacks on cattle', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 28/11/2023.

### **AI enabled cameras to track elephants in Jhargaram district**

The state forest department (FD) has installed 30 artificial intelligence (AI) enabled cameras to track the movement of elephants in the elephant corridor in Jhargram as part of a pilot

project to curb incidents of human-elephant conflict. The initiative, currently in an experimental phase, has been taken up by the FD in association with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

A forest official said forest staff currently deployed to track elephant movement face difficulties during dense fog and heavy rains. The AI-enabled cameras can operate smoothly even when visibility is poor. They will shoot high-quality pictures of the elephants even in the dark and send an alert to officials concerned in that range through a mobile app with pictures, location, and exact time.

Jhargram, a small district in western Bengal, has lost at least 41 persons to elephant attacks in two years. The most recent incident occurred on 29 December 2023 when a lone tusker reportedly entered a village, dragged out a 70-year-old woman from her house and trampled her to death in the courtyard.

Source: Snehamoy Chakraborty. 'Bengal forest department installs 30 Artificial Intelligence enabled cameras to track elephants; Pilot project to curb human-animal conflicts in Jhargram', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 31/12/2023.

### **FD burns 270 kg of ivory in Bankura**

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) burnt 53 pieces of ivory, weighing around 270 kg, as part of its recent decision to destroy ivory in its possession for years. This follows the Centre's instructions to the state FD to dispose these in a bid to send a strong message against poaching of elephants. As the incineration of ivory takes a long time, the foresters chose to use an incinerator from a private factory that deals with bio-medical waste and chemicals in Bankura's Barjora.

The FD has many quintals of ivory stockpiled in the custody of various forest offices in north and south Bengal as these have not been destroyed for the past 15 years. It has

now started the process for three forest divisions in Bankura and other divisions having stocks of ivory will do the same, said a senior forest officer.

Chief wildlife warden Debal Ray said that he had already formed a committee for each circle with ivory to initiate the process of disposal.

Source: Snehamoy Chakraborty. 'Bengal forest department burn 53 pieces of ivory, weighing 270kg, to destroy 'white gold'', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 20/12/2023.

### **State education board arranges transport for exams in districts having elephants**



The death of a secondary school board examinee in Jalpaiguri in early 2023 in an elephant attack has prompted the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE), to make additional arrangements for the safety of students living in elephant habitats of the state.

Students who live on the fringes of forests or need to move through forest areas to reach their examination centres will be provided with transport from their localities. When a student appearing for secondary school board exam next year goes to his or her school to get the admit card, school authorities will inform the student in detail about transport, pick-up and drop points, the WBBSE president said. Forest officials said that patrolling along routes that examinees use will be intensified.

In February 2023, Arjun Das, an examinee from Maharajghat of Rajganj block in Jalpaiguri district, was on his way to the exam centre on his father's bike when an elephant came out of the Baikunthapur forest

and attacked them. Arjun's father managed to escape but the boy was killed on the spot.

The district administration and the state forest department had, following the incident, hurriedly arranged transport for other examinees hailing from nearby areas.

Source: 'West Bengal Board of Secondary Education to ensure safety of students in jumbo belts', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 16/12/2023.

### **More buses for Bengal Safari Park near Mahananda WLS**

Six more buses are to be brought in for safari rides at the Bengal Safari Park, an open-air zoological park on the outskirts of Siliguri near Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). To be purchased at Rs. 25 lakh each, these six buses are in addition to the six already operational in the park. The decision to increase their number was in response to the high demand for safari tickets.

40,000 people visited the park from 24 December 2023 to 1 January 2024, creating an unprecedented rush. The authorities could handle this by hiring additional buses and sports utility vehicles for the additional safaris.

The safaris also saw the department generating an income of around Rs. 65 lakh.

Source: Bireswar Banerjee. 'Siliguri: 6 more buses for rides at Bengal Safari Park', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 10/01/2024.

### **Camera trap images of two years confirm continuous presence of tiger in Buxa TR**

The photo of a tiger was captured by a camera trap in December 2023 in the Buxa Tiger Reserve (TR). On-duty forest guards found pugmarks on the bank of a stream inside the reserve on December 21. Senior forest officials confirmed that those were of a male tiger. Additional camera traps installed by the forest

department (FD) to confirm the presence soon captured an image of a full-grown tiger in the Pana forest range.

This is the second time in the past two years that a tiger has been clicked in Buxa. The continuous presence of a tiger, evident from the photos shows improvement of the reserve area as a tiger habitat, said the field director. In 2021, a photo of a tiger was captured in a trap camera marking the first evidence of the tiger's presence in Buxa in three decades. However, forest officials are reported to have said that the latest pugmarks do not match those of the tiger sighted in 2021.

