



Vol. XXX, No. 2

April 2024 (No. 168)

LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

In the centre of India

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Jharkhand/Madhya Pradesh

Palamau TR officials visit Sanjay Dubri TR to study wildlife management techniques

Madhya Pradesh

More than 10,000 vultures in MP; highest in the country

Bandhavgarh TR team rescues tusker from Annupur district; will be sent to Kanha TR
Central committee visits region affected by human elephant conflict

Tigers start occupying new grassland areas in Kanha TR

SFRI takes up ecological assessment of wolves in Nauradehi WLS

No response to tender notice for Ken-Betwa River Linking project; concerns over clearance inside Panna TR

CAG reveals misuse of CAMPA funds in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh/Odisha

Tiger from Sanjay Dubri NP reaches Odisha

Maharashtra

Least number forest fires in Maharashtra in 2023 in last five years: RTI reply

27 tigers, 26 leopards, two sloth bears at Gorewada Rescue Centre: RTI reply

- 3 MAFSU submits Rs. 30 crore proposal for Wildlife One Health Centre
- 3 Camera trap survey shows animals using over and underpasses to cross Nagpur Mumbai expressway
- 3 Annual budget of Rs. 36.79 crore approved for TCFs in all TRs of Maharashtra
- 3 MoEF&CC returns forest diversion proposal for new rail alignment near Melghat TR
- 4 Melghat TR organises volleyball tournament for local communities
- 4 Melghat TR provides skill training for local youth
- 4 2nd milk centre in Pench TR in two months
- 4 Recently established elephant camp in Pench TR requires two elephants
- 4 Ghorpad village important transit point for wildlife between Pench and Bor TRs: WII study
- 4 Villagers block traffic on NH 44 after death in tiger attack in Pench TR
- 4 New plant species discovered in Gol Pahadi area of Pench TR
- 4 Pench TR starts two Forest e-Service Centres
- 4 Rise in crocodile numbers in Pench TR
- 7 Otter distribution and occupancy survey carried out in Pench TR
- 7 Adventure sports project launched in Pench TR buffer zone
- 7 Tourists fined for consuming alcohol in TATR safari; barred from further visits

Telangana	16	13,874 leopards in 70% of its areas in India: highest number in MP and Maharashtra	
SBWL approval for gaur sanctuary in Kothagudem, Kawal-Tadoba corridor CR and increased compensation			
Telangana/Maharashtra	16		
Telangana approves CR status for tiger corridor between Tadoba Andhari and Kawal TRs			
NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA	17		
Pench Tiger Reserve gets IUCN's "Dark Sky Park" title			
NBWL to consider proposals only after forest clearance			
		IN MEMORY	
		- Sreedhar Ramamurthi	
		- KM Chinnappa	
		OVERHERD – A visual comment	19
		FROM THE ARCHIVES	23
		PERSPECTIVE	24
		Pathways to just conservation by looking beyond man-made boundaries	

Protected Area Update
Vol. XXX, No. 2, April 2024 (No. 168)

Editor: **Pankaj Sekhsaria**
Associate Editor: **Reshma Jathar**

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

Produced by **Kalpavriksh** and
The Environment and Ecology Research Group (EERG), C-TARA, IIT Bombay

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

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

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

Note: Stories that appear in the *PA Update* are edited version of the original news reports first published in the source mentioned at the end of the story.



Publication of the PA Update has been supported by
Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust
C/o Foundation for Ecological Security <http://fes.org.in/>
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
and
Donations from a number of individual supporters

EDITORIAL

In the centre of India

This issue of the *Protected Area Update* is another experiment. What was last time a 'One Newspaper *PA Update*' is this time focussed entirely on one geographical/ecological unit. For the last issue we had accessed only one source - *The Telegraph* newspaper - for news on wildlife and conservation from across the country. We tried a reversal this time - the sources of news are varied like always, it is the area of focus that is fixed and restricted.

The landscape approach, as we know, is a relatively new one where conservation is concerned. It seeks a more comprehensive and integrated engagement with the ground in an acknowledgement that conservation issues are complex, diverse and multi-layered. The Central Indian Landscape (CIL), the focus of our efforts this time, is a good example of this: a land/scape that spans boundaries of at least four states in the heart of India, nearly 40,000 sq. km of good teak and sal forests, a number of protected areas and also home at the same time to ancient communities with diverse cultures. Gondwana, the other name this broad region goes by, comes from one such community that has been here from the very beginning. With a number of prominent tiger reserves and good numbers of the big cat it is also often referred to as India's tiger capital.

Creating an issue then of the *PA Update* with stories focussed exclusively on the CIL offers interesting insights. Three things seem to stand out. While the tiger continues to hold centre-stage, one sees interesting news and developments involving other species as well - elephants moving into parts of Madhya Pradesh from Chhattisgarh, of otters in Pench TR, discovery of a new plant species also in Pench, vultures in Madhya Pradesh as a whole and wolves and cheetahs in Nauradehi in particular.

At another level one can see the landscape as a microcosm of what is happening

at the national level, albeit in much more granular detail: a tiger walking all the way from Sanjay Dubri NP to Odisha, the CAG reporting irregularities in funds usage in Madhya Pradesh, issues related to linear infrastructure, FD initiatives to involve local communities like in Melghat and developments (rather the lack of them) in the Ken-Betwa River Linking project. There is clearly no one single story or narrative that can be considered a signature issue of the landscape.

The third key learning as often is the case is about the media, the vehicle that brings to us the information of what is happening in the field. Concentrating on news about a smaller geographical unit rather than the entire nation like we have done this time, shows up the landscape in much sharper relief thanks to the granularity and detail of the reporting. We also find sources that we have missed all along - newspapers and news sites whose footprint is more restricted and limited than the national media, but where the engagement is more intense in and comprehensive for the region they cover. Their local-ness is their strength, the depth comes through more clearly and intensely and the landscape emerges richer and more interesting and with a flavour that is its own.

This has been an interesting *PA Update* to put together for these reasons and the same, hopefully, will be the experience of the reader as well.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

JHARKHAND/MADHYA PRADESH

Palamau TR officials visit Sanjay Dubri TR to study wildlife management techniques

A team of about 25 officials of the Palamau Tiger Reserve (TR) visited the Sanjay Dubri TR in Madhya Pradesh (MP), mid-February, to

study the planning and management at Sanjay Dubri TR.

Palamau TR in Jharkhand shares the landscape with TRs in MP and both the States fall in the central Indian tiger landscape. The Palamau TR teams had visited other TRs including Bandhavgarh and Kanha in MP in the past. However, this visit to Sanjay Dubri TR is considered important as this TR came into existence in 1975, just one year after the creation of the Palamau TR, but has performed much better than Palamau.

The Sanjay Dubri TR spread over 831 sq. km is currently reported to have over 22 tigers, more than 30 leopards and 11 species of reptiles. The Palamau TR on the other hand, though spread over an area of 1,100 sq. km has seen its dwindle to almost zero. A male tiger was captured on camera here in March 2023 but is reported to have left the reserve. There are reports of a couple of other tigers here but the officials are not sure how long they will remain. While the Betla National Park (NP) in the north of Palamau has 70 to 80 gaur, the Palamau TR south has none.

Palamau TR officials tried using a Boma technique i.e. the African system of catching animals for translocating chital. However, no deer boarded a Boma truck that was parked in Betla NP for two weeks. Sanjay Dubri TR has translocated gaur from Kanha TR. The team was to also see how the Boma technique works among other initiatives and explore possibilities of replicating those in Palamau TR.

Source: 'PTR team visits MP reserve to study wildlife management', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/02/2024.

MADHYA PRADESH

More than 10,000 vultures in MP; highest in the country

A three-day vulture estimation exercise conducted recently in protected areas including

the six tiger reserves (TRs) in Madhya Pradesh, has recorded more than 10,000 vultures in the State. The highest number of over 900 was reported from the Panna TR with more than 900 vultures.



Vulture numbers have been growing steadily in the State - from 7,029 in 2016 to 8,397 in 2018, to 9,446 in 2020-21 to over 10,000 in 2022-23.

Source: 'MP is home to over 10,000 vultures', www.thehitavada.com, 25/02/2024.

Bandhavgarh TR team rescues tusker from Annupur district; will be sent to Kanha TR

In the morning of 25 February, the second day of rescue operation, a team of experts from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) rescued an elephant that had gone on rampage in Annupur district leading to the death of a farmer three days earlier on 22 February. The victim was identified as a resident of Gobri village in Jaithari forest range, 250 km east of Jabalpur and close to the Chhattisgarh border. Two others sustained bullet injuries after a mob clashed with forest personnel and police following the incident at night on 22 February.

