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Protected Area Update

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EDITORIAL

Wildlife issues in electoral politics

The June 2014 issue of the PA Update had a rather special section of news - one that the newsletter never published earlier and has not had a chance to carry ever since. This is particularly relevant now considering we've just completed another general election and a new government has just been sworn in.

One amongst the more remarkable and important contexts in which the 2024 elections were held were the extreme heat conditions experienced in large parts of the country even as the electorate stepped out to vote. It seemed for a moment that the deteriorating conditions of this planet were making their last ditch effort at being heard and being counted. Unsuccessfully one might add here, quickly. Because, while there were some questions and discussions on environmental matters such as air pollution, the heat waves and climate change, this wasn't a significant consideration in the electoral stakes. And if this is the fate of larger environmental issues which often affect many lives very intimately, one can imagine the fate of wildlife related issues that are considered remote and insignificant in any case.

This is what makes the 10 year old June 2014 issue of the PA Update very interesting. It had a special section running over four pages with more than a dozen news stories where wildlife issues were at the heart of the battle for votes in the general elections of 2014 (see pg. 23 for a sampling). This as the following excerpt from the edit of June 2014 issue indicates was the case from all around the country:

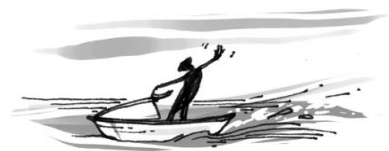
"In Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Punjab the key issue was damage to crop and human life caused by animals such as nilgai, spotted deer, wild boar, elephants, monkeys and leopards. Candidates were forced by the electorate

here to take cognizance of the issues, including, by threatening to boycott the polls.(...)

There were other issues as well in other places. In the Kawal Tiger Reserve in Andhra Pradesh, the candidates were forced to deal with local concerns related to eviction in the name of wildlife conservation, while in the Kaziranga NP in Assam, political parties traded charges on the rhino poaching that continues here. In the Chitradurga district of Karnataka and the Chalakudy Lok Sabha constituency, local communities actually boycotted the polls in protest against the use of land for projects, they say, are environmentally destructive and would also harm their livelihoods. Also in Kerala, one saw the recommendations for declaring the Western Ghats as an ecologically sensitive zone becoming a key issue that even influenced the choice of the candidates of the various political parties."

This sounds remarkable considering the complete absence of such issues in the debates and the considerations this time. It will take a more detailed analysis of both political manifestos and of media reporting to get a more definitive picture, but one can say safely that the environment was barely an issue in India elections 2024. And wildlife issues were not even on the horizon anywhere.

This is both a conundrum and a challenge. For a country as rich, diverse and dependant on natural resources as India it is a big failure that these issues don't count when it comes to electing our representatives. The question as always is how do we get a voice and a representation for issues of conservation? The answer it appears is as elusive as ever.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ASSAM

HC defers Assam cabinet's decision to denotify Deepor Beel WLS

The Gauhati High Court (HC), on April 5, deferred a decision taken by the Assam cabinet in March earlier in the year to denotify Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), which is also a Ramsar site. A division bench of the HC said that the decision is unjust and improper, and directed the State government to not go ahead with de-notifying the sanctuary. The court also issued a direction to authorities to not allow development and construction activities in and around the wetland till the demarcation notification is issued.

On March 10, the State cabinet had directed the forest department to conduct an inquiry as to why the notification in 2009 was issued without settling the rights of the traditional fishing people. The cabinet also decided to set aside the notification as it was done without approval of the State cabinet. The State informed the HC of these details in April. In its affidavit filed on April 5, the State government mentioned that a formal notification for denotifying the WLS can be issued only after approvals from the state and national wildlife boards as well as the Supreme Court (SC). A special leave petition challenging the HC's division bench' order of 2018 regarding notification of the WLS is at present pending in the SC.

Before that, on April 3, the State government informed the HC that though the cabinet had decided to denotify the WLS no formal notification had been issued. The latest in the matter is not known.

Source: Utpal Parashar. 'Gauhati HC stalls Assam govt decision to denotify Deepor Beel wildlife sanctuary', www.hindustantimes.com, 05/04/2024.

WII survey records presence of rare mammalian species in Manas NP

A camera trap survey carried out in Manas National Park (NP) by Urjit Bhatt and Salvador Lyngdoh of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) from 2017 to 2019 has photo-documented rare and endangered species including Himalayan goral, Asiatic brush-tailed porcupine, and Ferret badger for the first time, while chital was recorded here after two decades. The survey also photographed other species including the Marbled cat, Asiatic golden cat, Fishing cat, Golden jackal, Sloth bear, Himalayan serow, Swamp deer, and Pygmy hog

A total of 37 species (34 mammals and three galliformes i.e. heavy-bodied ground feeding birds) were recorded with 24,888 independent records over the whole sampling period of 12,601 trap-nights.

Mammals were photographed using camera traps in an area of 270 sq. km within the forested habitats of Manas. Seven elusive mammals (four herbivores and three carnivores) chital, Himalayan goral, Asiatic brush-tailed porcupine, Hispid hare, Jungle cat, Chinese pangolin, and ferret badger were seen on camera and all seven species were recorded once in more than 1,500 trap-nights, with chital and Himalayan goral in the most - 12,601 nights.

The study said that additional surveys are needed to resolve the distribution status of these seven species in Manas NP. Given the availability of these species' habitat and confirmed occurrence, this region should be prioritised for initial survey efforts. Together with the Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) in Bhutan, Manas NP forms one of the largest areas of conservation significance in South Asia. Manas NP is connected to the west by first addition to it - formerly Manas reserve forest (RF), the east by Deodhara RF, and the north by RMNP, creating a large landscape with habitats ranging from savannah grassland and tropical forest to upper hill oak forest.

Source: Roopak Goswami. ‘Majestic Manas: Several new species captured for the first time in Nat’l Park’, www.eastmojo.com, 02/05/2024.

GOA

Panaji Forest Range got nearly 200 wildlife rescue calls in first three months of 2024; general decline over last four years

The wildlife rescue squad at the range forest office in Panaji has been inundated with several animal rescue calls during the first three months of 2024, according to data released by the State forest department (FD). Compared to the rest of the State, Panaji is the most urbanised range with forests in Tiswadi and Bardez falling under its jurisdiction.

From January to March 2024, the squad received 197 distress calls for the rescue of reptiles, mammals, and avifauna that entered residential areas. In January 2024 alone, the squad attended 38 reptile rescues, along with seven mammal and three avifauna rescues. This escalated in February with 66 reptile rescues, along with seven mammals and three avifauna. In March, the squad responded to 65 reptile emergencies, five mammals, and three avifauna.

From 2021 to 2023 through January, February, and March, the combined totals of reptile, mammal, and avifauna rescues were 352, 345, and 221, respectively.

Year/s	January	February	March
2021-2023	352	345	221
Average per year (2021-23)	117.33	115	73.66
2024	48	76	73

The data reveals a downward trend in wildlife emergencies, particularly in reptile-related incidents. The reasons behind this drop in such incidents remain unknown.

Source: Nidar Sayed. ‘As temperatures soar, wildlife rescues in urban areas go up’, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 01/05/2024.

GUJARAT

Gujarat government to set up multi-species safari parks on non-forest land

The Gujarat government has planned to establish multi-species safari parks on non-forest land across the State. These are proposed to come up at Koteswar in Kutch, Palanpur in Banaskantha, and Mandvi Naliya in Una taluka of Amreli. Departing from the conventional model of single-species safaris, these parks will offer visitors a more diverse and immersive experience by showcasing a variety of animal species within the same premises.