As no tiger was sighted here for nearly three decades till 2021, the FD had, in consultation with the National Tiger Conservation Authority, planned a re-introduction program (*PA Update* Vol. XXVI, No. 5). Accordingly, initiatives were taken to develop a prey base by releasing herbivores in the forest. The FD has released more than 1,000 deer in the newly developed grassland area of the reserve. Work is also in progress to relocate two forest villages which are in the reserve (see accompanying story; also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 4 & 2).

Source: Anirban Choudhury. 'Royal Bengal tiger's picture clicked by trap camera in Buxa Tiger Reserve', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 30/12/2023.  
'Pugmarks of royal Bengal tiger spotted in Buxa Tiger Reserve of Alipurduar district', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 29/12/2023.

### **Two forests villages to be relocated from Buxa TR**

The Alipurduar district administration has set in motion the process of relocating the residents of two forest villages from within the Buxa Tiger Reserve (TR). The two villages to be shifted are Bhutiabusty in Kumargram block, which has 50 families and

Gangutiabusty in Kalchini block which has 191 families.

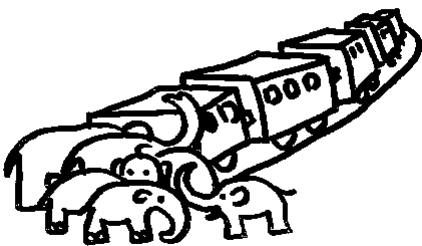
This follows the 10 December 2023 instructions chief minister (CM) Mamta Banerjee gave when on a visit to Alipurduar. The relocation is in light of the plan to reintroduce tigers to the reserve (see accompanying story). A meeting was held on December 12 by the Alipurduar district magistrate (DM) to discuss the CM's instructions. Those attending included officials of the district land and land reforms department and the senior forest officers posted in Buxa.

The DM said after the meeting that the families living in both the hamlets had agreed to the proposal for relocation. Each family will be provided with compensation of Rs. 15 lakh in two instalments. The district administration has received Rs. 36 crore for the same.

There are a total of 17 forest villages in the Buxa TR.

Source: 'Alipurduar district administration to relocate residents of two forest villages in Buxa Tiger Reserve area', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 13/12/2023.

### **Three elephants killed in train accident in Buxa TR**



Three elephants including a six-month-old calf were mowed down end November 2023 by a speeding goods train between the Rajabhatkhawa and Garopara stations. This section between Alipurduar Junction and Siliguri Junction under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) passes through the Buxa Tiger Reserve (TR), Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), and Chapramari WLS. It also passes

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along the fringes of Gorumara and Jaldapara National Parks (NP).

These forests have high elephant populations and collisions have been a regular affair since the gauge conversion in 2003 led to an increase both in the number of trains using the route and their running speeds. This latest incident has taken the count of elephants killed on the railway tracks in north Bengal to 77 since 2004 (see PA Updates Vol. XXVI, No. 5).

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken *suo motu* cognisance of the incident. The eastern zone bench of the NGT acting on the basis of a newspaper report of the incident published on 29 November 2023 asked concerned parties, including officials of the state government, the Railways and other concerned central ministries to file affidavits in the matter.

According to a railway official, the driver of the special goods train travelling from Guwahati to Siliguri spotted a herd of 10-odd elephants crossing the tracks around 7.15 am. The train was moving at high speed and though he applied emergency brakes the train still knocked down the last three elephants of the herd. A speed restriction of 30 kmph is in place in this section between 5 p.m. and 5 a.m. to reduce the possibility of accidents. However, this accident took place beyond this period and the train was travelling at about 100 kmph. The railways have now imposed a round-the-clock speed restriction in this stretch.

The divisional commercial manager (DRM) of Alipurduar Railway Division said that an inquiry had begun. The Railways have also planned to install the intrusion detection system (IDS) in this section very soon (see accompanying story), since this has yielded good results in the 37 km stretch between Madarihat and Nagrakata. The IDS involves laying optical fibre cables along the tracks; the system informs the control room immediately if any heavy animal comes within 10 m of the tracks. The control room then can caution the loco pilot. The tendering process to bring the whole section under IDS is currently on along

with that for the Lumding and Rangia divisions of NFR, said an official.

In the meantime, the Buxa TR authorities are reported to have written to the Alipurduar DRM to provide the speed logbook to them so they could ascertain the reason behind the accident. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 1 and Vol. XXVIII. No. 6).