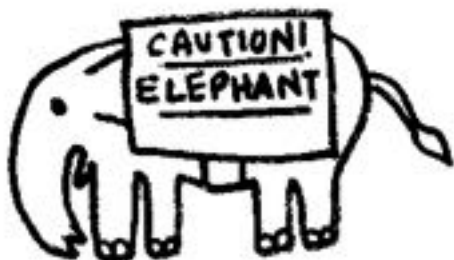
A magisterial probe was ordered and chief minister Mohan Yadav announced an assistance of Rs. 10 lakh for the family of the deceased.

A team of around two dozen experts along with three tamed elephants were deployed to capture the tusker. The Bandhavgarh TR authorities informed that the animal was tranquillized and rescued from Gobri beat under Jaitahri range of Annupur district. It is the same male elephant whose companion was electrocuted in Shahdol district a few days ago.

The rescued elephant will be sent to Kanha TR. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 3 and Vol. XXVI, No. 1).

Source: 'Elephant on rampage after its partner was electrocuted, rescued', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/02/2024.

Central committee visits region affected by human elephant conflict



A five-member committee of the Centre recently visited the regions of Madhya Pradesh affected by human elephant conflict to look into the causes and suggest remedies. It visited the Sanjay Dubri and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TRs), and parts of Shahdol, Annupur and Dindori. The committee is expected to hand over its report to officials at the Centre, who will study the report and make recommendations to the State for implementation.

Elephants have been causing damage to the crops and houses in the villages here. A villager died in an elephant attack recently in Annupur (see accompanying story), prompting a big agitation from the villagers. Other such incidents have also been reported in the recent past.

There are reported to be around 55 wild elephants in Bandhavgarh TR now.

Source: Rajan Raikwar. 'MP: Central panel studying wild elephant menace', www.freepressjournal.in, 08/03/2024.

Tigers start occupying new grassland areas in Kanha TR

Twelve tigers from areas adjacent to the Kanha Tiger Reserve (TR) such as Kanha, Kesli and Mukki are said to have moved into new

grassland areas within the reserve. These grasslands are in lands originally occupied by six villages that were relocated from within the TR in the last six years. These include Azanpur, Advan and Jholar.

For the last few years, the reserve authorities have been developing a new prey base by shifting spotted deer from high density areas to these areas. 1,600 spotted deer have been shifted to the new grasslands so far.

The tigers moving to new grasslands are expected to spread further to other regions across the Chhattisgarh-Maharashtra corridor.

Kanha TR is currently reported to have 111 adult tigers and 37 cubs.

Source: Rajan Raikwar. 'Bhopal: 12 Tigers Move To New Grasslands Of Kanha', www.freepressjournal.in, 22/01/2024.

SFRI takes up ecological assessment of wolves in Nauradehi WLS

The Madhya Pradesh State Forest Research Institute (SFRI) has initiated a survey to assess the ecological status of wolves inside the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) following the reintroduction of tigers here in 2018. Led by Dr. Aniruddha Majumdar, a scientist at the SFRI, this two-year project will conduct a comprehensive study of wolf behaviour, habitat utilization, prey dynamics, and interactions with both tigers and humans within the sanctuary.

The study area comprises 72 villages in the ecologically sensitive zone of the sanctuary. Previously, wolves held the position of top carnivore in Nauradehi; officials now suggest that the reintroduction of tigers here has changed the balance.

The Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve (TR) that was created in September 2023 encompasses areas within the Nauradehi and Veerangana Durgavati WLSs. The TR is spread over 2,339 sq. km across three districts—Narsinghpur, Sagar, and Damoh and has approximately 15 tigers.

Additionally, a study conducted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India has also identified Nauradehi WLS as a suitable location for the translocation of cheetahs (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 5 and Vol. XXIV, No. 5).

Reportedly, there are no more than 800 wolves left in Madhya Pradesh.

Source: P Naveen. 'In a first, SFRI takes up eco study on wolves in Nauradehi', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 29/02/2024.

No response to tender notice for Ken-Betwa River Linking project; concerns over clearance inside Panna TR

No company has responded to the tender notice floated by The National Water Development Authority (NWDA) to construct the Daudhan Dam and two tunnels in the Panna Tiger Reserve (TR) for the Ken Betwa River Linking (KNRL) project. A tender was floated in August 2023 with a October 2023 deadline but no company participated in the process. NWDA then extended the last date for filing tenders till 18 January 2024. Companies sent queries related to permission, cost, and technology but did not submit a tender. The deadline was extended for the third time till March 5 and NWDA also decided to invite companies to discuss their problems and issues on February 2 by releasing a public notice.

The Daudhan Dam proposed across the Ken River is 2,031m long. Two tunnels have also been proposed as part of the project for providing water for irrigation and power generation. While the upper tunnel will be built along left bank upstream of the Daudhan Dam, the lower tunnel will be built downstream of the upper tunnel. The project is to be completed in two phases - the Daudhan Dam complex in the first and the Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex Project, and Kotha Barrage in the second. The KNRL project is estimated to cost Rs. 44,605 crore and a tripartite agreement

for its implementation was signed in March 2021 by the States of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and the Central government.

The project chief executive officer said, explaining the lack of response to the tender notice, that the companies have some concerns about the project. Another official said that the companies were concerned about environmental clearance as the dam is going to be constructed in the core area of the Panna TR. A similar concern was raised regarding the construction of the Lower Orr Dam as well. The environment ministry had asked for a fresh environment appraisal to assess the ecological losses in this particular case and had imposed a fine on the State government and the company involved.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIV, No. 1; Vol. XXIII, Nos. 3, 2 & 1; Vol. XXII, Nos.4, 3& 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 & 1).

Source: Shruti Tomar. 'India's first river linking project faces hurdle as govt gets no tenders for dam', www.hindustantimes.com, 31/01/2024.

CAG reveals misuse of CAMPA funds in Madhya Pradesh

The Madhya Pradesh (MP) government is reported to have allocated more than Rs. 167 crore from Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds for activities ineligible under CAMPA. The funds were diverted when Shivraj Singh Chouhan was the chief minister. The misuse was revealed in a report published by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in February earlier this year. Activities that the report lists include a scheme for farmers and infrastructure development.

Of the allocation under CAMPA a total of Rs. 53.29 crore have been spent so far.

According to the CAG report, Rs. 120.30 crore for agro-forestry under the Mukhyamantri Krishak Samridhhi Scheme in 2017-18 and 2018-19; Rs. 20.88 crore for

construction of a Van Bhawan in 2018; Rs. 7.13 crore for fresh forest recruits in 2017-18; and Rs. 6.47 crore for research by the State Forest Research Institute in Jabalpur from 2017-18 to 2019-20 were allocated from CAMPA funds. Another Rs. 5 crore for training of forest staff in 2019 and Rs. 1.97 crore for infrastructure development from 2018-19 to 2019-20 also came from the CAMPA funds.

The report notes that "the department irregularly incurred expenditure of Rs. 53.29 crore on ineligible activities which could not be linked to any of the activities envisaged for compensatory afforestation and hence could not be carried out from CAMPA funds."

The CAG has pointed out further violations of CAMPA guidelines as well. The state chief executive officer of CAMPA disbursed Rs. 29.58 crore to the MP State Forest Development Corporation Limited for teak plantations from 2017-18 to 2019-20, which is in violation of several CAMPA guidelines.

The report also revealed "unwarranted expenditure on eradication of weeds" at the same location five times in seven months from December 2019 to July 2020. These included the removal of weeds at the Nauradehi Wildlife Division, which was one of the priority locations for the reintroduction of cheetahs. The CAG noted that the wildlife division removed "high density weed" first in December 2019 at a cost of Rs. 9.43 lakh. It then provided separate funds worth Rs. 17.20 lakh in December 2019 and July 2020 for lantana and brushwood removal though these were already covered under all types of weeds. The eradication of weeds was repeated in January and February 2020 at a cost of Rs. 5.72 lakh and Rs. 4.05 lakh respectively.

Source: Shivnarayan Rajpurohit. 'Misuse' of forest money: Madhya Pradesh diverted Rs. 167 crore from CAMPA funds', www.newsland.com, 27/02/2024.