The Palanpur park will feature sloth bear and lions, the one at Koteswar will have lions, tigers, and various avian species while the Mandvi Naliya park will have lions and leopards. The establishment of these safari parks will benefit the local ecosystem and create economic opportunities for surrounding communities through eco-development committees. The locations such as Koteswar and Palanpur have been selected for their religious significance and existing tourist traffic. The officials said that a person heading to Abu, Ambaji or Diu could take a break and spend time in a safari on their route.

A senior official highlighted that the Supreme Court (SC) issued a directive in February stating that the establishment of zoos or safaris, as referenced in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, owned by government or any authority within forest areas outside protected areas, must receive final approval from the court. The SC also directed all States and Union territories to submit details of their total forest land. Therefore, Gujarat government has decided to utilize land under its jurisdiction, but outside the purview of the FD. This will ensure that the development of safari parks would not require approval from

the SC and can be set up with just the Central Zoo Authority of India's permission.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Gujarat unveils plans for multi-species safari parks', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 27/03/2024.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Photographic evidence of four snow leopards in Kishtwar NP

A team of four scientists from the University of Kashmir, Srinagar, and the National Development Foundation, Jammu, have captured four snow leopards on camera in Kishtwar National Park (NP) in Chenab Valley region. The animal has been reported from Gurez and Sonamarg in the upper Baltal-Zojila region, in the Kargil range and in the areas adjacent to the north-eastern and south-eastern boundary of Kishtwar that connect with the Zaskar range in Ladakh. However, its occurrence remains uncertain in most of Kashmir, including in protected areas.

The team divided the study area into a grid of 5km × 5km cells and deployed 40 camera traps at 57 locations in a total of 18 grid cells from May 2022 to June 2023. The cameras were mostly limited to the southern, south-western and central areas of the park because other areas including those above 4,300 m and the northern, north-eastern, eastern and south-eastern parts of the NP were difficult to access because of the rugged terrain and extreme weather.

Photographs of two individual snow leopards were captured in a single frame on 19 September 2022 in the Dacchan range at 3,280 m. This was the first photographic evidence of the species in Kishtwar NP. The team captured seven more photographs of snow leopards in three other grid cells in the Dacchan and Marwah ranges. The team, on the basis of the markings on snow leopards' coats, concluded that the leopards captured in eight photos were four distinct individuals.

All the eight photographs were captured at an altitude between 3,004-3,878 m, which is mostly an arid alpine region above the treeline with steep and rugged terrain flanked by high-altitude pastures of junipers, grasses and legumes on rolling hills, noted the study. It also revealed that the Kishtwar NP has potential prey-species like the Long-tailed marmot and pika along with other carnivores such as Himalayan brown bear, Asian black bear, Red fox, Leopard cat, Yellow-throated marten, and Mountain weasel.

The study recorded significant anthropogenic pressure through livestock grazing at higher elevations in the Kibber, Kiyar, Nanth and Renai catchments. The study notes that "nearly 3,000 graziers and nomadic herders with 1,50,000 livestock visit the alpine pastures in the Marwah range each year. These large flocks are therefore a threat to both the habitat and the wild ungulate prey of the snow leopard through competition for pasture."

The team said that Kishtwar NP connects three Himalayan landscapes: the greater Himalayas of Jammu and Kashmir, the trans-Himalayas of Ladakh, and the lesser Himalayas of Himachal Pradesh. Thus, its strategic location can connect Snow leopard populations in the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions to the global Snow leopard range. The team has recommended a comprehensive study of the Kishtwar landscape including the Paddar and Wadwan valleys to estimate the occupancy, abundance, demography, and movement patterns of the Snow leopard and its prey as well as evaluation of the large cat's interactions with pastoral communities.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'J&K: In a first, four snow leopards captured on camera in the Chenab Valley's Kishtwar National Park', www.downtoearth.org.in, 09/05/2024.

KARNATAKA

Rainfall in early May eases water crisis for wildlife in PAs across State

Moderate to heavy rainfall across Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR), the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple TR, Nagarahole TR and MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in the first week of May washed away fears of forest fires and eased drinking water crisis for wild animals in these protected areas (PAs). The good spell of pre-monsoon showers also helped to fill water tanks in these PAs.

Gopalswamy Betta, Maddur, Kundakere, Hediyaala and Moleyuru ranges in Bandipur TR received moderate to heavy rain in the first week of May. The TR also received rain during the second week of April. The pre-monsoon showers helped to replenish 374 minor and major water bodies spread across the TR and provided relief from forest fires. Though no major forest fire incidents were reported this year, a minor fire had broken out in some places of Gopalswamy Betta and Maddur ranges days before the showers.

However, before these rains, scarcity of fodder and water had led to a large number of sambar and deer moving out and destroying crops in forest fringe villages of Gundlupet taluk, pointed out a resident of Hangala village here. Forest department (FD) officials were struggling to ease the drinking water crisis for wild animals by filling the water bodies using solar and diesel pumps, informed a senior forest official at Cauvery WLS. But the rains in early May in forest ranges of Cauvery WLS such as Hanur, Kowdahalli, Kothanur and Halagur and MM Hills WLS helped ease the situation here as well.

All ranges of BRT TR including BR Hills, Bylur, Punajanur, Chamarajanagar, Yelandur and Bedaguli in Chamarajanagar district, and Kallahalla, Antharasanthe and DB Kuppe ranges of Nagarahole TR of Mysuru district also received rain.

Source: S Ramesh. 'Rain brings cheer to MM Hills, Bandipur, BRT Tiger Reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/05/2024.

NCBS gets 50 acres of land in Western Ghats for research and conservation

The National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) has been entrusted with 50 acres of uncultivated land in the Western Ghats in Kodagu district by Dr. Saraswathy Ganapathy and her family for ecological research and biodiversity conservation. Ganapathy is the wife of late Jnanpith laureate Girish Karnad.

The land is to be given on lease for long-term monitoring of biodiversity and its response to climate change. NCBS will set up a field station on the land to facilitate monitoring of flora and fauna in the region.

"We've always wanted to find use for this land that preserves it for Coorg (Kodagu) and protects the environment. We couldn't have hoped for a better partner than NCBS to be its steward. Knowing that this forest will support long-term ecological research is very exciting", said Ganapathy.

Source: 'NCBS gets 50-acre land in Western Ghats for research', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/04/2024.

KERALA

Expert committee to study human-wildlife conflict in Kerala conducts first meeting

The first online meeting of the expert committee engaged by the forest department (FD) to study the human-wildlife conflict in the State decided on May 6 to evolve a landscape-and-species-specific strategy to ensure peaceful co-existence.

The experts made presentations about successful models adopted by foreign countries and other Indian States to mitigate the conflict. Additional principal chief

conservator of forest (APCCF) and the convener of the panel P Pugazhendi said that the State needs species-and-landscape-specific standard operation procedures (SOPs) for each of the 10 zones where conflict is high. He said that culling is not possible in the case of elephants and tigers, and that a new strategy is needed to counter the monkey menace. Further the APCCF said that radio collaring animals that enter human habitations, sharing the data, and use of an early warning system can be useful to mitigate conflict.

The FD will organise field-level workshops to understand landscape-specific issues and to evolve mitigation strategies. It is planning a framework for workshops based on which short-term and long-term strategies will be developed. The FD is also planning to take steps to improve wildlife habitats and ensure availability of water in the forest areas. Removal of invasive species will be taken up.

The FD has roped in International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Human Wildlife Conflict Task Force chair Dr. Alexandra Zinnermann and UNESCO nature science specialist Benno Boer who will share their experiences in developing mitigation strategies.

Source: 'Human-wildlife conflict: Kerala to adopt land, species-specific SOPs', www.newindianexpress.com, 07/05/2024.