Source: Anirban Choudhury. ‘North Bengal: Three elephants, including six-month-old calf, mowed down by speeding train’, [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 28/11/2023.  
‘Bengal: Three elephants killed as goods train hits them in Alipurduar’, [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 27/11/2023.  
‘National Green Tribunal seeks action on elephant deaths on Dooars rail track in Alipurduar’, [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 03/12/2023.

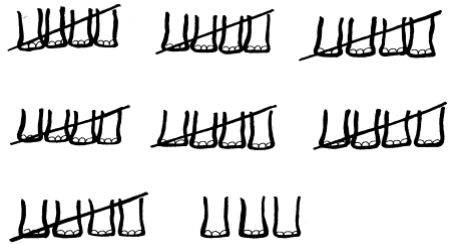
### **Railways to increase speed after installing intrusion detection system**

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) plans to increase the speed of trains in the Dooars after installing the intrusion detection system (IDS) to help prevent deaths of animals due to collision with trains. The Dooars tracks connect Siliguri Junction with Alipurduar Junction and pass through a number of reserve forests and elephant crossing zones, including the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Chapramari WLS and Buxa Tiger Reserve (see accompanying story).

The general manager (GM) of the NFR said that the installation of the IDS had started and would be completed in six to 12 months. Once the system is in place, the Railway authorities have planned to talk to the state forest department for increasing the speed of trains. Along the stretches where trains run currently at 30 kmph, the speed can be increased to 50 kmph while this can be increased to 70 kmph along the stretches where

the current limit is 50 kmph. The GM added that the electrification of the tracks is being carried out and speeds will increase once this is completed. The installation of the IDS becomes even more important in that context.

He also mentioned that three stations — Alipurduar Junction, New Cooch Behar and Rangpo in Sikkim — will be developed by spending around Rs. 200 crore on the infrastructure development of each of these stations.



Source: ‘Northeast Frontier Railway plans to increase train speed on Dooars track’, [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 03/01/2024.

### **BSF devises plan to secure Sunderbans against smuggling and infiltration**

A marine battalion comprising more than 1,100 personnel, a squadron of about 40 drones and 12-14 all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are part of a plan devised by the Border Security Force (BSF) to secure the Sunderbans mangrove region along the India-Bangladesh border against smuggling and infiltration. The blueprint of the plan has been prepared by the Eastern Command of the BSF based in Kolkata and a final approval and financial sanction from the Ministry of Home Affairs is awaited.

According to a senior official, Sunderbans is a strategic and vital area along the India-Bangladesh international border. Its effective domination and security is the need of the hour as there are inputs suggesting this tricky forest and riverine area could be used for cross-border infiltration of terrorists and criminals. The officer added that the BSF has hence decided to raise an exclusive marine battalion of its personnel for this task, deploy

drones that can undertake long-haul surveillance sorties and station some ATVs to access these areas for better patrolling.

The BSF, at present, patrols the Sunderbans area with a fleet of about 50 small and large speedboats and vessels. The vessels are called floating border outposts (BoPs). It is tasked with guarding the entire 4,096 km of the India-Bangladesh border, 2,216.7 km of which lies in West Bengal of which 300 km is the riverine border in the Sunderbans.

The BSF has communicated its plan to the West Bengal government seeking its nod for stationing a small team of its patrol parties comprising personnel on foot patrol in the forest department *chowkis* in the Sunderbans. The BSF patrol teams currently stay in the floating BoPs that constantly keep moving around the area.

Source: 'BSF plans marine battalion, drone squadron to secure Sunderbans against infiltration, smuggling', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 17/12/2023.

### **Tiger population in Sunderbans rises steadily**



The tiger population in the Sunderbans is increasing steadily. Tiger numbers here have increased from 70 tigers in 2010 to 76 in 2014, 88 in 2018 and to 101 as reported in the 'Status of Tigers: Co-Predators and Prey in India, 2022'.

As a result, tigers are moving to newer territories. Dhanchi, a small forest island on the eastern side of G-Plot beach on the edge of the

Bay of Bengal, and Thakuran Char, a piece of land formed by periodical accretion of soil on the banks of the Thakuran River, are two such pockets, say forest officials. Camera trap images recently provided the evidence of an adult male in Dhanchi, while tiger pugmarks were seen in Thakuran Char.

Dhanchi is spread over around 35 sq. km and the island on the bank of Thakuran covers roughly 100 sq. km. Dhanchi and the Thakuran char fall in Ramganga and Raidighi respectively, two of the three tiger ranges in South-24 Parganas division, with Matla being the third range.

