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## EDITORIAL

### Conservation's disconnect with ground realities

Stories in this issue of the *PA Update* from two opposite ends throw up some intriguing if not disturbing questions on the thinking and priorities of wildlife conservation in the country. One set of reports is from Maharashtra, the other from Odisha.

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has floated an eye-popping Rs. 120 crore tender for installing high-tech CCTV cameras to monitor mangroves and wetlands in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). This will also be integrated with other technologies, databases and networks to presumably ensure better protection and management of the mangroves. These high tech, high investment ideas surely sound good at the same time as they convey an impression of being serious and doing 'something'. They beg the question however of the problem that is sought to be solved.

What really are the problems facing mangroves that will be solved by techno-fixes such as these? Who will be monitored? What illegality will be identified? Who will be apprehended and what detrimental activities will be stopped by this? If one looks at the ground realities here one cannot but notice that there is a rather stark disconnect between what is happening on the ground and the solutions are being suggested.

The reality as the same newspaper report notes is that large mangrove areas in the MMR are not even with the forest department (FD) at the moment. Agencies like the Navi Mumbai Integrated Industrial Authority and CIDCO whose main mandate is to promote industrial and real estate development, often by reclaiming these mangroves, have still not handed over these mangroves to the FD. Other agencies suggest that mangroves are being lost due to debris dumping and land encroachment.

One surely does not need a CCTV network to identify these problems or the offenders. Techno-fixes might create the right optics but they won't solve problems that need long-term thinking and political and bureaucratic will.

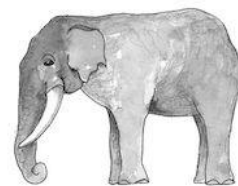
Almost the same approach is seen in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha where former army personnel are to be roped in for the special tiger protection force in preparation for the translocation of tigers here from Maharashtra. The agenda is to provide technical and infrastructural support and build up ground intelligence and to carry out targeted operations to deal with poachers.

Here again is the question - what is the problem that is sought to be solved? Tigers were re-introduced here as recently as six years ago - one died when caught in snares, the other became the source of huge conflict as she attacked, injured and killed local people. The strain this caused in relations between people and the FD still remains to be repaired and we now have another program for bringing in more tigers here. This obsession with the translocation and re-introduction of big cats (including the cheetah) is difficult to understand when so much else needs to be sorted out be it protection of existing wildlife, preventing loss of forests because of encroachment and diversion for industrial projects or building up a relationship of trust with the local communities.

These appear to be conservation agendas and a set of priorities far removed from realities on the ground. It is unlikely they will take us very far.

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Eds Note: We have not been able to carry our regular featured visual comment 'OverHerd' in this issue due to unavoidable reasons. It will be back in the next issue, though.



## ASSAM

### Assam recommends oil and gas exploration in ESZ of Hollongapar Gibbon WLS

Citing national interest, the Assam wildlife department has recommended to the Centre that forest clearance (FC) be granted to a Cairn Oil and Gas proposal for oil and gas exploration in the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary.

Cairn Oil and Gas, Vedanta's subsidiary, has sought diversion of 4.49 ha of forest land for exploration drilling in the Desso Valley Reserve Forest, Jorhat. This is currently pending before the Union environment ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), which appraises proposals for forest diversion. The FAC had, in July, sought the views in the matter of the state's chief wildlife warden (CWW).

CWW Sandeep Kumar noted that the ESZ of the WLS sees significant movement of wild elephants and appropriate scientific interventions shall have to be undertaken while implementing the project. As the project is of national interest, it may be recommended for granting FC subject to certain conditions, the CWW said.

He added that the exploration work should happen with minimal tree felling and that the user agency shall take adequate measures against all kinds of pollution likely to be generated due to implementation of the project including disasters like oil and gas leakage and explosion of the well. He also noted that 2% of the total project cost shall be deposited with the CWW for the wildlife conservation plan and mitigation of human-wildlife conflict.

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. 'Assam cites national interest, allows Vedanta project in Gibbon habitat', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 27/08/2024.

### 68 schools illegally operating inside Sonai Rupai WLS and Charduar RF: FD

The Assam Forest Department (FD) has stated in an affidavit before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that 68 schools are operating inside the Charduar Reserve Forest (RF) and Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) without the FD's clearance. But since more than 3,000 children are studying here in classes 1 to 5, it has been submitted that the schools should not be disturbed unless families are rehabilitated from here. This is in support of the request of the district mission coordinator, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Sonitpur.