LAKSHADWEEP

Mass bleaching of coral reefs in Lakshadweep; similar events reported all over the world

Coral reefs in Lakshadweep are showing signs of mass bleaching, an indication of severe heat stress faced by these coral communities. With shallow water temperatures exceeding seasonal averages by 1.6°C, researchers in Lakshadweep are observing widespread signs of coral stress. Many species are turning pale or white, experiencing coral tissue wasting, and ultimately perishing.

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The reefs of Lakshadweep were significantly impacted by global bleaching events in 1998, 2010, and 2016. Researchers from the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) noted a 25% decline in coral cover since the first global bleaching event. NCF's research indicates that it takes at least six to seven years without further disturbances for noticeable recovery of corals to occur. These impacts can be long-lasting, with other species dependent on corals potentially unable to recover even if certain kinds of coral do. The loss of habitat has a cascading impact on the invertebrates and fish that rely on this structure, say the researchers at NCF.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States of America too has confirmed a global bleaching event occurring across the tropics. Coral bleaching has been reported in the Great Barrier Reef in Australia as well. The mass bleaching has been triggered by several months of elevated global sea surface temperatures resulting from prolonged El Niño conditions throughout much of 2023. This marks the fourth such event to be declared after the late 1990s, highlighting the escalating impacts of climate change on ecosystems across the world.

Researchers explain that bleaching occurs when the symbiotic relationship between the corals and their photosynthetic algal partners deteriorates under stressful conditions; primarily high temperatures. This leads to corals losing their primary source of nutrition, and if stress persists, they eventually starve and perish.

Coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve too have been showing early signs of mass bleaching, prompting the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to order rapid underwater surveys to assess the situation.

Source: Abhilash Chandran. '‘Pale’ of gloom in Lakshadweep as mass bleaching hits coral reefs', www.indianexpress.com, 01/05/2024.

MADHYA PRADESH

Radio-telemetry study of Eurasian otter in Satpura TR

An Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) was radio-collared recently in the Satpura Tiger Reserve (TR) under a project that aims to understand the distribution of the species with changing water availability across multiple seasons. The study is being conducted by the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) and the Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT). Reserve officials along with a rescue team and the WCT radio-collared the animal and released it back to its habitat along the bank of Nagdwari River within the Kamti region.

According to WCT, three species of otters are known to be present in India - Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerea*), and the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*). Except for the Smooth-coated otter, there was no evidence of the other two species from Central India till 2016, when the first photographic evidence of the otter was recorded in Satpura TR. This recent discovery of the Eurasian otter in river systems in Madhya Pradesh is a reminder of our limited knowledge of freshwater species in India, says WCT.

To address this gap WCT started a project in collaboration with the FD in 2019 to understand the ecology of Eurasian otters and study forest river ecosystems. The project is supported by the Astral Foundation and the Alkyl Amines Foundation as part of their CSR initiatives. Camera traps were deployed across an expansive area spanning 5800 sq. km within the Satpura TR and the Kanha Pench Corridor.

The Eurasian otter is listed as a 'Near Threatened' species in the IUCN Red List.

Source: P Naveen. 'Eurasian Otter fitted with tracking device in Satpura Tiger Reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/04/2024.

NGT issues notices against proposed expansion of Pachmarhi airstrip near Satpura TR

The joint committee formed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to investigate alleged unauthorized construction for expansion of an airstrip close to the boundaries of Satpura Tiger Reserve (TR) has requested additional time to finalize and submit their report in the matter.

The inquiry was initiated by the NGT's principal bench after receiving an email complaint from Captain Brajesh Bharadwaj of Chhindwara. Bhardwaj in his email pointed out that the Pachmarhi airstrip that is proposed for expansion is in fact a non-functional airstrip, and yet, the expansion plan aims to increase its length from current 1200 m to 1800 m.

The airstrip is located near the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of Pachmarhi and within the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Narmadapuram district, very close to the tiger reserve. Permitting its expansion might have significant negative impacts on the long-term viability of tigers and the entire ecosystem of the region, claimed Bharadwaj.

After examining the petition and the supporting documents submitted by Bharadwaj, the NGT issued notices to the Ministry of Environment and Forest, and Climate Change, the Airport Authority of India through the Director General, and the District Magistrate of Narmadapuram.

Further, acknowledging the matter's relevance to the Central Zone Bench, the original application has been transferred to Bhopal for further appropriate action. The NGT has ordered its registry to transfer all records related to this case to the Central Zone Bench in Bhopal.

Source: P Naveen. 'Pachmarhi airstrip: Committee seeks more time from NGT to submit report', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 23/04/2024.

Cheetah from Kuno NP reported hunting goats in Morena

Veera, a female cheetah from the Kuno National Park (NP) was seen wandering in Morena district and reported to have hunted two goats in two days, mid-May. She also chased the goatherd leading to overall fear in the area that resulted in villagers staying home after dusk.

Veera, accompanied by a male cheetah Pawan had moved out of the park on March 24. While Pawan returned, Veera ventured beyond Pahargarh to reach the Pagara forest of Joura area via Dhanakuan and Chanchul, covering a distance of 150 km, informed forest officials.

On May 16 she hunted a goat and then chased its keeper. It was the second goat from the same herd Veera had killed the day before.

This is not the first time Veera has got out of the Kuno NP. In January earlier this year too she had moved into villages before returning to the forest area of Veerpur after around 20 hours.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 4)

Source: P Naveen. 'Cheetah gets out of Kuno National Park , goes hunting 150km away', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/05/2024.

Gandhisagar WLS to receive cheetahs this year; S African team assesses preparation

The Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) is set to receive five to eight cheetahs in the second half of the 2024 (see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, Nos. 6 & 5). A South African delegation recently visited India to assess the preparations at Gandhisagar WLS and the progress of the project in the Kuno National Park (NP). The visiting delegation also met their Indian counterparts in New Delhi to discuss strengthening collaboration in species conservation, particularly Project Cheetah.

The cheetahs will be released into a 64 sq. km fenced enclosure in Gandhisagar WLS,

which is part of a larger 368 sq. km protected area with an additional 2,500 sq. km surrounding it. The long-term goal is to establish a metapopulation of 60-70 cheetahs in the Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape after ensuring ecological restoration, prey availability, and scientific management.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority said, on a social media platform, that officials from South Africa visited the Gandhisagar WLS and were apprised of preparations to receive cheetahs. They also shared valuable insights while visiting the bomas, control room, and upcoming veterinary facilities.

Project Cheetah has seen both successes and setbacks in the last few months. The birth of 12 cubs this year has brought the total number of cheetahs in Kuno NP to 26. However, seven adult cheetahs have died due to various reasons since March 2023 (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 4)

Source: 'MP's Gandhisagar wildlife sanctuary to get 5-8 cheetahs from South Africa', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 25/04/2024.

MAHARASHTRA

Navegaon Nagzira TR awaits unified control of buffer zone, may lose NTCA grants

As per the amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, dated 4 September 2006, unified control of its buffer with a tiger reserve (TR) is mandatory. However, the Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve (TR) is still waiting to get unified control of the buffer zone even after eight years of notification of the same.

The buffer zone of the reserve was notified on 7 September 2016 with an area of over 1,241 sq. km including 648.68 sq. km of forest and 592.59 sq. km of revenue area spread across 186 villages. The notified buffer also includes over 100 sq. km of three ranges

of Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM), which has commercial logging operations worth crores of rupees.