The tiger in Dhanchi forest was first photographed in the second week of November 2023. It is reported to have crossed the river and reached the borders of a couple of villages on the other side around 25 December 2023. On December 27, it was driven back to the forest. It is believed to have moved from the larger Dhulibhasani forest, which is a known tiger habitat in the Ramganga range.

The tiger census report estimated that the tiger density in the Indian Sunderbans had reached 4.27 per 100 sq km while the estimated carrying capacity of the region is 4.68 tigers per 100 sq km. However, a former chief wildlife warden (CWLW) of West Bengal said that the Sunderbans' carrying capacity is a theoretical number and it can change. Due to the tidal waves new islands keep coming up and disappearing in the Sunderbans. A British record dating back to 1908 found 52 forested islands in the Sunderbans while satellite mapping post 2010 showed around 65 forested islands. Both Dhanchi and Thakuran Char have been built by such periodic accretion of soil. The second, in particular, is a full-fledged forest because of a plantation drive that began many years ago, said a forest official. Both these forests have a steady population of spotted deer and wild boars.

The Indian Sunderbans comprises the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve (TR) and the South 24-Parganas FD. The TR covers 2,585 sq. km and includes the Sunderbans National Park (East and West), which is the core area, and the

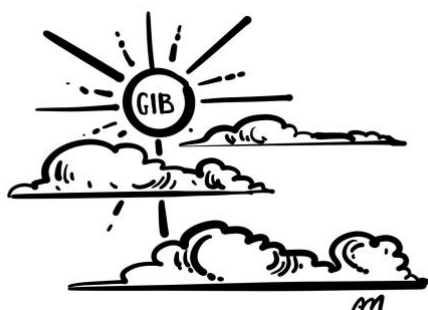


Sajnekhali Wildlife Sanctuary and the Basirhat Range, which form the buffer zones.

Source: Debraj Mitra. 'Rise in count drives tigers into new terrain: Pugmarks found in Dhanchi and Thakuran in Sunderbans', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 03/01/2024.

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### SC asks for comprehensive plan to save GIBs alongside solar power commitment



The Supreme Court (SC), on 19 January 2024, asked the Centre to come out with a comprehensive plan to save the critically-endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) while simultaneously keeping in mind India's international commitment on solar power. One of the reasons for the alarming decrease in GIB's numbers is said to be frequent collisions with overhead transmission lines including those from solar power plants.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra asked the Centre to find a way forward and also if there was any data based on scientific studies that these birds die of collision with the overhead power transmission line. Further, the bench asked if there were any government-monitored studies on the efficacy of the bird diverters in saving the GIBs from collision.

The bench referred to twin rival aspects of the matter saying that one pertained to saving these birds and the other related to setting up of solar power plants which can be set up in states like Rajasthan and Gujarat, the key habitats of this endangered species. The bench asked the Centre to file a comprehensive status report in the matter.

The bench took note of the submissions of senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the public interest petitioner MK Ranjitsinh, a retired IAS officer and others, that the GIB is on the verge of extinction and the court's 2021 judgement has not been complied with. The petition has sought the court's directions for an urgent emergency response plan to protect and ensure the recovery of the numbers of the GIB and the Lesser Florican.

Besides seeking a status report from a court-appointed expert committee, the bench also directed the chief secretaries of Rajasthan and Gujarat to file the latest report on the steps taken in the case.

The SC had, in its 2021 judgement on the PIL, passed a slew of directions to save the GIB. It had earlier directed the governments of Gujarat and Rajasthan to replace overhead electric cables with underground power cables, wherever feasible, and install bird diverters in priority areas where the birds live. It had also set up a three-member committee, comprising scientists Rahul Rawat, Sutirtha Dutta and Devesh Gadhavi, deputy director of The Corbett Foundation, to assess the feasibility for laying of the high-voltage underground power line. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 1; Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3 & 1; Vol. XXV, Nos. 6 & 5 and Vol. XXIV, No.1).

Source: 'SC asks govt to come out with 'comprehensive' plan to save endangered Great Indian Bustard', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 19/01/2024.

## SOUTH ASIA

### Training workshop on wildlife trafficking for South Asian enforcement agencies



A nine-day workshop was conducted recently for officials from law enforcement agencies in India, Bhutan, and Nepal to train them in curbing wildlife trafficking in South Asia. TRAFFIC India and WWF-India, in collaboration with the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) had organised this workshop as part of a regional project.

The workshop was attended by 34 officials, 10 each from Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and two each from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. They were from various law enforcement agencies in their respective countries, including forest and customs departments, police and para-military forces.

Resource persons who conducted sessions during the workshop came from a host of institutions including the WCCB, National Crime Bureau, Centre for Cell and Molecular Biology, Forest Research Institute and Wildlife Institute of India.