The FD has been directed to prepare a comprehensive resettlement and rehabilitation plan for the encroachers in the Nameri National Park - Sonai Rupai WLS landscape. The FD was expected to submit the draft plan by the last week of September 2024, the affidavit added.

An order dated May 2 in the case Dilip Nath vs. principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) and others, mentions the April 8 affidavit of the joint secretary, Environment and Forest Department, Assam, submitted before NGT's Eastern Zone Bench, Kolkata. The affidavit stated that schools were functioning and indulging in non-forest activities inside the forest areas. The range forest officer, Dhekiajuli range, has also lodged an FIR against the managing committee of these schools for violation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

The PCCF and head of forest force, Assam, as directed during the July 3 hearing, has re-filed an affidavit stating that action has been initiated by the FD against these schools' managements. The FD, through the divisional forest officer (DFO), Sonitpur West Division, and the DFO, Western Assam Wildlife Division, have issued notices dated June 29, 2024, to the district mission coordinator, SSA, Sonitpur, under Section 15(1) of the Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Rules 2023. The latest in the matter is not known.

Source: Kangkan Kalita. ‘68 schools with 3,000 students operating on forest land without clearance: Assam to NGT’, [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 31/07/2024.

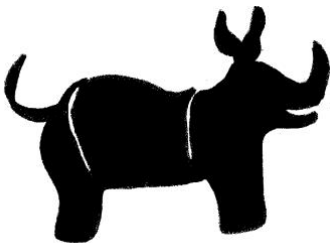
### **Anil Agarwal Foundation collaborates with Kaziranga NP&TR**

The Anil Agarwal Foundation (AAF) has through its flagship animal welfare initiative The Animal Care Organization (TACO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR) to provide a surveillance centre and dwelling units for frontline workers.

The MoU outlines a grant of Rs. six crores to be utilised over a period of three years.

TACO is an umbrella entity for 140+ social impact projects of Vedanta Ltd. and its business units. Vedanta Ltd., one of the world’s leading critical minerals, energy and technology companies, through its subsidiary Cairn Oil & Gas has also been exploring and developing the hydrocarbon potential of Northeast India.

Source: ‘Anil Agarwal Foundation collaborates with Assam’s Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve for TACO’s ‘Mission Vanraksha’’, [www.mediabrief.com](http://www.mediabrief.com), 22/08/2024.



### **NGT takes suo motu cognisance of proposed luxury hotels adjoining Kaziranga NP&TR**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken suo motu cognisance of the Assam

government’s plans to hand over land adjacent to the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR) for luxury hotels. The NGT’s principal bench moved an application on August 5 citing a news report dated July 31 in the matter. The NGT said that the article indicated violation of the provisions of the Environment Protection Act, 1986; Biodiversity Act, 2002, and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980

The NGT impleaded and issued notice to the principal chief conservator of forest and head of forest force, Assam, the TR authorities, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for their responses in the matter. It then transferred the matter to the Eastern Zonal Bench in Kolkata.

The Assam government on August 3 signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Tata Group to set up a 5-star Taj Hotel in Hatikhuli area, situated less than a kilometre from the core area of KNP&TR. 8-acre land has, reportedly, been earmarked to build a luxury resort which will impact about 1,500 people who work in Rongajan and Hatikhuli tea gardens, affecting their livelihood.

In a similar announcement in September 2023, the Assam government had announced an MoU with Hyatt Hotels and Resorts to set up a 5-star hotel in Inle Pothar in Kaziranga. Over 45 farmer families survive on the yield produced from the 19-acre land in Inle Pothar. 9.9 acre of this land has been earmarked for the luxury hotels project.

On June 7 the Assam government initiated the process of handing more than 12 ha of land to the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) by demolishing the house of a farmer.

Following this incident, 45 families, who claim that they possess ownership documents and that they were paying land revenues have been attempting to establish control over the land. However, with a police battalion setting up an outpost here, there have been reports of violent scuffles between these

families, their representatives from local political and human rights organisations and the police. Allegedly, the land has already been barricaded and people have been displaced from it. The authorities have fenced the area around Inle Pothar and also deployed 35-40 armed commandos to guard the area.

The Golaghat district administration, under which the area falls, has claimed that the said land which was allotted to Hyatt was transferred to ATDC in November 2022 by the sub-divisional land committee under the watch of Assam's Agriculture Minister, Atul Bora.

The Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Committee (GKLHRC) — an organisation of members from close to 100 villages in and around Kaziranga has been protesting against the land transfers since 2022. A GKLHRC representative said that these common lands now acquired by ATDC have been used by local tribal communities for generations. They have land rights over these lands as confirmed by their documents.

Conservationists too have expressed concerns. They pointed out that Inle Pothar and the adjoining tea gardens lie along the foothills of the Karbi Hills. Animals use this area during floods and cordoning the area will force animals to enter villages, aggravating human wildlife conflict.

Recently, the Indian chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an advisory body to the UNESCO, also wrote a letter to the ATDC raising concerns about the 5-star hotel proposal in Inle Pothar. ICOMOS has sought clarification on the carrying capacity assessment of the proposed hotel site, assessment of the impact on wildlife, community involvement, and alignment with sustainable practices. It has also pointed out that the proposed Hyatt Hotel is in the buffer zone of the tiger reserve and the proposed Taj project is within the Kaziranga NP at Hatikhuli Tea Estate. However, the UNESCO heritage site principles are clear that no major construction can take place in areas declared as natural heritage. If these hotels are built, it would violate these principles.

Neither ATDC nor the Assam government responded to the concerns expressed by the advisory body to UNESCO, said an ICOMOS representative.

Meanwhile, Sonali Ghosh, the director of KNP&TR said that the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) for the park is yet to be finalised. Therefore, all such proposed projects would need environmental as well as forest clearance along with an environment impact assessment. With the NGT taking up the case, legal experts have said that the 10 km ESZ as mandated by the Supreme Court would be applicable to the proposed hotels.

Source: Anupam Chakravartty. 'NGT takes *suo motu* cognisance as Assam seeks to hand over Kaziranga land to luxury hotel', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 07/08/2024.

'NGT issues notice to Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Tiger Conservation Authority and MoEFCC over proposed hotel construction in Kaziranga National Park', [www.sconline.com](http://www.sconline.com), 26/08/2024.

### **NGT orders stay on road construction inside Barak Bhuban WLS**



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered a stay on construction of a road inside the Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Cachar district. This was in response to a petition alleging that 15 ha of forest land inside the sanctuary had been diverted illegally to construct a road to the top of Bhuban Hill.

The order was issued in the third week of September by the Kolkata bench of NGT in response to an application filed in August by Pradeep Singh Shekhawat, a resident of Jaipur in Rajasthan. The September 19 order gave the stay as an interim measure saying that unless there is sanction from the central government

as required under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, no construction shall be permitted within the sanctuary during the pendency of the application.

The bench issued notices to all respondents—Assam government, Assam Forest Department, special chief secretary (forests) MK Yadava, Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, and deputy commissioner, Cachar, asking them to file counter-affidavits within four weeks. The next date of hearing was fixed as December 6.

Incidentally, this is the third such case against MK Yadava in the NGT. The two earlier ones are related to construction of a commando battalion inside protected forest in Barak Valley by diverting 44 ha of forest land and to the construction of a second commando battalion in the Geleky Reserve Forest on the Assam-Nagaland border.

Spread over an area of 320 sq. km between the Barak and Sonai rivers, the Assam government had approved creation of the Barak Bhuban WLS in July 2022. The sanctuary has eight recorded species of primates and is an important habitat for the King Cobra.

Source: Utpal Parashar. ‘NGT stays construction of road inside Assam’s Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary’, [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 23/09/2024.

## CHHATTISGARH

### ***Lantana* invasion in Chhattisgarh forests triggering human wildlife conflict**



Human wildlife conflict has become one of the major causes of death among tribals living in the forests of Chhattisgarh. According to the Chhattisgarh wildlife department, around 595 people have been killed in encounters with wild animals

over the past 11 years, with an average of 54 deaths per year. The death toll was 95 in 2021-22, 77 in 2022-23, and 77 again in 2023-24. More than 60,000 incidents of crop damage have also occurred during this period.

A significant cause of the conflict is the lack of food in the forests, where native vegetation—the primary nutrient source for wildlife—has been largely replaced by the invasive *Lantana camara*. The resulting scarcity of food in Chhattisgarh’s forests is forcing wildlife to move into human settlements in search of sustenance, leading to increased conflicts.

Recognizing this root cause, the Chhattisgarh Forest Department has removed *Lantana* from 4.41 lakh ha of forest over the past five years.