A forest official said that the FDCM area is the bone of contention because a unified buffer would mean ensuring ecologically compatible land uses and protecting corridors. According to wildlife conservationists, large-scale logging operations in FDCM areas have affected wildlife habitats. In 2016, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had even warned that funding support under the centrally sponsored scheme for TRs would not be possible if buffer zones are not put under the control of TRs.

Conservationists have also alleged that dispersing animals from the reserve are forced to suffer while moving to buffer areas where there is no awareness among locals who still resort to electrocution to protect crops from wildlife. Besides, grazing, fuel wood extraction, and forest fires are rampant, leading to forest land degradation. Further they pointed out that with the ongoing tiger translocation project (see the preceding story), unified control of the reserve becomes imperative.

Barring Navegaon Nagzira, buffer zones of the other five TRs in Maharashtra - Pench, Melghat, Sahyadri, Bor, and Tadoba – are under the unified control of respective field directors. The State's principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) Maheep Gupta said that he is working on the same as lack of unified control would indeed mean losing NTCA's grants.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Navegaon Nagzira reserve awaits unified control of buffer, may lose NTCA grants', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/05/2024.

Translocated tigress walks 60 km from Dhawda to Koka WLS within NNTR

Within a month of her translocation from the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) to the Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR), NT3, a 20-month-old sub-adult tigress *Protected Area Update* Vol. XXX, No. 3

travelled around 60 km to Koka Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), which is part of the NNTR.

NT3 was captured from TATR, on April 10, and released in NNTR on April 11. The tigress is one of two siblings born to the tigress Roma (T114) from TATR. NT3 was captured by the rapid rescue team from the non-tourism zone of Katezari. She was radio-collared by the Wildlife Institute of India and shifted to NNTR where she was released in Dhawda Plot in compartment number 98. After her release, NT3 explored the habitat for a few days and preyed on wild boar. She then moved through Chorkhamara, Umarzari, and New Nagzira WLS to reach Koka. At one time, she had come close to the NH6 near Gadegaon depot but returned. NT3 has been in the Koka WLS for nearly 15 days. While NNTR management has been monitoring her, she was also sighted by tourists, said Jayaram Gowda, Field Director of NNTR.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, had on 15 September 2022, granted permission to translocate 4-5 tigers to NNTR. On 18 May 2023, two young tigresses —NT1 captured from Armori in Gadchiroli and NT2 from Pangdi near the Kolsa range of Tadoba — were released in the core area of NNTR. While NT2 occupies both the core and buffer areas, NT1 left to settle down in the NNTR-Kanha corridor.

NNTR now has 12 tigers and there is, reportedly, enough scope to accommodate additional tigers, especially in the Koka and New Nagzira WLSs. Wildlife conservationists said that apart from augmenting tiger numbers, the project is being implemented to tackle increasing man-animal conflict in Chandrapur district. However, tigresses captured from outside the protected areas adopt the same habitat even if released in the core area. Hence, handing over administrative control of the buffer to NNTR is imperative.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Tigress translocated to Nagzira travels 60km to reach Koka WLS', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/05/2024.

Vijay Pinjarkar. '3rd tigress moved from Tadoba to Nagzira', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/04/2024.

Leopard cat sighting in Pench TR; first record of species in Central India

Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) has reported the presence of a leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*); reportedly, the first record of the species in Central India. Deputy Director of the reserve, Prabhu Nath Shukla, said the animal was captured on a camera deployed at a seasonal stream as part of the ongoing camera trap survey near Narahar village. It was captured in the buffer zone of Nagalwadi range which is part of the Mansinghdeo Wildlife Sanctuary. Its adjoining forest of the West Pench range is considered one of the most pristine areas in the Central Indian Landscape (CIL).

The Leopard cat has been reported from North-East India, the Northern Himalayan States, West Bengal, Odisha, and pockets of Western Ghats. It was considered absent in Central India, making this record from Pench TR a significant one.

Based on historical records from 1939 by scientist David Pocock and molecular work done in 2010, wildlife biologist Aditya Joshi who conducted the molecular studies said that the Leopard cat was never recorded from the CIL. One of the limiting factors contributing to the restricted distribution was the high summer temperatures. Habitat suitability models developed to predict Leopard cat distributions show areas surrounding Kanha TR as sites where it could be found. Therefore, additional targeted surveys are needed to map the distribution of this lesser-known small cat.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Maharashtra Pench records 1st sighting of leopard cat in Central India', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/05/2024.

TATR introduces traffic rules to curb overcrowding, disturbance to wildlife

Following widespread criticism after a tigress was cornered by over 150 tourists in the core area, the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) management has introduced several preventive measures to stop overcrowding. The event that occurred on the Khatoda-Tadoba Road on 17 May saw tigress Roma (T114) cornered by tourist vehicles leading the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to term the incident an example 'eco-terrorism' and not 'eco-tourism'.

The route from Jamni Chowk to Jamni Lake overflow point has been again converted into a one-way. This is aimed at reducing the chances of traffic congestion and overcrowding, said Anand Reddy, deputy director (core), TATR. No U-turns will now be allowed on the safari road and vehicles will also not be allowed to drive in reverse gear.

All the range forest officers in the Kolsa, Tadoba, Kolara, and Mohurli ranges have been informed about the new norms. The TATR authorities have increased patrolling to monitor the movement of tourists and ensure that the rules are being followed.

The new regulations have been welcomed by wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists who have been advocating for stricter measures to protect the tigers and their habitat.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Now, no U-turns, reverse driving in Tadoba safari', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 28/05/2024.

FDCM proposal for Rs 212 crore African safari at Gorewada Zoo

The Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) has proposed a Rs. 212 crore African safari at Gorewada Zoo. Singapore-based consultant Bernard Harrison has been engaged for designing the same. A workshop was conducted between April 22 and

29 to discuss various aspects of the safari including animal selection, habitat design and visitor facilities. The proposal is currently awaiting administrative approval from the State government.

The boundary demarcation on the African safari has already been done. Bernard's schematic designs for the African safari (63 ha), bird park (10 ha), and safari plaza (4 ha) have been approved by the Central Zoo Authority, said Shatanik Bhagwat, Director Gorewada Zoo. The African safari will house 30 animal species including zebra, giraffe, lions, cheetah, hippopotamus, spotted hyena, wildebeests, ostrich, baboons, and chimpanzees among other animals. If all goes well the project work will start after Diwali, added Bhagwat.

The introduction of the African safari is anticipated to provide a significant boost to tourism in the region, offer a new attraction for wildlife enthusiasts, and create job opportunities for the local community.

Source: 'Coming soon: Lions, giraffes & zebras at Gorewada safari', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/04/2024.

Rise in leopard deaths in Junnar Forest Division due to territorial fights: FD

The Junnar Forest Division (JFDv) has noticed a significant rise in the deaths of leopards in the last two years. This, according to forest officials, is because of territorial fights. They have attributed the trend to the rising number of leopards in the division in addition to lack of prey and shrinking habitats. They have also observed mothers deserting cubs within a year as compared to two years, which is the normal period. As a result these cubs are not trained to hunt and carve out their own territory. Thus, they get killed by adult leopards while trying to establish a territory.

The Deputy Conservator of Forest (DyCF) of JFDv said that the deaths of sub-adult leopards, aged between eight months and

one-and-a-half years, have been on the rise in the division in the last two years. About 18 deaths of sub-adult leopards reported were mainly because of territorial fights.

The JFDv has seven forest ranges covering Ambegaon, Junnar, Shirur and Khed tehsils. The largest number of deaths have been reported in the Manchar Forest Range. The Manchar range forest officer said that these fights usually take place at night and they learn of this only the next day or later and only when they come across a grievously injured animal or one that has already died.