The sessions conducted included an overview of wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade in South Asia, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and its implementation, coordination for tackling wildlife crime in Asia, learnings from the successes of conservation, role of rangers and investigators, and cybercrime and cyber forensics. The workshop aimed at training the participants to understand how human-wildlife conflicts fuel wildlife crime and illegal trade; and how to conduct wildlife

forensics and seizure of live animals, among other topics.

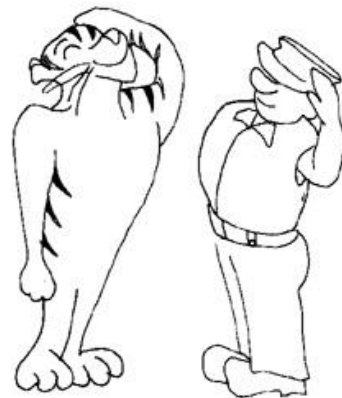
Other initiatives under this regional project include conducting capacity building for trainers, national capacity building for law enforcement, introduction to new tools and technologies, and support for more effective prosecution and judiciary work.

The project will support officials in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and will help strengthen SAWEN as the primary regional organisation combating wildlife trafficking, the statement said.

Source: 'Bhutan, India and Nepal collaborate to counter wildlife trafficking in South Asia', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 23/11/2023.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Asian Ranger Forum issues 'Guwahati Declaration' to achieve inclusive ranger workforce



The first Asian Ranger Forum (ARF) came to an end on 8 December 2023, with a 'Guwahati Declaration' urging the international community and governments across the world to strive for an 'inclusive ranger workforce'. Such a force, the declaration said, is crucial to

the protection of global biodiversity at this critical juncture when climate change is emerging as a major threat.

The maiden edition of the forum was organised collaboratively by a number of institutions including the Assam state environment and forest department, an NGO, Aaranyak, the International Ranger Federation (IRF), the Ranger Federation of Asia (RFA) and the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA).

The ARF's objective is to ensure a well-equipped workforce in the field to protect biodiversity. It believes every ranger makes a difference through their valuable contribution towards protection of wildlife and biodiversity and the planet needs more rangers at this juncture.

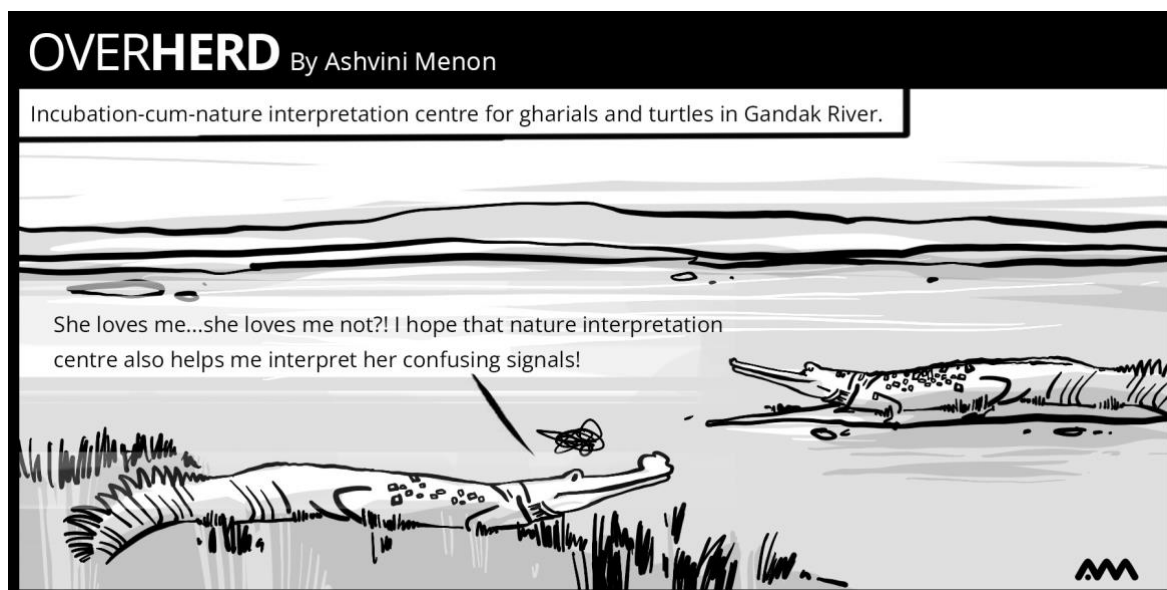
The declaration stated that "Asia is a highly biodiverse region, yet it has lost half of its natural capital in the last 50 years alone. Rangers serve as critical biodiversity guardians, safeguarding Asia's rich wildlife and ecosystems and enabling the achievement of the Global Biodiversity Framework's target

of effectively conserving and managing 30 per cent of the planet's land mass, oceans, coastal areas and inland waters by 2030 (30 by 30). Despite their critical importance, rangers are often under-trained, under-recognised and under-equipped. In order to achieve 30 by 30, the world must rapidly scale up both the number of rangers and the management effectiveness of existing and future protected and conserved areas."