Source: Sumi Rajappan. ‘How an exotic shrub is turning elephants rogue, threatening lives in Chhattisgarh’, [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in), 11/08/2024.

## GOA

### **Goa seeks extension for settlement of forest rights in and around Mhadei WLS**

The Goa government filed an application before the Bombay High Court (HC) at Goa on July 30, 2024, seeking an extension of time to reach a settlement with scheduled tribes (STs) and other forest dwellers around the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). This submission came a week after the deadline lapsed on July 24. This is the matter of a contempt petition filed by the Goa Foundation in the HC against the state government for not notifying Mhadei WLS as a tiger reserve (TR).

On July 24, 2023, the HC had asked the state government to settle the forest rights of STs and other forest dwellers by July 24, 2024, while passing the order regarding notifying Mhadei WLS and surrounding protected areas as a TR. In a hearing on June 10, 2024, the state government assured the HC that it would settle claims under the Forest

Rights Act 2006 for residents of the Mhadei WLS and nearby WLSs by July 24, 2024. However, the one-year time period ended on July 24 and the government has sought for an extension.

Meanwhile, the state government's special leave application challenging the HC's direction to declare a TR was scheduled to come for hearing on August 14 as per status given on the Supreme Court (SC)'s website. In view of this, the HC adjourned the matter beyond August 14.

The latest in the matter is not known.

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

Source: 'State seeks extension for settlement of forest dwellers', [www.thegoan.net](http://www.thegoan.net), 31/07/2024.

'Fail Fail: Rights of forest dwellers in Mhadei still not settled, still more time sought', [www.heraldgoa.in](http://www.heraldgoa.in), 31/07/2024.

## **HARYANA/A&N ISLANDS**

### **Haryana notifies 24,353 ha land as forest to compensate Great Nicobar deforestation**

Haryana has recently notified 24,353 ha of land in Aravali range in five of its districts - Gurgaon, Nuh, Rewari, Mahendergarh and Charkhi Dadri - as protected forest. This is under the compensatory afforestation swap meant to make up for the diversion (and destruction) of about 13,000 ha of tropical rainforests in Great Nicobar Island for a mega infrastructure project proposed there (*PA Updates* Vol XXVIII, No. 6, Vol. XXVIII, Nos.5 & 4 and Vol. XXVII, No. 1).

Though the target was 26,000 ha, Haryana was able to secure only 24,353 ha. For the remaining 1,647 ha, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is in talks with the Madhya Pradesh government.

The MoEFCC had in November 2022 approved the project that involves constructing an international airport, a trans-shipping terminal, a power plant and a township over 160 sq. km of land in Great Nicobar. More than 80% of this area is pristine tropical forest, with more than a million trees. In February 2023, it was decided that compensatory afforestation for this destruction will be carried out in the Aravalis of Haryana.

The Haryana government submitted its plan for compensatory afforestation to MoEFCC in September and will get Rs. 3,000 crore for the same once the plan is approved by MoEFCC. This amount is five times higher than the state's entire annual forest budget of Rs. 600 crore.

Haryana has issued multiple notifications, the last being in July, to notify Aravali land under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). The largest chunk is in Nuh - 11,118 ha. It is followed by Mahendergarh (6,556 ha), Rewari (3,582 ha), Gurgaon (2,500 ha) and Charkhi Dadri (596 ha). In Gurgaon, the freshly notified areas span across 13 villages. Another 34 villages in Rewari, 68 in Nuh, 54 in Mahendergarh, and four in Charkhi Dadri have been given protected forest land status. Before this, these areas were owned by the village panchayat.

According to officials, Haryana was chosen as the site for compensatory afforestation because the state has India's lowest forest cover - at just 3.6% of its total area. Over the decades, swathes of Aravali hills have been lost to rapid concretisation and mining. Haryana is home to around one lakh ha of the Aravalis. Of this, 45,000 ha of the hills are notified under Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA) and the Aravali Plantation, giving them legal cover from non-forest activities. The remaining 55,000 ha were never recorded or notified as forests. (see accompanying story)

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Nicobar swap: 24k hectares of Aravalis in 5 districts of Haryana get protected forest tag', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 15/08/2024.