While infighting among leopards is a natural phenomenon, the increasing infighting reveals that the area for habitation is falling short in the JFDv. Last year, the death of four leopards due to starvation within four months here had raised concerns among forest officials. The deaths were reported from the Manchar and Shirur forest ranges. The leopards were in the age group of 1-12 years.

Source: 'Forest department blames territorial fights for spike in Junnar leopard deaths', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 11/04/2024.

ODISHA

NGT notice to Odisha government on tourism activities in Satkosia TR and Satkosia gorge

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Odisha government to file a fresh counter affidavit to the petition challenging ongoing harmful tourism activities in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR) and Satkosia gorge of the Mahanadi river "under the garb of eco-tourism".

The NGT's east zone bench in Kolkata expressed dissatisfaction over the Odisha government's affidavit submitted on May 10. The bench said that the government was silent on the structures allegedly built in the ecologically sensitive area, and directed the

State government to file a fresh affidavit with detail of the location of construction, activities under eco-tourism, carrying capacity, number of visitors, and sustainability of the ecosystem. It also noted that the Satkosia gorge is a natural habitat for about 500 endangered gharials who use the sand banks for laying eggs.

A petition filed, January 2024, by the NGO Wildlife Society of Orissa, had pointed out that over 16 cottage tents including seven with air conditioners and attendant dining huts had been set up during the tourist season from October to May as part of the 'Badmul Sand Resort' in Satkosia. Sports such as volleyball/basketball and football are organised along with folk music and dance, and bonfires are lit at night at the site. The petitioner claimed that these activities in the ecologically sensitive area will bring irreparable damage to the local environment and biodiversity.

In its recent hearing, the NGT bench directed to the Odisha government and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change to file their counter affidavits particularly with reference to the Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary and the issues involved in the present case. The bench granted four weeks for the governments for filing the affidavits and posted the matter for further hearing to July 22.

Source: Lalmohan Patnaik. 'State told to file fresh affidavit on plea against 'harmful tourism' in Satkosia', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/05/2024.

RAJASTHAN

Draft notification of ESZ for Shergarh WLS issued; objections invited

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has issued a draft notification declaring extent and boundaries of eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around Shergarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). As per the draft the

ESZ encompasses an area of 348.60 sq. km with an extent of 1 km (minimum) to 17 km (maximum) around the boundary of the 98.6 sq. km core area of the sanctuary.

The government has invited objections or suggestions to be sent within 60 days. After formal declaration of ESZ, the Rajasthan government needs to prepare a zonal master plan within a period of two years from the date of publication of final notification. This will have to be done in consultation with local people and different departments concerned.

In the past eight years, several efforts were made to demarcate the ESZ for Shergarh WLS. In June 2022, the Supreme Court directed that every protected forest, national park and wildlife sanctuary across the country have a mandatory ESZ of a minimum one km starting from their demarcated boundaries.

Source: Jitendra Choubey. 'Centre notifies eco zone of Rajasthan wildlife sanctuary', www.newindianexpress.com, 29/04/2024.

TAMIL NADU

State identifies 42 elephant corridors; more than double the Centre's number

The Tamil Nadu (TN) Government's Elephant Corridor Committee has identified 42 elephant corridors in the State. This is more than double the number of corridors identified by the Project Elephant division of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

The Centre's Project Elephant division had, in 2023, identified 20 elephant corridors - 15 within TN and five interstate corridors between Kerala, Karnataka, and TN. The Elephant Corridor Committee of the State headed by additional principal chief conservator of forests, wildlife, V Naganathan, and comprising forest department officials, scientists, experts, and conservation organisations, has identified the 42 elephant

corridors through ground validation, mapping and surveys.

Elephants are distributed across 20 of the 26 forest divisions in TN, covering 9,217.13 sq. km and as per the report, human-elephant conflict has been widespread across 20 forest divisions with the Coimbatore, Gudalur, and Hosur forest divisions and Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve experiencing intense human-elephant conflict (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 5; Vol. XXVI, No. 6 and Vol. XXIV, No. 5).

The draft report of the State committee points to mining by brick kiln owners as one of the major threats to two corridors that fall under the Coimbatore division - the Melbavi-Pattisalai-Singuli-Kandivalli-Damanur-Sembukarai corridor (Anaikatty corridor) and the other corridor comprising Vellingiri Andavar Kovil Foothills-Valkaradu-Chinnamalai-Maruthamalai foothills-Kanuvai hills-Mangarai-Madudanpathi-Kurudumalai's eastern slopes.

The synchronised elephant census in 2017 reported 2,761 elephants distributed across 26 forest divisions in TN while the 2023 exercise indicated an estimated population of 2,961 elephants in the State.

Source: 'Tamil Nadu's Elephant Corridor Committee Identifies 42 Pathways for Curb Human-Elephant Conflicts', www.weather.com, 30/04/2024.

TELANGANA

Telangana FD grapples with forest fires in Eturnagaram WLS and Amrabad TR

The Telangana Forest Department (FD) in late March grappled with forest fires in the Tadvai region of Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR). The fires in Eturnagaram WLS posed a serious risk to wildlife across Tadvai, Lingala, Medaram, Peddavenkatapur, and Shapally.

Telangana principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) RM Dobriyal said that on any *Protected Area Update* Vol. XXX, No. 3

given day the State sees an average 100-120 fire spots. The forest department (FD) gets regular real-time alerts from the Forest Survey of India based on ground heat mapping. The FD also does some GIS-based vetting and rushes teams to the spot. In some cases the terrain is so difficult that it takes three to four hours to reach, said the PCCF.

He added that often those who come for fishing in the river start fires while cooking food. Even local tribes such as the Chenchus collecting mahua flowers set the ground on fire to make it easy to collect flowers the next day.. He said that beedi leaf contractors also pay workers to set the forests on fire.

Referring to their limited resources, the PCCF said they have requested the government to include forest fire control in disaster management. Also, the FD is conducting awareness campaigns, informed the PCCF.

Source: U Sudhakar Reddy. 'Forest fires singe Eturnagaram & Amrabad wildlife sanctuaries', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/03/2024.

UTTAR PRADESH

Smuggling shifting from live turtles to that of dried calipee: NGO

The Society for Conservation of Nature (SCN), an NGO working towards turtle conservation, has alerted the law enforcement agencies that the poachers, who were earlier smuggling live turtles have now shifted to the illegal trade of the dried calipee of the animals.

Turtle calipee is a fatty gelatinous layer found immediately over the lower shell of a turtle and considered a delicacy. Recently, a lot of seizures of calipee of turtles has taken place in Etawah and its surrounding areas. In the latest incident, a joint team of the special task force and the forest department officials arrested two persons including a woman from Etawah railway station and recovered 36 kg of

dried calipee of turtles stuffed in several trolley-travel bags.

Rajiv Chauhan, secretary-general, SCN, said that earlier, poachers used to smuggle live turtles, but now they kill turtles, procure their calipees and smuggle those within the country and even to foreign countries. The first seizure of calipee was reported in 2000 from Etawah, and now it has become a regular practice. Poachers mostly hunt soft shell turtles including Indian softshell turtle (*Nilssonina gangetica*) and Indian narrow-headed softshell turtle (*Chitra indica*) for procuring calipees, added Chauhan.

Source: 'Poachers now shift to trade of dried calipee of turtles', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 23/03/2024.

Eight out of nine vulture species found in India sighted in Dudhwa NP

A recent survey has recorded over 300 individual vultures at different locations feeding on animal carcasses in the Dudhwa National Park (NP). The sightings included eight of the nine species found in India: Eurasian griffon, Himalayan griffon, White-rumped vulture, Cinerous vulture, Red-headed vulture, Egyptian vulture, Slender-billed vulture and Indian vulture.