It stated further that given its size and ecological importance, Asia will play a pivotal role in determining whether this global target is met.

The ARF in Guwahati was attended by 146 participants from 20 countries.

Source: Umanand Jaiswal "Guwahati Declaration' urges international community, governments to strive for 'inclusive ranger workforce'", [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 10/12/2023.



## A rough draft of conservation history

A review by T R Shankar Raman of *Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India*

<https://india.mongabay.com/2022/04/book-review-a-rough-draft-of-conservation-history/>

Newspapers, as someone famously said, publish the first rough draft of history. If this is right, then the book under review can be said to provide a first rough draft of the conservation history of India from the mid 1990s to the present. *Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India* by Pankaj Sekhsaria contains a selection of news items from mainstream media and accompanying editorials that first appeared in the bimonthly newsletter *Protected Area Update* edited by the author and published by the environmental organisation Kalpavriksh.

*PA Update*, still in publication, typically focuses on news and issues concerning India's wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, tiger reserves, conservation and community reserves, and surrounding landscapes. The newsletter began publication as the *JPAM UPDATE News on Action Towards Joint Protected Area Management* in September 1994 and matured over the years into its present 24-page bulletin form. The book covers the period from around 1996 to the present day, bringing out conservation news, issues, and opinions, kaleidoscopic in their diversity.

### Distilled yet diverse themes

The period covered by the book was marked by a huge churn in India, as conservation moved from its protectionist origins to grappling with diverse challenges and threats, some old — such as dams and human-wildlife conflicts — and many new — such as linear infrastructure intrusions and mining. The foremost among these trends is the rise of the neoliberal state and the trampling of environmental and livelihood concerns under the iron wheels of untrammelled economic and industrial growth. This juggernaut rolls on, watering down or whittling away environmental laws and

regulations, and obliterating sections of protected areas (PAs) or entire PAs denotified, to make way for destructive development.

The period also stands witness to the tension of shifting from exclusivist ideas of pristine and inviolate protected areas to more inclusive views of people as partners in conservation. Another landmark in this period was the Forest Rights Act of 2006 that created new opportunities to redress historical injustice, park-people conflicts, and empower forest dwellers to challenge destructive development in their lands. The increase in protected area coverage in some parts of India and the establishment and growth of vibrant civil society organisations focused on research, on-ground efforts, and community-based conservation, must be counted on the positive side.

The book is organised in 14 chapters that distil the news and editorials into thematic (Law, Policy, and Governance; The Developmental Threat; Tourism), species-oriented (Fate of the Elephant; Tigers and Tiger Reserves), and ensemble chapters (A Colourful Mosaic; Specific Geographies). The coverage is inevitably selective. What sets the tone of the book are the accompanying editorials that present these in the immediate context, while linking them to wider currents and cross-cutting issues in conservation.

### Protected areas and beyond

In these editorials, Sekhsaria speaks up for wildlife not just inside PAs, but for the wildlife outside PAs. He talks about involving people living inside PAs in their management, and on sensitising people outside PAs, including city dwellers and urban conservationists, into the realities and needs of conservation. He decries the focus on a few charismatic species or reserves, and champions the cause of diversity in species, landscapes, and conservation

strategies. Often, the editorials accompanying each chapter devolve into a series of probing questions triggered by the news: questions that must be asked by and of policymakers, conservationists, and other citizens.