## **Forest and mining departments identify same land for protecting forest and stone quarrying**

On July 20, 2023, the forest department (FD) issued a notification to cover around 204 ha of the Aravalis in Rajawas village as protected forest under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). This was as part of the compensatory afforestation sway for the diversion of the 13,000 ha in Great Nicobar Island (see preceding story). However, around the same time, a parallel process concerning the same tract of land culminated in the Haryana's mining department (MD) carrying out an e-auction to allot approximately 48 ha of these 204 ha for mining. A company was chosen and awarded a 10-year lease on August 4 to quarry stones.

The notification issued by FD has mentioned Rajawas khasra numbers from 91 till 124 as part of protected forest while the letter by the MD to the company that offered the highest bid has permitted the company to extract stones in khasra numbers 91, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102 and 103 in Rajawas village for a period of 10 years.

Mining in a non-forest area can only be carried out if it is approved by the Rajawas panchayat as the land parcel is owned by the village. If it is forest land – in this case, covered under FCA – the MD will need clearance from the FD in addition to the panchayat's consent. A forest officer said that the FD has not granted a no-objection certificate to carry out mining in Rajawas.

The Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB) is supposed to facilitate consent from the panchayat for mining. While a HSPCB regional officer for Mahendergarh said that due process had been followed, the chairperson said that the board cancelled the public hearing, which was to be held on September 17 and it will investigate the matter.

Locals, who had been pushing the government to conserve the Aravalis near Rajawas long before the FCA notification, had thought that the protected forest status would

ease their worries. A villager pointed out that any attempt at mining will destroy the hills and affect their ability to recharge groundwater. A former village sarpanch said that back in 2016, when a mining firm started work, wild animals started venturing into the village and there were some attacks too. (Also see story above).

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Notified Aravali forest portion sold for mining', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 15/09/2024.

## **KERALA**

### **Kerala FD identifies 10 landscapes with high human-wildlife conflict in state**

The Kerala Forest Department (FD) has identified 10 forest landscapes where human-animal conflict is high. These include Aralam (comprising areas upto Taliparamba in Kannur and Kasaragod), Wayanad, Mannarkkad, Chalakudy-Malayattoor, Palakkad, Nilambur, Munnar, Ranni, Konni. and Thiruvananthapuram.

According to a forest official the conflict in Wayanad involves tigers and elephants whereas in Kottiyoor tigers have been trapped in snares put up by locals. In Chalakudy, the conflict is due to the 24 km-long trench constructed by the estate plantation authorities to prevent elephants from entering their area. In the Palakkad landscape, male elephants are involved in crop depredation. The conflict is different in each landscape, warranting a different approach.

Measures envisaged include short-medium- and long-term solutions - on how to rescue animals that get trapped in human habitations, habitat management by identifying degradation and other challenges, and providing training to field staff. A specialized team will be constituted in each landscape for conflict prevention.

Master trainers will train field staff at the circle level. The training module reviews the tools required for each existing rapid

response team of the FD. Once the training of forest staff is over, officials from other concerned departments like agriculture will be trained through the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA). People's representatives will also be sensitized by KILA in this regard.

Kerala reported 6,662 conflict incidents, including those due to snake bites, in 2019-20. It rose to 8,076 incidents in 2021-22. The FD admitted that the rising conflict is due to the expansion of agricultural activities near forests, a shift in cropping patterns, and the fragmentation of forest land among other factors.

Conflict

begins to surface in the state after winter and peaks when summer



temperatures soar in March, April and May.

Source: TC Sreemol. 'Forest dept. identifies 10 landscapes with high human-animal conflicts', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 23/09/2024.

## MADHYA PRADESH

### Two villages agree for relocation from within Ratapani WLS

Neelgarh and Dhunwani, two of the 32 villages located within the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) are reported to have agreed for relocation elsewhere. The forest department (FD) is said to have identified land for them in Goharganj and Sultanpur. Two more villages have also agreed in principle for the relocation.

The FD says it is hopeful that all the villages will gradually agree as this is important to declare the sanctuary a tiger reserve (also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXX, No. 4 and Vol. XXIX, No. 5).

Source: 'Ratapani Sanctuary Seeks Tiger Reserve Status; Residents Of Two Villages Agree For Evacuation', [www.freepressjournal.in](http://www.freepressjournal.in), 29/09/2024.

## TR status proposed for Madhav NP

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) is working on a proposal to secure tiger reserve (TR) status for Madhav National Park (NP). State forest minister Ramniwas Rawat said that the area of the NP is being increased and once this work is completed the proposal will be sent to the central government.