The fortnight-long field survey was carried out in February 2024 by Vipin Kapoor Sainy, field biologist, Dudhwa, and two research scholars from Aligarh Muslim University, Syed Basit Miyan and Aqsa Jaseem. The duo had witnessed vultures feeding on carcasses on February 18 while researching swamp deer in the park. Enthused by the sighting, the team surveyed various locations in the core and buffer zones for the next few days and sighted vultures - 265 in Pharsahiya, 75 at Bela Khurd, Bela Kalan and Majhgain, 19 at the railway line near Sharda River.

Source: 'Recent Dudhwa survey: Eight of nine vulture species in India sighted in park', www.hindustantimes.com, 02/03/2024.

UTTARAKHAND

New tourist zone started in Kota range of Corbett landscape

A new tourist zone has been started in the Ramanagara Forest Division (RFD) where visitors can see all the wild animals including tigers, leopards and elephants that the Corbett landscape is known for. The zone has been named Kota tourist zone as it falls in the Kota range of the RFD. It is adjacent to the Sitabani tourist zone. The entry and exit points of the Kota tourist zone have been kept at Bhandarpani Gate.

Though operational since March 22, the opening of the new zone was a low key affair as the model code of conduct for the general elections was in force then, informed the Ramanagara divisional forest officer.

Since its opening, more than 6,000 tourists have visited the new zone.

Source: Zarafshan Shiraz. 'Corbett's newest attraction: Kota tourist zone welcomes wildlife enthusiasts', www.hindustantimes.com, 02/05/2024.

WEST BENGAL

Forest guard dies in encounter with poachers in Sunderban TR

A forest guard died in an encounter with poachers while patrolling inside the Sunderban Tiger Reserve (TR), on May 18. Police identified the deceased as Amalendu Halder (59), a resident of Raidighi.

According to a statement issued by the forest department, the incident happened at around 10 pm on May 18. A team of forest guards while patrolling near the Netadhpani

camp on a small boat in Gosaba 1 compartment spotted a group of 10-15 poachers trying to kill deer. When the forest guards accosted the poachers, they opened fire at the guards and Halder was injured.

The staff jumped into water to save themselves. Three of them survived the attack but Halder did not. His body was found in Morabani khal, Gosaba 1 compartment, near the site of the incident. He had suffered head injuries. An FIR has been registered.

Source: Atri Mitra. 'Forest guard shot dead by poachers in Bengal's Sundarban Tiger Reserve', www.indianexpress.com, 20/05/2024.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH

Frequent forest fires threaten the Sunderban ecosystem in Bangladesh

Fires in the Bangladesh side of the Sundarban are now occurring almost every year during the dry season. The forest department (FD) and local residents reported 40 fire incidents here between 1970 and 2024; the same area has seen 25 fires for the much smaller time span from 2002 to 2024, suggesting an increase in fire events here. The forests have also witnessed a reduction in water inflow and an increase in dry regions, making the mangroves vulnerable.

The most recent such fire broke out in East Sundarban on May 5, a short distance from Amorbunia village in Morelganj sub-district of Bagerhat district. The fire damaged approximately 13 acres of forest and took almost four days to extinguish. Nearby residents have been demanding the mangroves be protected through a robust management system as they consider these mangroves extremely valuable. They have pointed out that these forests saved many lives during Cyclones Sidr in 2007 and Aila in 2009, and that they

depend on these forests for collecting minor forest produce. Though an inquiry committee has been formed to investigate the fire, locals say nothing will come out of it.

Experts says that the Bangladesh Sundarban is prone to frequent fires, cyclones, excess salinity, and even damage from high tidal pressures. However, no steps have been taken to improve the management. While the Sundarban in West Bengal, India, is smaller than in Bangladesh it is relatively better managed. India has a separate dedicated ministerial office to manage the area called the Department of Sundarban Affairs, under the West Bengal government.

Other panels have in the past highlighted factors such as severe heatwaves, insufficient rainfall, and droughts as contributing to frequent fires in addition to the fires started by honey collectors, cigarettes discarded by fishers and retaliatory actions by individuals involved in forest crimes. The suggestions from the panels include clearing out 40 km of canals and three ponds, hiring more staff for the FD, improving patrols by forest guards, building three observation towers, putting up a nylon rope fence along a 35 km stretch of the Chandpai area, constructing a river fire station, and dredging the Bhola river, which has silted up near the forest.

Experts including from educational institutes and NGOs have highlighted the reduced water flow in the forest and disruption of flooding pattern due to fires in the ecosystem as major concerns in addition to the poor management. They have expressed the need to update the outdated forest law as well.

Source: Rafiqul Islam Montu. 'Why are Bangladesh's Sundarbans catching fire? Reduced water inflow, increasing dry areas may be the cause', www.downtoearth.org.in, 16/05/2024.

NEPAL

Whitley Award for owl conservationist Raju Acharya

Owl conservationist Raju Acharya has won the Whitley Award 2024 for his work for the protection of owls in central Nepal after spearheading a government-backed 10-year plan to safeguard the birds. The Whitley Award funding will help boost initiatives in central Nepal, home to the greatest density of the birds and 19 of the country's 23 owl species. Acharya is the founder of Friends of Nature, a Kathmandu-based environmental group and was instrumental in driving The Owl Conservation Action Plan in 2020 which addresses threats to owls from hunting, illegal trade, and habitat loss.

At the forefront of owl research in Nepal and known locally as 'Owl Sir' for his efforts to draw attention to the plight of owls, Acharya hopes to engage early career scientists to join him on his mission. He brings out a digital owl newsletter called Hapsilo. He also set up the Nepal Owl Festival 11 years ago that has helped boost eco-tourism to the region and become one of the country's biggest conservation events.

Threats to the owls are significant. The birds are the subject of illicit trade in central Nepal, with 1,500 owls hunted or traded each year in the country. Owls represent good or bad omens in central Nepal. Some people associate them with death, while in other areas, owl feathers are regarded as sacred objects that can ward off evil. Hunting by teenagers using catapults and habitat loss are other threats to the owls amid the felling of old trees whose cavities are crucial nesting sites for the birds.

Acharya received the award on 1 May 2024 at the Royal Geographical Society in a ceremony that marks three decades since the very first Whitley Award was presented.

Future work planned by Acharya includes

- conducting training events to increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies,

policymakers and “owl envoys” – local ambassadors for the owls - with a goal of reducing hunting and trade by 25%

- attempting collaboration between the ethnic groups to foster a broader understanding of owls to reduce the use of catapults, discourage the consumption of owl meat, and advocacy for adherence to the government regulations which protect the birds
- addressing the use of catapults by students who hunt the owls by creating five catapult-free zones
- raising awareness among students and the public by creating 100 conservation camps
- restoring and rehabilitating 1,200 ha of owl habitat by protecting 500 old trees and installing 100 artificial nests in semi-urban areas

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK charity supporting grassroots conservation leaders in the Global South. Over 30 years it has channelled £23 million to more than 200 conservationists across 80 countries.

The other winners for the Whitley Award 2024 are:

- Fernanda Abra from Brazil who is pioneering the use of low-cost canopy bridges over highway BR-174 in the Amazon rainforest to restore connectivity for tree-dwelling mammals and save them from road collisions.
- Naomi Longa from Papua New Guinea who is safeguarding coral reefs in Kimbe Bay and creating a network of marine protected areas led by local Indigenous women.
- Aristide Kamla from Cameroon who is restoring the African manatee habitat in Lake Ossa, addressing threats from invasive species and pollution.
- Kuenzang Dorji from Bhutan who is protecting the Endangered Gee's golden langur and implementing solutions for farmers whose crops the primates are targeting.