### Case studies in a staccato rhythm

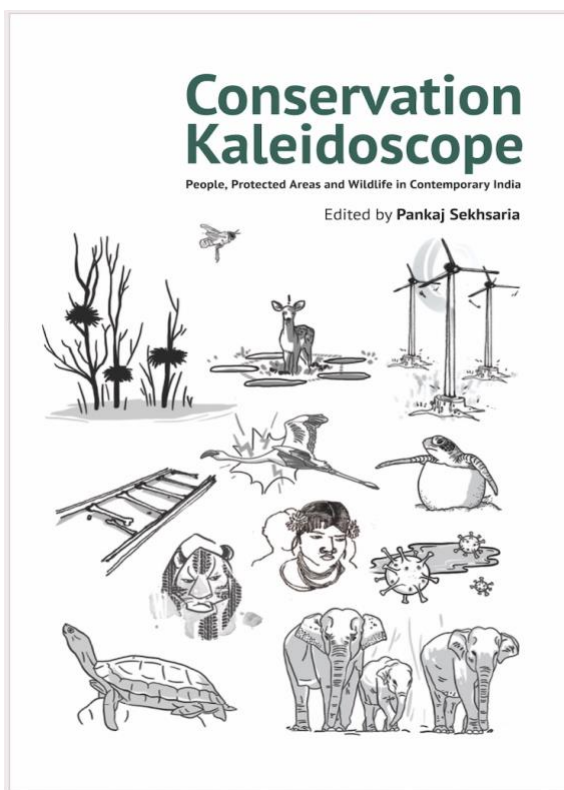
Built as it is largely on news on conservation that manage to appear in mainstream media, the picture that emerges from the book of India's conservation history is more like a series of rapidly-projected slide photographs rather than a moving film with a clear beginning, a narrative flow, climax, and denouement. This staccato presentation of news and opinion can be unsettling and difficult to read or grasp as a coherent narrative. And yet, while it presents no grand panorama, the book is nevertheless revealing in its particulars, in the details that emerge from a focus on myriad individual cases: a reserve forest denotified in Andhra for industrial use; a road cleared through a PA in Uttarakhand; mass bird deaths in a Rajasthan lake; police firing in Wayanad, Kerala; a conference on bees in Tamil Nadu; human-elephant conflict in Jharkhand; and so on.

### A reference for wildlife history in India

Where the book inevitably falters is in providing depth and completeness. A news event on a threat in a new area is flagged, but the reader is often left with little idea of what came later. The section on the Forest Rights Act is insubstantial: with little news or analysis of cases where the FRA has been implemented or deliberately disregarded. Another major gap in the book is the paucity of reports or editorials about wildlife research in and around PAs. In India, there has been a remarkable growth of institutions and scholars engaged in wildlife research since the 1990s, with better understanding on wildlife conservation issues, numerous new discoveries and findings coming to light, and increasingly brought to the

public by excellent science communicators and journalists. Recent issues of *PA Update* do carry a section about research, but this very significant aspect remains a dark patch in the otherwise colourful conservation kaleidoscope. Despite these limitations, this book is a worthwhile read and reference for a wide spectrum of people concerned with politics, development, wildlife and environment in India.

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

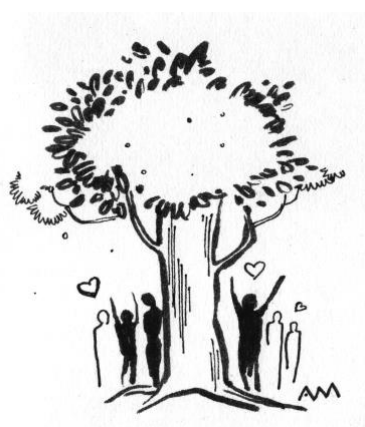
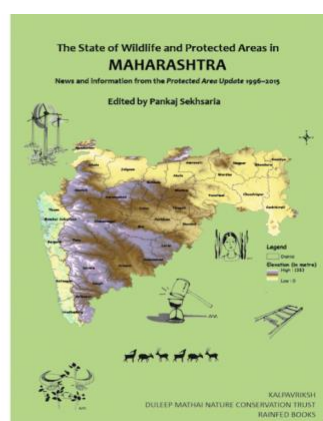
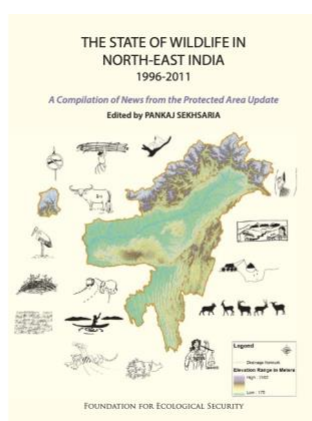
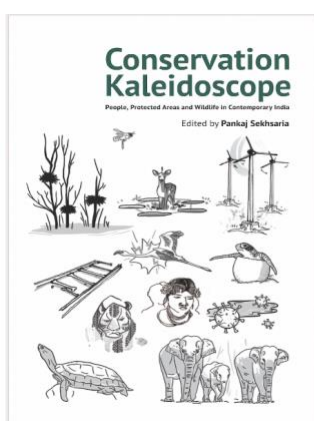
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**READERS WRITE**

**Useful and informative newsletter...**

I am a Protected Area Manager with the US National Park Service and am in India on a Fulbright Fellowship looking at protected area management issues in your country. I'm affiliated with ATREE during my six month fellowship. I have found the PA Update to be very informative and helpful in learning about Indian protected area challenges, opportunities, and accomplishments.