If approved this would be the eighth TR in the state.

Tigers had disappeared from Madhav NP decades ago and recent efforts to revive the population here include the translocation of tree tigers from other TRs. A year ago, Madhav NP field director had also sent a proposal to include additional area in the buffer zone. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 5)

Source: 'Efforts On To Get Tiger Reserve Status For Madhya Pradesh Madhav National Park', [www.freepressjournal.com](http://www.freepressjournal.com), 05/09/2024.

## MAHARASHTRA

### CCTV surveillance network proposed for mangroves and wetlands across MMR



The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) has floated a tender for a Rs. 120 crore high-tech CCTV network to monitor mangroves and

wetlands in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

With 669 cameras and a centralised monitoring system, the video surveillance will cover 195 mangrove zones in areas such as Mumbai, Thane, Bhiwandi, Navi Mumbai, Panvel, and Uran. The network will have an automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) system, integrated with the data of VAAHAN Sarathi as well as databases of Passport, Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), Prisons, and Automated Multimodal Biometric Identification System (AMBIS).

The proposed network with night vision cameras will track illegal movements by people and vehicles that can inflict damage to life and property of the mangrove areas. The mangrove cell will also have a central control room, zonal recording station, storage backup station and a zonal viewing centre.

It is to be noted that vast stretches of mangroves are still under government agencies other than the FD. The mangroves on lands allotted to Navi Mumbai Integrated Industrial Authority (erstwhile NMSEZ) are yet to be accounted for, while the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (CIDCO) is yet to hand over several mangrove zones in areas like Kharghar to the FD in violation of the High Court order, said an activist. The NatConnect Foundation pointed out that mangrove destruction in these areas goes on unabated, and that mangroves and wetlands have been under attack by debris dumping and land encroachment.

Source: Vijay Singh. 'Forest dept to install Rs 120 crore CCTV system to watch over mangroves in MMR', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 19/09/2024.

### **State forest minister seeks feasibility study to fence Pench TR**

State forest minister Sudhir Mungantiwar, on September 24, asked forest officials to conduct

a feasibility study to fence the Pench Tiger Reserve (TR). He was addressing a marathon meeting called at the behest of the Ramtek Shiv Sena MLA, Ashish Jaiswal, at the district collectorate. Principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) (head of forest force) Shomita Biswas, PCCF (wildlife) Vivek Khandekar, conservator of forest (CF) A Sreelakshmi, deputy conservator Bharat Singh Hada, the reserve deputy director Prabhu Nath Shukla, assistant conservators of forest (ACFs), and range forest officers were present. Jaiswal has been strongly pushing for the fencing.

Over 150 people from Ramtek tehsil, 90% of whom were fishermen, were also present at the meeting. They were keen on seeking fishing permission in the Totladoh reservoir in the core area of the TR.

The meeting discussed the recent spurt in human-animal conflict in the Pench landscape. Mungantiwar called to strengthen mitigation measures by providing "smart sticks" to the local people and improving communication between people and primary response teams (PRTs). He also called for procuring patrolling and monitoring equipment like vehicles and camera traps using funds from the district mining fund and the district planning and development councils. He also suggested training doctors at public healthcare centres (PHCs) to treat tiger attack victims. On September 18, farmer Chandrakant Ingle from Parsheoni tehsil, who was attacked by a tiger and suffered huge blood loss, was referred to Nagpur as he did not get proper treatment at the PHC.

The minister asked for fresh calculation of the carrying capacity of the reserve and identifying tigers that are unable to hunt. He asked further for AI-based monitoring and illuminating dark patches in the buffer and providing buses to school children in problem areas.

Wildlife experts have however flayed the idea of fencing the reserve. They have pointed out that a similar attempt in Pilibhit TR in 2019-20 was unsuccessful and had failed to curb conflict. Also, as per NTCA guidelines,

fencing is not advisable as it blocks the free movement of wild animals. In the long term, it will lead to inbreeding and infighting between big carnivores.

In the meantime, Ramtek MP Shyamkumar Barve, Nagpur Zilla Parishad members Shantabai Kumre and Harish Uikey, and sarpanches from Ramtek and Parsheoni tehsils boycotted the meeting as they wanted the minister to hold the meeting at Deolapar, where the tribals from most of the villages on the fringes of PTR have launched a chain-hunger strike since September 22, raising various demands.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Mungantiwar calls for fencing Pench reserve', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 25/09/2024.