MADHYA PRADESH/ODISHA

Tiger from Sanjay Dubri NP reaches Odisha

A young tiger from the Sanjay Dubri National Park (NP) has been documented walking hundreds of kilometres to reach Odisha after having passed through Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

The four-year-old tiger is currently in the northern region of Odisha. Officials are trying to match the photos of the tiger with the existing database to identify the particular individual.

According to a senior official, this is not the first time that the State's tiger has travelled to a distant State. In the past, one tiger of Kanha had reached the Andhra Pradesh borders.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 3)

Source: Rajan Raikwar. 'MP tiger covers two states to reach Odisha', www.freepressjournal.in, 20/03/2024.

MAHARASHTRA

Least number forest fires in Maharashtra in 2023 in last five years: RTI reply

Maharashtra witnessed a decrease in forest fire incidents in 2023 as compared to the previous four years. This is shown in data shared by the forest department (FD) in response to an RTI application filed by activist Abhay Kolarkar.

Among 15 circles in the State, Gadchiroli recorded the highest 31,207 ha land destroyed by forest fires in five years from 2019 to 2023. Gadchiroli also witnessed the highest number of 10,198 fire incidents in these five years.



The total number of fire incidents were 37,403. These resulted in the destruction of 1,28,315 ha of forest

area and a total financial loss of Rs. 3.16 crore. The highest property loss worth Rs. 51.73 lakh was recorded in the Kolhapur circle. Dhule (Rs. 43.36 lakh), Nashik (Rs. 42.11 lakh), and Thane (Rs. 40.38 lakh) recorded highest amount of property losses after Kolhapur in these five years.

The seven circles of Vidarbha region - Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Nagpur, Nagpur (wildlife), Amravati, Yavatmal and Melghat - witnessed destruction of the highest 77,800 ha land in forest fires between 2019 and 2023. The loss alone is 60.63% of the total loss in the State.

A total of 5,274 fire incidents, the lowest number for the last five years, were reported in the State in 2023. The forest land affected - 12,921.60 ha - in 2023 was also the lowest for the five year period.

In 2023, the State government received the highest amount of Rs. 16.25 crore under the non-plan scheme for fire and forest protection. From 2019 to 2023 Maharashtra received a total of Rs. 70.27 crore under the scheme. The State also received Rs. 35.60 crore in the same period under the forest fire prevention and management scheme of the Central government. The amount for 2023 was Rs. 7.50 crore, which is second highest amount after the Rs. 13.21 received in 2018-19.

Honorary Wildlife Warden of Nagpur Ajinkya Bhatkar said that the fire incidents in Maharashtra forests mainly take place between February and April which is also the period for collection of *Tendu* leaves and *Mahua* flowers. In Western Maharashtra, most of the fires take place during collection of *Apta* leaves.

Source: Kaushik Bhattacharya. '2023 sees drastic decline in fire incidents in State forests', www.thehitavada.com, 16/02/2024.

27 tigers, 26 leopards, two sloth bears at Gorewada Rescue Centre: RTI reply

The Gorewada Rescue Centre (GRC) in Nagpur currently has 27 tigers and 26 leopards

and two sloth bears. 21 of the big cats were sent here in the last five years. This was revealed by the forest department (FD) in a reply to a right to information (RTI) query. The FD reply also stated that forest teams had rescued 30 carnivores including tigers, leopards and sloth bears from various forest areas of the state between 2019 and 2023. Of these, 17 tigers and four leopards were sent to GRC for treatment and care.

GRC director Shatnik Bhagwat noted that two or three of the 27 tigers in the centre are likely to be released into the wild. The remaining 24 tigers, 26 leopards and two sloth bears shall remain at the centre for the rest of their lives. There are 30 enclosures in GRC, almost all of which are now occupied. Most of these carnivores are injured or incapable of hunting in the wild. They can however be sent to other zoos in the country under the animal exchange programme.

In the last five years, 13 tigers and three leopards were rescued from Chandrapur division and most of them were sent to GRC. The centre has three tigers rescued from Nagpur division, three tigers and a leopard from Gadchiroli division, two tigers from Yavatmal division, two leopards from Thane division and a sloth bear from Amravati division rescued in the last five years.

One of the leopards rescued from Chandrapur was released in Compartment No. 250 of Chandankhedi area of Alapalli forest range. Another leopard which was rescued from Thane circle on 3 November 2021 was released in wild after fixing a radio collar. The sloth bear rescued from Buldhana circle of Amravati division on 29 October 2021 was released in the wild the very next day.

Apart from GRC, some of the rescued carnivores were sent to the Maharajbag Zoo, Transit Treatment Centre, and to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai.

Source: Kaushik Bhattacharya. '21 carnivores sent to Gorewada Rescue Centre in five years', www.thehitavada.com, 11/02/2024.

MAFSU submits Rs. 30 crore proposal for Wildlife One Health Centre

The Maharashtra Animal and Fisheries Sciences University (MAFSU), Nagpur, has submitted a proposal for a Wildlife One Health Centre to the State government. The proposed centre will be an extension of the present Wildlife Research and Training Centre (WRTC) at Gorewada.

MAFSU has submitted details about equipment needed, temporary staff for five years, and other requirements. The proposed Rs. 30 crore project will deal with wild animals and the diseases resulting from the human wildlife interactions, said Dr. Shirish Upadhye, director of instruction and dean (veterinary), MAFSU. Further, he pointed out that increased human animal conflict must have brought many new health complications for wild animals too. The centre will study both the aspects of human and wildlife health.

Source: Chaitanya Deshpande. 'MAFSU's proposed Wildlife One Health Centre to be first in India', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/02/2024.

Camera trap survey shows animals using over and underpasses to cross Nagpur Mumbai expressway

The latest camera trap survey by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has shown animals including langurs, leopard, nilgai, chinkara, porcupine, and wild boar using overpasses and underpasses to cross the Nagpur Mumbai Samruddhi Mahamarg.

The expressway passes through three varied habitat types, starting from the dry deciduous forests near Nagpur, grasslands in the middle section, and the Western Ghats near the Mumbai end. It does not pass through any protected area but does cut across tiger corridors and the habitats of many species such as the Great Indian Bustard, wolf and blackbuck.

The WII study aims to analyse this information in light of structural and environmental factors that make some structures more efficient than others in terms of wildlife crossings. A monitoring team has deployed 64 camera traps across the overpasses and underpasses.

Dr. Bilal Habib, who is leading the study, said that the use of overpasses by species like chinkara, leopard and porcupine is the first indication of the acceptance of mitigation measures by wildlife, which is specific to the region. Chief Wildlife Warden of Maharashtra, Maheep Gupta said that the results from this survey will help implement mitigation measures across other highways in the State.

Besides tunnels, 1,797 mitigation structures of 11 types have been built on sensitive stretches of the expressway. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 3).

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar and Chittaranjan Tembhekar. 'Leopard, nilgai, porcupine, boar among wildlife using Samruddhi overpasses', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/02/2024.

Annual budget of Rs. 36.79 crore approved for TCFs in all TRs of Maharashtra

The executive committee of the tiger conservation foundations (TCFs) headed by forest minister Sudhir Mungantiwar recently approved a Rs. 36.79 crore annual budget for six tiger reserves (TRs) in Maharashtra. This is as per the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006, which mandated the creation of TCFs with the intent of providing additional institutional support to strengthen the management of TRs.

The highest budget of Rs. 16 crore has been proposed by Tadoba Andhari TR (TR), followed by Pench and Bor (Rs. 7.7 crore), Melghat (Rs. 7.03 crore), Sahyadri (Rs. 4.5 crore) and Navegaon Nagzira TR (Rs. 1.56 crore).

It was noted that the TRs with the exception of TATR had not spent the entire approved TCFs budget for the previous year. In 2022-23, the approved budget was Rs. 26.14 crore but the TRs spent Rs. 23.87 crore. Only TATR exceeded the approved budget of Rs 10.15 crore by spending Rs. 12.67 crore.

The minister has directed all the TRs to improve facilities for tourists including proper drinking water and toilet facilities, creating of selfie points, waiting halls, and souvenir shops, and generating a market for locally produced products. Officials have also been told to promote skill development facilities for local youth.

The minister also asked for the preparation of an unified five-year tourism plan for all tigers reserves (TRs) in the state. The move aims at bringing uniformity in the facilities offered. Addressing a meeting of officials of tiger conservation foundations (TCFs) of six TRs on 24 January 2024, the minister asked officials to start 'Vande Mataram Van Seva Kendras' to share information about various government schemes including the forest rules and regulations. The Pench TR has already started two such service centres in the buffer zone of the reserve.