- **David Manski**, Director of Conservation and Cultural Heritage, US National Park Service, Acadia National Park, Bar Harbor, Maine, USA.

**Elephant deaths in train accidents...**



The editorial (A falcon and an elephant, *Protected Area Update*, Vol. XIX, No. 6, December 2013) only mentions the PIL submitted in the Supreme Court (Shakti Naik vs Union of India) regarding elephant deaths all over India.

It, however, does not mention the PIL submitted by me & five others against the Railways for regularly mowing down elephants in North Bengal in the Calcutta High Court (Shakti Banerjee & others vs Union of India, Case no WP 3470W of 2013). In 2000 when I was the State Director of West Bengal State Office of WWF-India, I had filed, on behalf of WWF-India, a PIL in the Calcutta

High Court against the conversion of the metre gauge to broad gauge in the Siliguri - Alipurduar sector. My view was that accident rates will go up if the conversion is done.

My fears have come true as the accident rate has gone up after the track was converted. Whereas in 29 years of the existence of metre gauge track, there were 27 deaths, the the death toll has been 52 since the conversion in 2004. Is it not shocking?

Please raise your voice at the national level as we need the support of all.

- **Lt. Col. (Retd) Shakti Ranjan Banerjee**, Hony Director Wildlife Protection Society of India. Email: banshakti@gmail.com

**The South Asian challenge...**

I liked the editorial (The South Asian Challenge, *Protected Area Update*, Vol. XIX, No. 5, October 2013) where you have raised important inter-SAARC issues that are waiting to be looked at. Maybe the PA Update could take some initiative?

1. Include news about individual PAs in other South Asian countries? I am sure many would be interested.
2. You could have news about their Conservation/Species Programmes; their wildlife set-ups etc.
3. Their policies and laws on wildlife & its conservation could be reported on.
4. Also report wildlife / conservation NGOs active in neighbouring countries?
5. Interest of their authorities and/or research bodies to look at Threat Assessment of Species that are common in South Asian countries, for e.g. Snow Leopard, Western Tragopan and many others could be included.

- **Vinay Tandon**. Email: vtandy@gmail.com

## PERSPECTIVE

### **One Health: Bridging the Gap Between Humans, Animals, and Ecosystems**

One Health is a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human health, animal health, and the environment. It emphasizes collaboration across disciplines to address health challenges at the interface of the three domains of human health, livestock health, and wild animal health and acknowledges that our health is intertwined with that of other animals. Diseases can cross species boundaries, affecting not only individuals but entire communities and ecosystems. Most of the newly emerging infectious diseases originate in wildlife and can spill over to humans like we saw in the case of Covid 19 and what we have been seeing with avian flu, Nipah virus disease and monkey disease.

One Health brings together experts from diverse fields—veterinarians, ecologists, epidemiologists, and public health professionals. Their combined efforts enhance disease surveillance, research, and response. Hence, regular monitoring of wildlife health informs us about disease prevalence, transmission patterns, and potential risks to humans. This knowledge can guide public health policies.

However, when we talk of wildlife management in India, there is hardly any mention of disease. Wildlife health management is a neglected field in our country and needs an efficient team of wildlife disease ecologists working with health professionals, wildlife managers, and conservationists to address health-related challenges in wildlife populations. Wildlife disease ecologists work at the intersection of veterinary medicine, ecology, and wildlife management but unfortunately, we only have a handful of such trained people working here. As a result, the risk of disease spill-overs and the introduction of diseases to new areas during translocations or reintroductions go unnoticed due to the lack of trained personnel in disease surveillance.

One Health requires seamless data exchange between human health agencies, veterinary services, and environmental agencies. Overcoming data silos is essential for effective disease control. As climate shifts impact ecosystems, and with the rise in ecotourism, wildlife diseases may emerge or spread. India faces significant environmental challenges, including climate change, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity. One Health strategies therefore must adapt to changing environmental conditions.

In conclusion, One Health recognizes that our well-being is intricately linked to the health of animals and the environment. By fostering collaboration, research, and awareness, we can build a healthier planet—one where humans, animals, and ecosystems thrive together. Remembering that the health of our planet depends on the health of all its inhabitants, let's find ways to safeguard wildlife, prevent zoonotic outbreaks, and promote a harmonious coexistence.

- **Kazveen Umrigar**, Conservation Breeding Specialist, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai.

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