### **SBWL approves Durgapur open cast mine in tiger corridor in Chandrapur**



The State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has given sanction to Western Coalfield Limited's (WCL) Durgapur open cast mine in a tiger corridor in Chandrapur. The state government had on June 19 sent a recommendation to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for diverting 80.77 ha of reserve forest land for renewal of the mining lease under Van Adhiniyam, 1980 in compartment numbers 400 & 401 of Chandrapur Forest Division.

As the project site is located 12.25 km from Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and falls in the buffer zone and the tiger corridor connecting Tadoba-Tipeshwar-Kawal, obtaining wildlife clearance was mandatory. Of the targeted 15.20 MT, WCL

has already mined 7.20 MT during the period 2005-2013. WCL has sought the extension to mine the rest of the 8 MT.

The 23rd SBWL meeting was called ahead of assembly polls, reportedly, to grant immediate clearance to the project. There were, reportedly, standing instructions not to oppose the project. The principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) recommended the project subject to wildlife mitigation measures from the Wildlife Institute of India and asked the WCL to deposit Rs. 91 lakh (2%) of the Rs. 45.51 crore project cost with Tadoba Foundation for wildlife conservation.

Environmental activists say that the project will cause huge damage as it involves felling of trees and huge bamboo clusters. Further, they have pointed out that the proposed forest land is a tiger habitat and falls in the corridor connecting Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary and further to Indravati TR.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Coal Over Conservation: State Wildlife Board Okays Mining in Chandrapur Tiger Corridor', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 27/08/2024.

## **ODISHA**

### **Special Tiger Protection Force for Satkosia TR before bringing in tigers from Maharashtra**

The Odisha government has set up a Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) for Satkosia Tiger Reserve (TR). This is partly in preparation for the plan to relocate 15 tigers from the Tadoba Andhari TR in Maharashtra to Satkosia in five years in phases. Satkosia has no tigers currently. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) visited the area and has set 15 conditions for the Odisha government to comply with before translocating the big cats.

Former army officials have been roped in for the STPF. Prior to the arrival of the

tigers, the STPF personnel will start working towards the protection of other wild animals. They will be given technical and infrastructural support to keep a round-the-clock vigil in Satkosia. They will be assisted by the forest department officials and locals from the adjoining villages. Sniffer dogs will also be deployed to assist the STPF. The members will carry out targeted operations to deal with the poachers and they will also build up their ground intelligence.

Earlier, the state government's bid to translocate two tigers from Madhya Pradesh (MP) to STR in 2018 was unsuccessful. While a tiger named Mahavir was killed after it got trapped in snares, another big cat named Sundari was sent back to MP after being kept in an enclosure for 28 months in STR (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVI, No. 1, and Vol. XXIV, Nos. 6 & 5).

Source: Subhashish Mohanty. 'Special force for tiger protection: Odisha govt ropes in ex-army officials for Satkosia reserve', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com), 08/09/2024.

## RAJASTHAN

### **FD gears up to relocate 12,127 families from within TRs**

The Rajasthan Forest Department (FD) is preparing to relocate 12,127 families living within tiger reserves (TRs). This follows the recent directive from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) urging 19 tigers states in the country including Rajasthan, to prioritise the relocation of villagers residing in core zones of TRs.

The matter was discussed in a meeting held in Alwar in the first week of September that was chaired by the Union environment minister, Bhupender Yadav.

The chief secretary and the additional chief secretary (ACS) of the FD also convened a meeting to discuss ways to expedite the village relocation process. A senior forest official from Sariska Tiger Reserve (TR), who *Protected Area Update* Vol. XXX, No. 5

attended the meeting, said the discussions included increasing cash compensation and offering land packages. A study of the compensation packages provided in other states will also be conducted as the current monetary compensation of Rs. 15 lakh is not accepted by many villagers and needs to be increased. It was also suggested that while this compensation is fixed by the Centre, the state can also contribute and encourage people to relocate.

Another official highlighted the disparity in land values between forest areas and land outside the TRs. The officer said that it has been conveyed to the authorities that if the State or Centre wants to prioritise the relocation project, it should be treated similarly to National Highway Authority of India projects, where timely and fair compensation is provided to landowners to ensure the project's completion. A committee should be constituted including district administration officials, which can allocate land.

While the Ranthambore TR has largely resolved its village relocation issues, the State's priority now shifts to moving villages from other tiger reserves in the state.