Forest officials said that most of the foundation money has been proposed for tourism and habitat development. A sizeable amount has also been proposed for research and capacity building of the staff and habitat development in buffer areas.

Principal secretary (forest) B Venugopal Reddy, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) and Head of Forest Force Shailesh Tembhurnikar, PCCF (wildlife) Maheep Gupta, and officials from all the six TRs - Tadoba Andhari, Navegaon Nagzira, Sahyadri, Bor, Pench, and Melghat in the State attended the meeting.

Source: 'Unified tourism plan for tiger reserves now', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 25/01/2024.

Vijay Pinjarkar. '₹36.79 crore budget for better mgmt of Maha tiger reserves', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 29/01/2024.

MoEF&CC returns forest diversion proposal for new rail alignment near Melghat TR

The Regional Empowered Committee (REC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has returned a fresh proposal from South Central Railway (SCR) for diversion of 49.60 ha of forest land in Buldhana district for upgradation of the Akola-Khandwa railway line. The REC meeting was held on February 26 and it returned the proposal, reportedly, due to several anomalies in it.

Earlier, the proposal to expand the existing meter gauge line through the Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) was rejected by the State government and the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

The meter gauge that was laid in 1959-60 is being converted to broad gauge. As part of this 473 km-long gauge conversion project from Akola to Ratlam, train operations stopped on Akola-Khandwa section from 1 January 2017. While work has been going on in other sections, it was stalled between Akot and Amlakhurd (78 km) pending wildlife clearance. In June 2022, the Railways gave up plans to expand the line here through Melghat TR on the grounds that it won't be able to double the line in future owing to lack of permissions. Hence, SCR changed the track alignment and submitted a fresh proposal for diversion of 49.60 ha of forest land.

The new alignment is proposed through Akot, Hiwarkhed, Sonala, Jalgaon Jamod, and Usami. It includes construction of 30 km of an additional line and a 7 km long tunnel. It is also proposed to pass through compartment numbers 625, 627 and 453 in the territorial forest of Buldhana.

The deputy conservator (DyCF), Buldhana, reported that the compartment 625 and 627 are undulating terrain having rich and diverse tree density while compartment 453 is plain with a low tree density. The DyCF has reported presence of tigers, leopards, nilgai, wild boar and other wild animals in and around the area proposed for diversion.

As per the proposal, over 8,000 trees will be felled in compartments 453 and 627. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXV, No. 2 and Vol. XXIV, No. 4)

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Panel returns proposal for forest land diversion to upgrade rly. line', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/03/2024.

Melghat TR organises volleyball tournament for local communities

The Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) management organized a volleyball tournament from February 16 to 20 among other events to celebrate the golden jubilee of the reserve. In Melghat, dominated by mostly the *Korku* tribals and the *Gavli* community, *Kula Mama* (maternal uncle) is the name affectionately used for tigers. Named after this fact, the Kula Mama Volleyball Tournament 2024 was held in Melghat TR's Semadoh. The tournament had 48 participating teams.

In an effort to draw local youth towards tiger and forest conservation, the first such seven-day 'Kula Trophy' was organized in 2013 in Borikheda where 150 teams participated from 70 villages in and around the Melghat TR. The tournament was discontinued but restarted following the efforts of the CCF. In a new initiative, the Melghat TR management distributed volleyball kits to 37 villages.

The first prize for the trophy is Rs. 25,000, followed by Rs. 15,000 for runners-up and Rs. 10,000 to the third winner.

Earlier, the TR management invested in communities by rewarding villages for

preventing forest fires. However, it was observed that some elements worked with malafide intentions to win over others by allegedly igniting fires. Thus, proving the initiative counterproductive, FD officials said, and therefore this initiative to invest in sports.

Created in February 1973, the Melghat TR was one among the first nine created in the country.

Source: 'Forest department's sporting gesture aims at saving tigers and preventing forest fires', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/02/2024.

Melghat TR provides skill training for local youth

Melghat Tiger Reserve (TR) has set up four computer learning centres for local youth, one each at Vastapur, Harisal, Chikhaldara and Shahanur. A skill development centre has also been set up at Paratwada.

The Paratwada Skill Development Training Centre was opened in December 2020. During lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic, classes were held online. The centre has completed 21 batches. In the present batch of 28, seven are girls from remote villages.

Harisal became a digital village in 2017 and the computer learning centre was started here in 2019. Till now over 350 local youth from 40 villages in a 25 km radius have been trained in the MS-CIT certification course. Some of the trainees got jobs after completing their course while several of them have started their own e-centres to assist villagers, informed the deputy conservator of forest, Gugamal. He said that the driving and computer training courses cost Rs. 4,500 each, and the entire cost is borne by the Melghat TR Tiger Conservation Foundation.

Source: 'Jobs for local youth boost Melghat's save tiger mission', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/02/2024.

Recently established elephant camp in Pench TR requires two elephants

The Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) management is exploring options to get two more elephants for its Borban camp as it did not get elephants either from the Karnataka's Motigodu camp or the Kamlapur camp in Maharashtra.

The Nagpur Forest Division recently established the elephant camp at Borban in Chorbauli range for development of eco-tourism in Pench TR and for deep forest patrolling. In the first phase, two male elephants, Bhima (30) and Subramanaya (29) from Karnataka's Motigodu and Dubare elephant camps respectively were brought to the Borban camp.

Pench TR was supposed to get one more male elephant from Karnataka but the transfer of elephant got cancelled due to shortage of males there. As regards to the female elephant, residents of Kamlapur in Gadchiroli district have opposed the idea of shifting a 32-year-old female elephant named Mangla from the Kamlapur camp. The search has now shifted to other States such as Odisha.

The team at Borban camp which includes mahouts, care takers, and veterinarians will visit the Pench TR in Madhya Pradesh to get training in the handling of elephants. The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department is already handling elephants for patrolling in TRs and for promoting eco-tourism.

Source: Kaushik Bhattacharya. 'Jumbo issue.. After plans to get two elephants from Karnataka, Gadchiroli fail, PTR exploring other states', www.thehitavada.com, 15/03/2024.

2nd milk centre in Pench TR in two months

The Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) management in Maharashtra has started a milk collection centre in East Pench. The milk collected will be sold to milk co-operatives in Nagpur. Under the project, Pench TR is also funding farmers

from the villages in the buffer zone for purchasing cattle. The reserve has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Haldiram, a brand of food, for purchasing milk from the milk collection centre.

A similar centre is being successfully run in Awaleghat village of South Pench. This centre is funded by the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) through its CSR arm.

The TR management is bearing the cost of the salary of the employees who are working in the milk collection centres in both the villages. The respective *gram panchayats* are helping farmers to establish the milk collection business.

The project was launched in January 2024 for the benefit of villagers including widows and land-less labourers who do not have a source of income. Since then the TR has funded for purchase of more than 100 cattle in around 6-7 villages. The reserve authorities provide 90% of the funds for this, while the remaining 10% comes from the farmers themselves. The scheme is said to have evoked a very positive response.

To avoid malpractice in the milk collection centres, the management is also planning to launch digital collars for every cow and buffalo that farmers are purchasing from the funds issued under the project.

Source: Kaushik Bhattacharya. 'Milk collection centre launched... PTR's initiative in East Pench to help farmers', www.thehitavada.com, 11/03/2024.

Ghorpad village important transit point for wildlife between Pench and Bor TRs: WII study

A camera trap based study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has recorded that Ghorpad village of Katol tehsil, Nagpur district, is used regularly by wildlife transiting between the Bor and Pench Tiger Reserves (TRs). This is attributed to the fact that wildlife

is not able to use the designated Katlabodi to Chameli wildlife corridor due to heavy traffic on roads along this corridor.

The forest department (FD) had declared the Katlabodi to Chameli area under the Kondhali forest range a wildlife corridor over a decade ago. The corridor connects Bor to Pench. However, due to construction of highways on both sides of the corridor wildlife movement has shifted to Ghorpad village which is situated about 4 km from the notified corridor.

Camera traps installed in this area by WII have confirmed presence of animals including tiger, leopard, wolf, sambar, sloth bear, langur, hornbill, four-horned antelope, spotted deer, wild boar, nilgai and wild dog. Reportedly, it is the same area inhabited by the renowned tiger Bajirao; he died in a road accident in 2017 near Bazargaon.