- Leroy Ignacio from Guyana who is leading an expansion of one of the country's first Indigenous-led conservation movements to protect the endangered Red siskin finch.

Source: 'Nepal's 'Owl Sir' awarded',
www.nepaltimes.com, 02/05/2024.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Rhino, cedar most affected by illegal wildlife trade: UNODC

The 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report released on May 13 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has listed the rhino and the cedar respectively as the animal and plant species most affected by global illegal wildlife trade during 2015-2021.

According to the report, 15 broad markets comprised the bulk of the observed illegal wildlife trade between 2015 and 2021 based on a standardized seizure index. At 29%, the market for rhino horn constituted the biggest chunk among animal species. It was followed by the market for pangolin scales at 28%, and elephant ivory at 15%. Other animal species most affected by the illegal trade included eels (5%), crocodilians (5%), parrots and cockatoos (2%), carnivores (2%), turtles and tortoises (2%), snakes (2%), seahorses (2%), and others (8%).

Among plants, cedars and other Sapindales like mahogany, holy wood and Guaiacum constituted the biggest market at 47%. Rosewoods were second at 35%, while agarwood and other Myrtales like ramin and eucalyptus were third at 13%. Golden chicken fern and other Cibotium as well as orchids comprised 1% of the market each while other species made up the remaining 3%.

The report also provided details of seizures reported: corals comprised 16% of all such seizures followed by crocodilians at 9%. They were followed by elephants (6%),

bivalve molluscs (6%), carnivores (5%), 4% each - parrots and cockatoos, orchids, turtles and tortoises, snakes and rosewood, 3% each - ginsengs, costus root, aloes and other Liliales such as agave, snowdrop and yucca, and cacti, 2% each - even-toed ungulates, sturgeons and paddlefishes, pangolins, sea snails, lizards, and birds of prey (1%) and others (16%).

As far as commodities were concerned, coral pieces were found the most and comprised 16% of all seizures during 2015-2016. Live specimens came second at 15% while medicines made of animal products constituted 10% of all seizures. Animal meat, shells and small leather products each comprised 6% of the seizures. They were followed by animal bodies (4%), plant roots (3%), extracts (3%), ivory carvings (3%) and others (28%).

The 2024 report is the third edition, with earlier editions published in 2016 and 2020. The report noted that wildlife trafficking persists worldwide despite two decades of concerted action at international and national levels. While there are signs of progress in countering trafficking of iconic species such as elephants and rhinos, the harsh reality is that wildlife traffickers are highly adaptable and can use every method available to escape detection.

The document urged strong coherence and harmonisation across the trade chain, strong international cooperation and increased investment to build data and analytical capacity at national and international levels in order to close knowledge gaps. It also flagged corruption and technology as areas that should be looked into. Lastly, it noted that addressing organised crime as a whole was required in order to tackle wildlife crime.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Rhinos, elephants, pangolins, cedars, rosewoods & agarwood most affected by illegal wildlife trade: UNODC',
www.downtoearth.org.in, 14/05/2024.

Survival International blames UNESCO of ignoring conservation related atrocities against indigenous people in Asia & Africa

Survival International (SI), a London-based human rights charity, has accused UNESCO of being complicit in the illegal eviction and abuse of indigenous people in its report launched on April 18, World Heritage Day. It says that UNESCO has played a key role in giving legitimacy to many of the most notorious protected areas in Africa and Asia, and it has largely ignored the well-documented atrocities being committed on its watch.

The report said that many UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHSs) are located on what were once indigenous lands. It has listed six WHSs - three in Africa and three in Asia - that occupy indigenous land. These include the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania, Kahuzi-Biega National Park (NP) in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Odzala-Kokoua NP in Republic of Congo, Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex in Thailand, Kaziranga NP in India, and Chitwan NP in Nepal.

All six sites are the sites of serious and continuing conservation-related rights abuses, the SI report said. With the Tanzanian government pressing ahead with plans to evict thousands of Maasai people from lands where they have lived for generations the Ngorongoro Crater has become a scene of intimidating security operations and the denial of basic services according to the report. Similarly, the report claimed that the Kahuzi-Biega NP had been the site of rape, violent attacks and an all-out campaign since 2019 to purge the area of indigenous Batwa people from their ancestral lands.

According to SI, Kaziranga has become infamous for brutal extra-judicial killings, torture and arbitrary arrests, with the NP guards shooting on sight with impunity. 144 people have been killed by guards in Kaziranga between 1990 and 2016. The park area is home to the Mising and Karbi people as well as other indigenous peoples brought to the

area to work on the tea estates, collectively known locally as the “tea tribes”. However, the UNESCO World Heritage Center, in its 2011 State of Conservation report, praised a government notification, which gives forest officers immunity from prosecution if they use firearms in the course of their duty, as a “significant step to prevent poaching and boost staff morale”, said SI. While the number of extrajudicial killings had reduced after the matter came to light in 2016, the indigenous people living around the park are still harassed and banned from entering their ancestral lands, the report has said.

SI has called on UNESCO to remove WHS status from any site where human rights atrocities are occurring.

Source: Rajat Ghai. ‘World Heritage Day 2024: Survival accuses UNESCO of being complicit in illegal eviction, abuse of indigenous people’, www.downtoearth.org.in, 18/04/2024.

Forest fires caused highest global tree cover loss in 2023: Global Forest Watch

2023 stands out as the year with the planet losing the highest tree cover from fires, totalling 11.9 million ha. This is an alarming 42% of all tree cover loss recorded that year as per data put together by Global Forest Watch.

Globally, nearly 28% of tree cover lost between 2001 and 2023 was because of forest fires, with Russia and Canada reporting the highest rates of loss. In 2023, Canada alone witnessed the destruction of 7.76 million ha of tree cover due to fire alongside other heavily affected countries such as Russia, Brazil, Bolivia, the United States of America, and Australia. Worldwide, in the four weeks starting from mid-April 2024, Ecuador accounted for 0.27% of all fire alerts - the highest.

In India, the peak fire season typically begins in late February and spans about 12 weeks. Since 2001, India has witnessed the loss of 38,100 ha of tree cover to forest fires.

The highest loss was recorded in 2008, when overall 3 million ha were destroyed by fires, deforestation and other drivers of loss. Although the loss due to forest fires began to decline afterward, hitting a low of 600 ha in 2013, recent data indicates a resurgence.

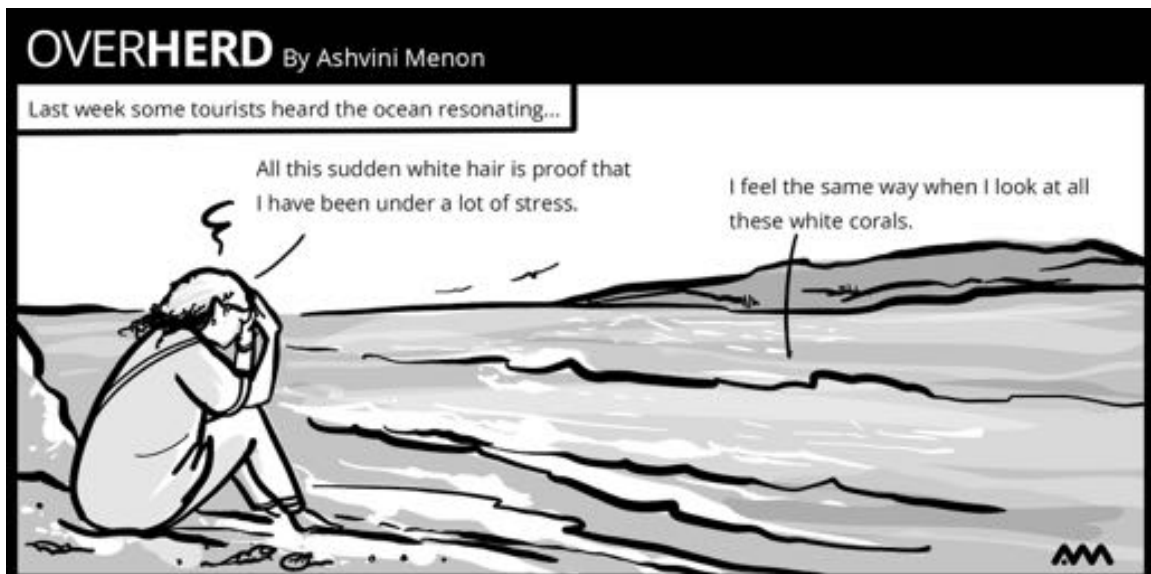
In 2023, 2,130 ha were lost, according to Global Forest Watch data. Uttarakhand alone had reported over eight new forest fires by the last week of April this year, consuming 11.75 ha of tree cover. From 2001 to 2023, Odisha and Arunachal Pradesh were the hardest-hit States, losing over 200 ha of tree cover each due to fires.