The area also has trees like mahua, teak, and haldu and reports suggest that the FD has given a permission for felling some of them.

Source: Kaushik Bhattacharya. 'Ghorpad village, a hotspot for wildlife movement', www.thehitavada.com, 18/02/2024.

Villagers block traffic on NH 44 after death in tiger attack in Pench TR

Villagers and family members of a deaf and mute man who was killed in a tiger attack on 8 March in Pench Tiger Reserve (TR), protested by blocking traffic for two hours at Deolapar on National Highway (NH) 44. The family members refused to claim the body demanding compensation and a job for a member from the victim's family. They also demanded that the forest department (FD) capture the tiger.

Surju Zitu Invate (55) from Kadbikheda village was killed in a tiger attack within Paoni Unified Control wildlife range of Pench TR when he was tending to his cattle and goats within the buffer forest area.

After getting information about the protests, Dr. Prabhunath Shukla, Deputy Director of Pench TR with his team went to the protest area and urged the villagers to stop the agitation and allow the traffic to move. The FD called Deolapar police to avoid any untoward incident. Shukla also handed over a cheque of Rs. 5 lakh to the victim's family and assured that the remaining compensation of Rs. 20 lakh will be paid in the next 48 hours.

Source: 'Tiger Attack: 'Rasta Roko' in Deolapar causes heavy traffic-jam for hours', www.thehitavada.com, 10/03/2024.

New plant species discovered in Gol Pahadi area of Pench TR

A recent survey carried out with technical support of the Forest Survey of India has discovered a new plant species of *Polygonum* genus, *Polygonum chaturbhujanum*, from the Gol Pahadi Island of Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) in Maharashtra.

The survey that was carried out over one year recorded 863 plant species belonging to 554 genera and 117 families in the reserve. Of the total species reported, 294 were herbs, 157 wild trees, 131 climbers, 131 grasses, 52 shrubs, and the remaining were avenue trees and epiphytic plants. 46 species were indigenous to India while 32 plant species were of rare distribution and six plant species strictly endemic to the Indian subcontinent, a press release of the forest department (FD) said. The six endemic species are *Aeginetia indica*, *Boerhavia crispera*, *Habenaria gibsonii* var. *foetida*, *Iphigenia pallida*, *Petalidium barlerioides*, and *Barleria gibsonii*.

The noted that the higher biodiversity found in grass species is interesting as Pench does not have extensive grasslands and most of the grasses are under canopy.

Source: 'New plant species discovered in Maharashtra's Pench Tiger Reserve: Forest official', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 04/01/2024.

Rise in crocodile numbers in Pench TR

A total of 52 crocodiles were spotted in Pench River on the Maharashtra side of the Pench Tiger Reserve (TR), an increase of 22 since the first survey that was conducted here in June 2023. A total of 30 individuals had been recorded in 2023 when the water levels were high due to release from the Totladoh dam.

The latest citizens' survey was conducted in a 200 km stretch of Pench River with the help of fishermen's boats from 29 to 31 January 2024. 21 citizens supported forest staff to carry out the study aimed at establishing seasonal distribution and estimation of number of crocodiles and turtles. The technical partner for the project was the Tinsa Ecological Foundation.

The survey area was divided into three parts – Totladoh, its connecting stretch, and Lower Pench reservoir. The 'modified belt transect on boat method', a type of line transect where observers survey river banks based upon direct and indirect sightings, was used for the study. The stretch from Gowlighat to Kirangisarra showed the highest density of crocodiles. The survey teams also recorded dens and eggs of softshell turtles.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Survey finds 52 crocs in Pench reserve, up from 22', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/02/2024.

Pench TR starts two Forest e-Service Centres

The Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) in Maharashtra has started two Van e-Seva Kendras (Forest e-Service Centres) for people living in remote villages. The centres will offer services for banking, payment of electricity bills and DTH and mobile phone charging among others. They will also offer online services for access to boundary maps of forests, ecologically sensitive zones and protected areas.

These centres have commenced operations in Narhar in the Nagalwadi range

and Dahoda in Paoni Unified Control. The individuals operating these centers have been selected based on the MS-CIT course certificate, possession of a BPL card, and recommendation by the gram panchayat.

Almost all the State and Central government schemes are now implemented through online services. However, many villages in the buffer zone of Pench TR lack these facilities, which forces villagers to travel long distances to access these services. Moreover, these villages do not get access to online services offered by the forest department. The service centres are expected to fill these gaps.

According to the Pench TR authorities, this initiative will also help expedite the receipt of crop and cattle compensation resulting from human wildlife conflict incidents. With all necessary documents available at these centres, villagers will find it easier to file applications.

In the second phase, the Pench TR authorities have planned to open 15 more such centres with CSR support.

Source: 'Maha Pench first to start 2 Van e-Seva Kendras', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/01/2024.

Otter distribution and occupancy survey carried out in Pench TR



A study was conducted by the Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) and experts from the Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), Mumbai, in

December 2023 to study otters in the reserve. A report titled, 'Otter distribution and occupancy along the forest streams of Pench Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra', was subsequently submitted in January 2024.

The study area comprised Pench River, its tributaries, and other forest streams.

The primary objective of phase-I of the project was to estimate the current occupancy of otters within Pench and determine factors that influence their occupancy, informed Prasad Gaidhani, lead researcher, WCT.

The data was collected by walking along the sampling units and recording covariates that include habitat characteristics. The habitats were categorized as pool, run, riffle, and the presence of large refuge pools. Otter signs such as spraint (scat), spoor (pugmark) and halt (den) were recorded. The sign survey helped to identify the most suitable locations to install camera traps. Camera traps were deployed at suitable sites where the probability of otter capture was maximum. Each segment had two cameras deployed for 30 days.

According to the Pench TR authorities, in addition to understanding the habitat preferences and status of otters in Pench, an objective was to build the capacities of frontline staff to carry out systematic scientific surveys to assess the status of otters within the TR. Now, they are planning to conduct joint multi-season surveys with the WCT.

The Eurasian Otter had remained unnoticed in the Central Indian Landscape for decades. Until recently, its presence was reported from the Himalayan foothills and the southern Western Ghats. In 2016, the first photographic record of the species in Central India was reported from the Satpura TR in Madhya Pradesh.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Eurasian otters spotted in Pench, a first in Maha.', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/01/2024.

Adventure sports project launched in Pench TR buffer zone

Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) in Maharashtra has launched adventure sports - paramotoring and hot air balloon ride - in the Kolutmara buffer village of West Pench. The move aims at attracting more tourists to the Pench TR. The

initiative is a joint project of Maharshi Adventures Sports and the Kolutmara eco-development committee.

The local advisory committee, led by Nagpur Divisional Commissioner, Vijayalakshmi Bidari, approved the project in November 2023.

Paramotoring involves gliding with a motorised parachute, reaching heights of up to 400 feet in the sky while hot air balloon rides up to 300 feet. Fees for paramotoring will be Rs. 2,500 per person and that for a hot air balloon ride will be Rs. 1,500. The project supported by the District Eco-tourism Fund will give direct employment to more than 15 local youths.

Source: 'Paramotoring, hot air balloon ride starts in PTR', www.thehitavada.com, 31/12/2023.

Tourists fined for consuming alcohol in TATR safari; barred from further visits



In an incident that happened in February, five tourists from Chandrapur were fined Rs. 5,000 each for consuming alcohol during a safari ride in the Tadoba Andhari

Tiger Reserve (TR).

The tour guide accompanying the tourists noticed them consuming alcohol and advised them against doing so. Despite the guide's admonition the five persisted, prompting the guide to return the tourist vehicle to Moharli Gate and inform the relevant forest officials. Upon investigation the TATR management confirmed that these five tourists within the vehicle were inebriated. They were fined and barred from further visits to the reserve.

According to the TATR official, this is not the first instance where tourists have been fined for consuming alcohol. Similar actions

have been taken previously as well in the reserve.

Source: Pradip Kumar Mitra. 'Five tourists fined ₹25K for drinking during safari in Tadoba', www.hindustantimes.com, 17/02/2024.

TELANGANA

SBWL approval for gaur sanctuary in Kothagudem, Kawal-Tadoba corridor CR and increased compensation

The Telangana State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) in February approved a gaur sanctuary in Kothagudem and an increase in compensation for wildlife attack deaths to Rs. 10 lakh. It also approved the establishment of a 1,492 sq. km conservation reserve (CR) covering Kagaznagar and Asifabad divisions that form a corridor between the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TR) in Maharashtra and the Kawal TR in Telangana.

The SBWL meeting chaired by minister for forest and environment Konda Surekha also approved 19 proposals to enhance mobile phone connectivity in remote areas and another for T-fibre connectivity for all villages and settlements in forested regions of the state.

The minister directed officials to frame rules on use of elephants in special cases. In the wake of rise in gaur population in Sathupalli and Kinnerasani areas, discussions were initiated for establishing a dedicated sanctuary and the proposal was approved. The minister also addressed the issue of timely payment of salaries to tiger trackers and outsourced employees working in the forest department.

Source: 'Telangana wildlife board OKs Kawal tiger conservation zone', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 07/02/2024.

TELANGANA/MAHARASHTRA

Telangana approves CR status for tiger corridor between Tadoba Andhari and Kawal TRs

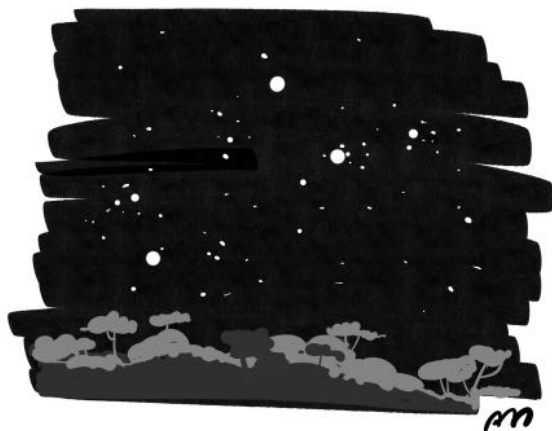
The Telangana Forest Department (FD) is considering a proposal for declaring the areas constituting the tiger corridor between the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maharashtra and the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR) in Mancherial district of Telangana as a conservation reserve (CR). The FD has recommended the proposal to the State government and the State Board for Wildlife has approved it (see accompanying story).

An FD official said that the 1,200 sq. km area between TATR and Kawal TR can be declared a CR because it has become a haven for the spillover tiger population from Maharashtra. The FD needs to take the local communities into confidence by assuring them livelihoods through eco-tourism activities. A successful model of eco-tourism with community participation in Amrabad TR can be replicated here, said the official. However, the key issue in declaration of a CR is the precondition of having consultation with the local communities. Considering the reportedly troubled relations between the FD and the local communities in the corridor area, it might not be an easy task for the government to conduct public consultation.

Recently, two tigers were found dead in close proximity of each other in Kagaznagar Mandal of Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district. Officials suspected poisoning by local villagers. Three persons including a minor, all of them local tribals, were arrested after preliminary investigations.

Source: V Swathi. 'Forest dept. moots conservation reserve in Tadoba-Kawal tiger corridor', www.thehindu.com, 04/02/2024.

Pench Tiger Reserve gets IUCN's "Dark Sky Park" title



Recognising the intrinsic value of the night sky as a natural, cultural, and historical resource, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has granted Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) the 'Dark Sky Park' title.

The Dark and Quiet Skies for Science and Society Working Group, led by the International Astronomical Union, has recommended the establishment of 'Dark Sky Oases' by national and local governments to protect citizens' right to enjoy the beauty of a star-filled sky. The certification of 'Dark Sky Place', focusing on lighting policy, dark-sky-friendly retrofits, outreach, education, and monitoring the night sky, is created to encourage communities and protected areas worldwide to safeguard dark sky sites.

Upon recognition as a dark sky site, Pench TR has inaugurated a night observatory under the innovation scheme of the district planning committee funds. The protection watchtower has been equipped with a telescope. Also to mitigate light pollution, over 100 street and community lights in Wagholi, Sillari, Pipariya, Khapa villages of Paoni Unified Control range buffer area have been replaced with lights facing the ground.

Collaborating with the adjoining eco-development committee ensures the provision of staying facilities and hospitality services, as activities are typically organised during the night.

The Centre had in 2022 notified Hanle in Ladakh as India's first Dark Sky Reserve.

Source: 'Pench Tiger Reserve brings home IUCN's prestigious Dark Sky Park certification', www.thehitavada.com, 12/01/2024.

Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Direction of lights changed, Pench tiger reserve to be India's first Dark Sky Park', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/01/2024.

NBWL to consider proposals only after forest clearance

In a letter dated 18 March 2024, the wildlife division of the Union environment ministry has instructed all States and Union Territories that proposals requiring both wildlife and forest clearances shall be placed for consideration before the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) only after receipt of forest clearance.

Until now, forest and wildlife clearances for infrastructure projects proposed were often considered in parallel.

The new decision came after the standing committee of the NBWL recently considered a road project in the buffer zone of Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand. Some of the committee members had objected to the fact that the project lacked prior forest clearance at first. However, on learning that the project had received forest clearance in December 2022, the committee approved it with conditions including speed limit, underpasses for elephants, and that the diverted forest land's legal status remains unchanged.

According to officials the new decision will avoid contradictory rulings by having higher scrutiny at the forest clearance level first. Experts have however raised concerns over unintended consequences of this

move. They pointed out that while it could provide the NBWL with site inspection reports and potential impacts on wildlife as these are supposed to be officially documented for getting a forest clearance, it will be challenging to ensure that the grant of forest clearance does not become a means to endorse wildlife clearance.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Wildlife clearance for projects only after green nod, says panel', www.hindustantimes.com, 22/03/2024.

13,874 leopards in 70% of its areas in India: highest number in MP and Maharashtra

The report on estimation of leopards in India, released on 29 February 2024 by Union environment minister, Bhupender Yadav, notes that India's leopard population rose from 12,852 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022.

Madhya Pradesh (MP) is reported to have the maximum number of 3,907 (up from 3,421 in 2018), followed by Maharashtra where the number has risen from 1,690 in 2018 to 1,985 in 2022. In Karnataka the number rose from 1,783 to 1,879, and in Tamil Nadu from 868 to 1,070.

The leopard densities were found to be higher in the tiger reserves (TRs) compared to outside protected areas despite the fact that tigers exert regulatory pressure on leopards. Efforts regarding prey recovery and protection need to be strategized and at the same time conflict resolution mechanisms need to be evaluated to timely mitigate issues of human-leopard interface, stated the report.

Virendra Tiwari, director of the Wildlife Institute of India that conducted the tiger/leopard estimation, said that the survey is a subset of the national tiger estimation report. It was carried out only in the areas where there is both a tiger and leopard population, which is 70% of the total areas occupied by leopards. There are many areas that are not taken into assessment in this survey, for example, the

Sanjay Gandhi National Park or areas in Haryana, which have only leopards. If these areas are included then the overall leopard population would rise further.

A statement released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change said that Central India shows a stable or slightly growing leopard population: 8,820 in 2022 against 8,071 in 2018. The Shivalik hills and the Indo-Gangetic Plains experienced a decline; from 1,253 in 2018 to 1,109 in 2022. The report also showed that several States including Uttarakhand, Kerala, Telangana, Chhattisgarh and Goa have shown a decline in leopard population.

Of the Maharashtra's total leopard population of 1,985, Melghat TR reported the highest number at 233, followed by 148 in Tadoba Andhari TR, 140 in Navegaon Nagzira TR, 135 in the Sahyadri TR and 102 in Pench TR.

According to the report the leopard occupancy in MP increased in the Chambal and Bundelkhand regions with a marginal decline in the Chhindwara forests. Further it said that the Panna TR and Kuno National Park exhibit some of the highest leopard densities in India. Satpura TR also is reported to have a rich leopard population. The report noted that the leopards were able to coexist with tigers in MP as TRs such as Satpura, Bandhavgarh, Pench, and Kanha also reported high leopard numbers. However, the leopard mortality is higher as well over here.

The report cautioned that while leopard populations thrive in MP, "effective vigilance is essential to address both targeted and unintentional poaching... there is a need for the effective implementation of mitigation measures concerning linear infrastructure development projects to ensure the continued well-being of leopard populations in the region."

In 2021, the Special Task Force of the MP State Forest Department (FD) had arrested more than 45 people accused of killing leopards by electrocution. 56 leopards were found dead in MP in the first eight months of

2021; the number was around 35 for 2022 and 40 in 2023. The first four months of 2019 had witnessed more than 40 leopard deaths in the State.

Source: '13,874 leopards in India, Madhya Pradesh leads the pack', www.indianexpress.com, 01/03/2024.
Ankita Garg. 'Leopard State MP count 3,907; highest in country', www.thehitavada.com, 02/03/2024.
Pratip Acharya. 'Leopard population in Maharashtra rises to 1,985; Melghat has highest at 233', www.indianexpress.com, 01/03/2024.