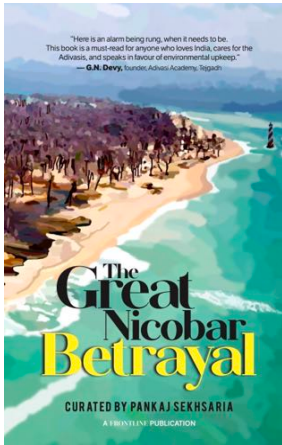
Between 1 May 2023, and 29 April 2024, a staggering 12,689 high-confidence

visible infrared imaging radiometer suite (VIIRS) fire alerts were reported in India, with 8,967 alerts recorded this year alone until April 29, according to Global Forest Watch.

Between 2012 and 2023, the peak year for fire alerts was 2021, with 23,388 alerts. Between April 25 and May 2 this year, India received 38,885 high-confidence VIIRS fire alerts.

Source: Ashli Varghese. '38,100 Hectares Of Tree Cover Lost To Forest Fires', www.m.rediff.com, 13/05/2024.





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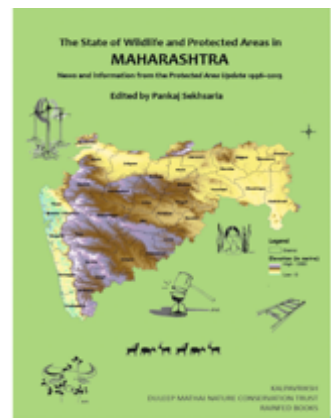
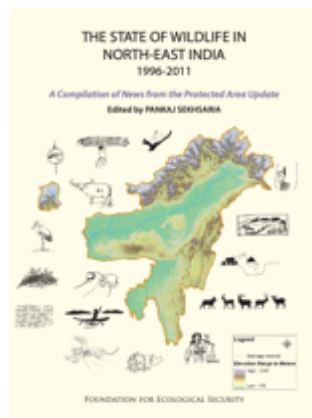
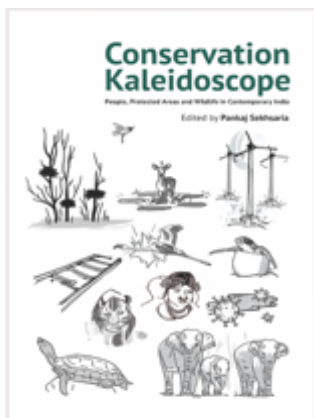
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BOOKS FROM THE PA UPDATE

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- 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

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Where wildlife related issues came centre-stage in these elections...

State	PA	Constituency / District	Issue
Andhra Pradesh	Kawal Tiger Reserve	Khanapur, Bellampally and Asifabad (State assembly constituencies), Adilabad district	40 villages in these constituencies expressed concern over reports of eviction following the creation of the buffer zone for the TR over an area of nearly 1100 sq km. Four villages in the core of the reserve - Alinagar, Dongapalli, Malyal and Maisampet – have reportedly agreed to relocation and to the rehabilitation package of Rs. 10 lakhs per family. Source: S Harpal Singh. ‘Tribal people to confront leaders over fate of villages’, <i>The Hindu</i> , 06/04/14.
Assam	Kaziranga National Park	Kaliabor Lok Sabha constituency	The issue here is of continued rhino poaching and the encroachment in and around Kaziranga NP by suspected Bangladeshi nationals. The opposition parties including the Bhartiya Janata Party, the Asom Gana Parishad and the Communist Party of India, Marxist have all blamed the ruling Congress government for the present situation. All party manifestos talk of better protection for the rhino, which is the state animal. Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap. ‘In Assam Kaziranga’s rhinos become election plank’, <i>The Indian Express</i> , 06/4/14.
Chhattisgarh	-	Sarasbahar village, Jashpur District	Around 1000 villagers here threatened to boycott the polls on a number of issues, including that of elephant attacks on paddy fields, homes and people. One of key demands in this zero electricity village is for power supply, which the villagers argue will illuminate the village at night and also help keep elephants at bay. Source: Rashmi Drolia. ‘Chhattisgarh's Jashpur villagers to boycott polls’, <i>The Times of India</i> , 24/03/14.

PERSPECTIVE

Unlearning Conservation

When we are young, we are always taught to colour inside the lines, follow the rules, and be disciplined. For most, once grown up, the benchmark for these “lines” or rules is the law. As a young policy officer, working with and reading laws often leaves me with one big question - where are we drawing our lines?

Narrowing it down to forest conservation in India, let’s take the case of two major laws that regulate the same: the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) of 1972 and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. It is curious to me how, although both these laws strive to conserve forests, they often seem to be at loggerheads with one another. While the WLPA seeks to protect nature from people, it is the newer FRA which allows people - albeit those who have always lived with nature - to slowly but surely, legally, wander back into their own forests.

Words often thrown about in forest conservation circles - poaching, encroachment, and overgrazing - seem to be the broadest legal grounds of battle between these two laws. When does hunting, a cultural practice, turn into poaching, which is a crime? When does animal husbandry, an economic and cultural practice, turn into “overgrazing?” And when does simply living in a home turn into “encroachment?”

But to me, the most curious part is how, even while allowing people to venture back into the forest, the FRA itself does not link people’s right to knowledge with their right to developmental infrastructure - having a road, a school, a hospital, an electricity connection, or a source of water. Developmental rights fall under section 3.2 of the FRA and deal with the aforementioned infrastructure. This is clearly marked off from sections 3.1(i) and (k), which outline people’s right to conserve their traditional knowledge about the forest. Here I would ask - does knowledge not inform development? Why give someone a school without conserving their knowledge?

While these questions continue to plague me (and hopefully, you), I would like to underline my words with a statement made by the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar Islands in August 2022: “We have a deep reverence for these islands since they harbour ancient spirits of our ancestors. Our customs and practices have ensured the integrity of all life on these islands remains intact. We do not hunt for commerce... we cannot overharvest resources nor damage the island... We have never been asked how these wildlife species continue to persist in our beaches... we are aware of their presence and have coexisted with them long before the concept of a wildlife sanctuary was even conceived.”

- **Srishti Saxena** is Policy Advocacy Officer,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.
Email: s.srishti@hotmail.com

Errata: Amrita Neelakantan is executive director, Network for Conserving Central India (NCCI) and not the National Network for Conserving Central India as was mentioned in the last issue (Vol. XXX, No.).
The error is regretted

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