IN MEMORY

Remembering Sreedhar Ramamurthi (1956-2023)

Sreedhar's journey intertwined with ours at EQUATIONS, bound by a shared dedication to understanding the impact of tourism on communities. As a founding member of the Academy for Mountain Environics in the 1990s, he played a pivotal role in shaping sustainable tourism models for the mountains. His pioneering work on Mountain Tourism for Local Community Development set the stage, introducing vital concepts like tourism carrying capacity and waste management plans for destinations such as Kinnaur and Badrinath. Using technology, they developed TRIP (Tourist Research Information Package), a comprehensive software package incorporating information on tourism and allied activities from tourist centres, providing an invaluable guide for tourists.

Years of tireless effort in the mountain areas through the Academy for Mountain Environics paved the way for the formation of Environics Trust. Through this transformation, their impact expanded to work with various communities, including those affected by mining, marginalized groups, disaster-stricken

areas like coastal communities, and displaced communities. At EQUATIONS, our collaboration continued through impactful projects like Mahua Memoir, shedding light on the challenges faced by adivasis amidst relentless mining activities, and developing a Peoples' Vision for Tourism in Himachal Pradesh in collaboration with the Himalaya Niti Abhiyan.

Sreedhar's humble demeanor and unwavering support for organizations, people's movements, or individuals like myself delving into new ideas encompassing the Forest Rights Act, Panchayati Raj, and tourism were consistently welcomed and encouraged. The backing of the Environics Trust, with Sreedhar at its helm, has been instrumental in supporting the paths many of us have taken, fostering growth we may not have achieved otherwise.

Sreedhar's legacy stands as a beacon of resilience, innovation, and collective action, and an inspiration to many who crossed paths with him.

- **Aditi Chanchani** was associated from 2000 to 2019 with Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS) – a national level research, advocacy and campaign organisation that works on the impacts of tourism policy and development from the perspective of local communities. She is currently based in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.
Email: aditi.chanchani@gmail.com

A life devoted to the wild: KM Chinnappa (1941-2024)

As a young school student, I was in awe of this range forest officer from Nagarhole, who had stopped my family and me from picking up some twigs from the forest floor. KM Chinnappa explained to us that all of that belongs to the forest, and we cannot take it out. That lesson stayed with me forever.

When KM Chinnappa took over as Range Forest Officer in 1967, Nagarhole was

plagued by elephant poachers, forest fires and illegal timber felling at a large scale. For nearly three decades, he fearlessly fought poachers, often walking alone in the dark through the forests at night. His deep knowledge of the forest, animal behaviour and his unwavering commitment to conservation steered conservation efforts in Nagarhole and beyond. His austerity, tough questions and his honesty has guided over three generations of conservationists in Karnataka and beyond.

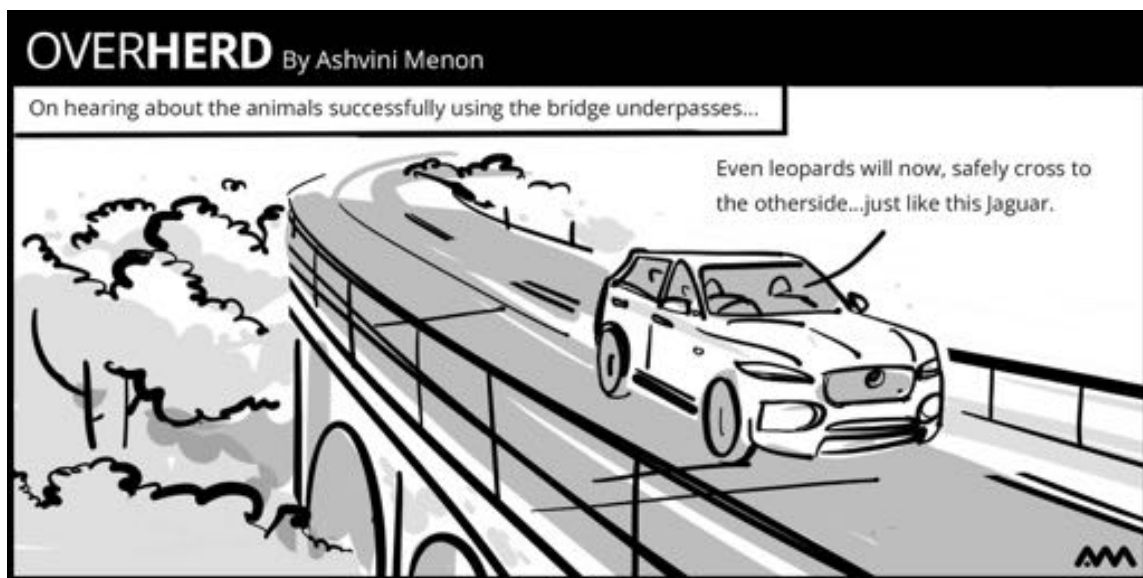
In 1999, as I debated about pursuing a career in wildlife, Chinnappa involved me in a camp to quantify large herbivore densities in Nagarhole, run by Dr. Ullas Karanth. I learnt from him how to walk and work in elephant forests, keeping our 'antennae' up. Conservation was our creed, and his tough questions guided many of his protegeses in making career and life decisions. Today as I debate about the value of higher education, I recall the times spent with Chinnappa and his wife Radha at their humble coffee estate home in Coorg. The mentoring and guiding we received at this gurukula had a far deeper impact on our lives compared to the formal education we pursued.

After Chinnappa quit the forest service, he devoted his life to nature education.

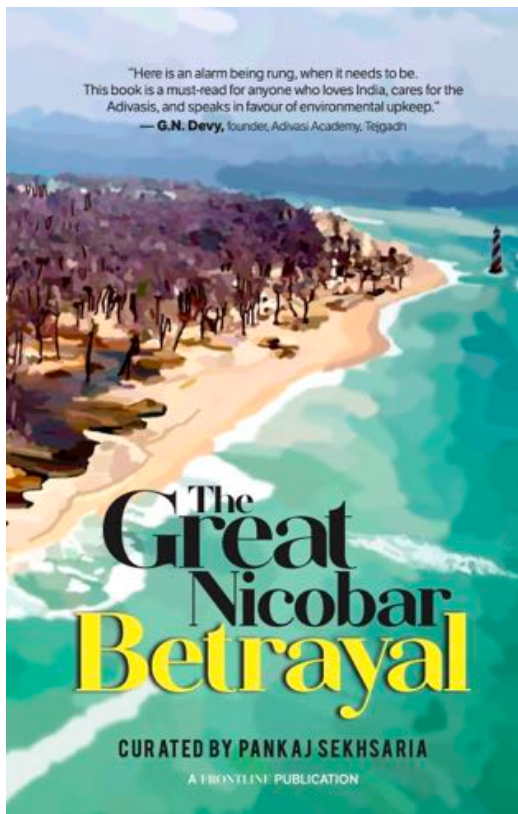
He believed this was the most important duty that he can serve, and had a unique and disciplined approach to instilling strong natural history skills in local school children. Having spent my undergrad years volunteering at Chinnappa's wildlife education camps, decades later when I decided to quit academia, the years spent with Chinnappa guided me towards making career choices again, leading our team to establish a nature education program in Uttarakhand.

Chinnappa was truly a forest guru. His life spent amidst the wildlife he loved so dearly, has guided people from various walks of life to respect nature and work hard towards biodiversity conservation. He will continue to inspire and guide many more generations with the values he has instilled in his shishyas.

- **Soumya Prasad** moved from two decades in academia to working with biodiversity and sustainability education at Nature Science Initiative, a Dehradun-based nonprofit.
Email: prasadsoumya@gmail.com



NEW!
THE GREAT NICOBAR BETRAYAL
A Frontline Publication, Curated by Pankaj Sekhsaria,
pg xii+100+12 colour plates; Price: Rs. 499



An edited collection of short pieces by different writers, important documents and a selection of pictures on the mega infrastructure project being pushed aggressively in Great Nicobar Island. This is a project that will impact half a dozen protected areas, a rich coastline, endangered and endemic biodiversity and ancient communities that have been living here for 1000s of years.

Articles by Pankaj Sekhsaria, Aathira Perinchery, Janki Andharia, V Ramesh & Ravinder Dhiman, B Chaudhari, Ishika Ramakrishna, Uday Mondal, Mahi Mankeshwar, Shrishtee Bajpai, S Harikrishnan, Manish Chandi, Ajay Saini, and Norma Alvares.

Foreword by: Madhav Gadgil

Pls write to psekhsaria@gmail.com to order copies and/or for further information.

ENDORSEMENTS

"Here is an alarm being rung, when it needs to be.

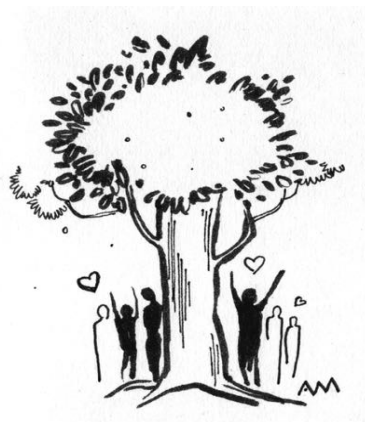
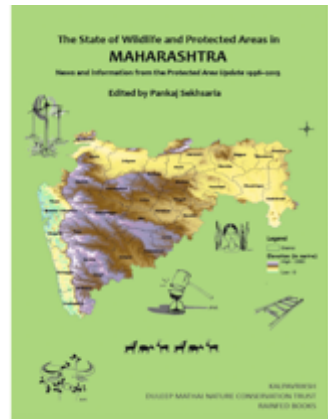
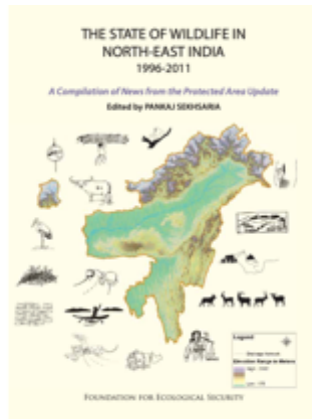
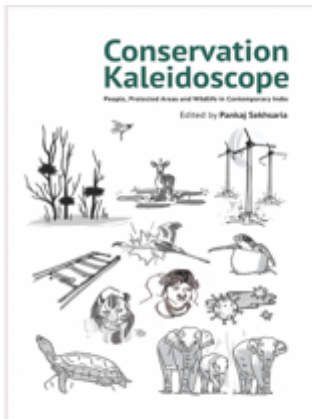
This book is a must-read for anyone who loves India, cares for the Adivasis, and speaks in favour of environmental upkeep." - G.N. Devy

"Even at a time of accelerating environmental vandalism around the world, what the Indian government is planning in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands stands out for its sheer folly and short-sightedness. As this excellent collection of essays shows in painful detail, these plans are a perfect example of 'disaster capitalism', in which the government is taking advantage of the displacement of the native Nicobarese by the tsunami of 2004 to make a massive land grab for a completely senseless plan of 'development'." - Amitav Ghosh

BOOKS FROM THE *PA UPDATE*

- 1) *Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India*, 2021, 450 pp, 140 line drawings., Price: 650
- 2) *The State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra: News and Information from the Protected Area Update 1996-2015*, 2019. 250 pp, 100 line drawings, Price: Rs. 400
- 3) *The State of Wildlife in North-East India 1996-2011: A compilation of news from the Protected Area Update*, 2013, 330 pp, 100 line drawings, Price: Rs. 300

For more details and to order copies, please write to psekhsaria@gmail.com



Support the *PA Update*

We continue to need financial support to sustain the publishing of the *PA Update*. Please considering donating for the same or subscribing for yourself, your institutions or gifting subscriptions. For further details please write to psekhsaria@gmail.com

MADHYA PRADESH

WII suggests Nauradehi WLS suitable for reintroducing the cheetah

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has found Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, spread over an area of 1,200 sq km, to be suitable for reintroduction of the cheetah.

The Madhya Pradesh Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) has written to the Centre to fund the Rs. 260 crore project as nearly 20-22 villages need to be shifted for the purpose. The state government is of the view that since the project was of the Centre, the Ministry of Environment and Forest and the National Tiger Conservation Authority should bear its entire cost.

The cheetah was supposed to be translocated to the state's Palpur Kuno WLS, but the search for a new place is now said to have been initiated because the Supreme Court directed relocation of lions from Gir WLS to Palpur Kuno.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XV, No. 5).

Source: 'WII Plans Rs 260 Crore Project for Reintroducing Cheetah in India', *The New Indian Express*, 22/02/14.

MAHARASHTRA

At least four tigers were poached in Masondi, Melghat in 2013: CCMB

A January 2, 2014 report from Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad has said that DNA samples of bloodstained soil, decomposed flesh pieces, intestinal parts collected from compartment No. 51 - Masondi in Melghat and a metal trap with blood stain and hair samples, collected half a km away from the crime spot, have tested positive and belong to four different

tigers. This is apart from one tiger poached in Dhakna - Melghat in March 2013.

The CCMB report has brought a sensational twist to the tiger poaching incidents in Melghat because till now poachers had revealed (and the officials had believed) that only one tiger had been killed here. The number could, in fact, be much higher. Arrested poachers are reported to have said that one individual known to them had alone trafficked 11 tiger skins between April and June 2013 but only five have been brought on record and offences have been registered in four cases. Offences have still not been registered in the Katol, Khumari and Sevagram poaching cases.

The official tally of tigers poached last year stands at 12. It includes only one from Masondi and not the remaining three revealed by CCMB. It also doesn't include poacher Ranjit Bawaria's confession that he trafficked two tiger skins from Katol and more from Sevagram. Apart from this, poachers also killed two leopards and two sloth bears at the same spot in Masondi. Yet, no one has been held accountable.

Melghat officials claimed they have nabbed over 20 poachers on the basis of call-details records (CDRs) of March 4, 2013, when the Dhakna tiger was killed. Wildlife experts have, however, pointed out that if officials had indeed been working on CDRs of March, they could have saved those four tigers that were killed later. Officials are, reportedly, continuing to resist putting higher figures on record for poaching cases. Trafficking of six tiger skins from Bhandarbodi in Ramtek has also not been put on record, for instance, even though the accused have admitted doing it.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Poachers killed four tigers together at Melghat', *The Times of India*, 08/02/14.

PERSPECTIVE

Pathways to just conservation by looking beyond man-made boundaries

For too long, conservationists have focused only on actions within protected areas (PAs), neglecting the dynamics in areas outside PA boundaries. Fortunately, there's a growing shift in perspective to look beyond human-made borders and grasp ecosystem interactions at a broader landscape scale. In the past decade, at the Network for Conserving Central India (NCCI), we have witnessed the transformative power of landscape-centric conservation first-hand.

A landscape-centric approach recognizes the importance of ecological connectivity and corridors for safe animal passage across the region. Iconic species like the tiger travel across many human-use lands, and ensuring connectivity between habitats is paramount to their continued conservation in central India. We led the first synthesis research on tiger corridors in India and built consensus among the scientific community for these connectivity areas. This is a truly landmark collaboration. We're making this valuable science more accessible through multi-language outreach efforts and creative artistic methods to communicate our findings.

To understand how tiger corridors could also provide vital ecosystem services in the region, we looked at rivers in central India. Our study of ecosystem services and connectivity conservation reveals that many major rivers' headwaters lie within wildlife corridors. Studying the river system in central India vastly increases the relevance of wildlife corridors to local communities and society.

Our motivation to go beyond boundaries and study the human or societal aspects of conservation landscapes comes from the stark realization that conservation cannot succeed in isolation from human activities and needs. We love to be part of retaining and enhancing community ownership and stewardship of natural resources. The NCCI recognizes local communities as allies to

achieve long-term conservation goals. Take, for example, our work on reviving millet farming. Reviving traditional grains could provide more stable incomes, a sore need from a food security perspective. Once people can enhance their quality of life, discussions with them as partners for conservation will be more authentic and effective.

We co-produce and co-create. By fostering dialogue, sharing knowledge, and pooling resources, we amplify the impact of conservation efforts and build resilience in the face of emerging threats. These aspects of conservation work are often overlooked in the traditional view of conservation efforts. At the NCCI, we are convinced of the power of networks for long-term success. Our vision is of a thriving central India, where the *Jugalbandi* of people and nature is celebrated!

- **Amrita Neelakantan** is executive director, National Network for Conserving Central India (NCCI).
Email: amrita.neelakantan@columbia.edu.

For private circulation/Printed Matter/BookPost
To

From: **Kalpavriksh**, Apt. 5, Sri Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004