A Sariska Tiger Foundation representative said that the tiger population in Sariska TR has increased to 43. If the villagers are not relocated, these tigers will move out of the TR in search of new territories. Already, two young male tigers have left the TR. If adequate compensation is provided, people will move, as many are already living in difficult conditions.

A senior official added that while civil society in other States are criticising the relocation directions, claiming it could be among the largest displacements ever for wildlife conservation, the situation in Rajasthan is different. He said that public representatives and villagers are voluntarily coming forward to move outside the TRs to improve their living conditions after an increase in the compensation package. There are many examples of successful relocations,

such as in Girdharpura in Mukundra Hills TR and one in the proposed Kumbhalgarh TR.

According to NTCA data, out of 15,045 families residing inside TRs in Rajasthan, 2,918 have been relocated since the inception of Project Tiger in 1973.

Source: 'Over 12k families in Raj await relocation from tiger reserves', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 08/09/2024.

### **HC directs relocation of tribal hamlet from Kumbhalgarh WLS**

In an order passed in July, the Rajasthan High Court (HC)'s principal seat in Jodhpur has directed the state to relocate the tribal hamlet of Kharni Tokri from within the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The relocation has been necessitated by the fact that the village is situated deep within the WLS, depriving the residents of basic amenities such as roads, electricity, and water. Despite previous representations from the villagers requesting to be moved out, the forest department had not addressed their concerns. The HC directed that the relocation process be completed within three months.

Additionally, the State Legal Aid Authority has been asked to inform people of Kumbhalgarh and surrounding tribal areas about the relocation and related schemes meant for them.

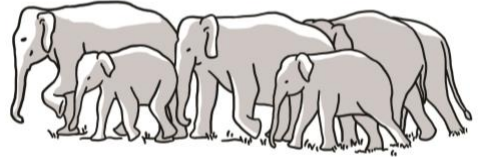
The small hamlet has around 25 houses under the jurisdiction of Ghanerao gram panchayat in Pali district. Half of the families in the hamlet have sought relocation due to lack of amenities and possibilities of human wildlife conflict.

In August 2023, Kumbhalgarh received in-principle approval to be declared as a tiger reserve. The National Tiger Conservation Authority endorsed the proposal on August 4, 2023 and Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change too has granted preliminary approval.

Source: 'First time in Raj, HC orders shifting of tribal hamlet', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 30/07/2024.

### **TAMIL NADU**

### **Madras HC to hear petition on demolition of 35 resorts in Sigur elephant corridor**



The Madras High Court (HC) has agreed to hear a petition for the demolition of 35 tourism resorts in the Sigur elephant corridor. A bench of the HC had noted that since the Supreme Court had appointed the Sigur Plateau Elephant Inquiry Committee, both the petitioners against the demolition and the state government must seek clarification from the apex court on whether a lower court can accept the petition challenging the order. The committee led by Justice K Venkatraman, appointed by the Supreme Court, had ordered the demolition of the resorts in the disrupted corridor.

Though Acting Chief Justice D. Krishna Kumar advised the resort owners to approach the Supreme Court (SC), the state government argued that the HC constituted forest bench could decide on the issue after considering all aspects.

The corridor, which once used to facilitate the cross-forest movement of about 6,300 Asian elephants across three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, has been significantly degraded in recent years due to the actions of local tourism players. Elephants from Nilambur and Wayanad forests in Kerala, Bandipur and Nagarhole forest reserves in Karnataka and Mudumalai and Sathyamangalam forests in Tamil Nadu use the Sigur plateau because it is the only flat route available for large herds between the steep

slopes of Nilgiris and the Moyar gorge. The corridor is also used by other animals such as tigers. It is also a natural habitat for the largest population of three critically endangered species of vultures in southern India. The entire area is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, spread across 5,000 sq km and the order to demolish the resorts is part of the larger efforts to revive the corridor.

The notice to the resorts mentioned that the buildings were built without proper permissions, violating sections 56 and 57 of the Tamil Nadu Town and Country Planning Act, 1971. Following these orders from the Supreme Court, the resorts have been locked and sealed since 2018.

The Wildlife Trust of India, with support from Project Elephant under the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, had identified four corridors in the Sigur Plateau: (i) Avarahalla – Sigur, (ii) Kalhatti – Sigur, (iii) Moyar – Avarahalla, and (iv) Kalmalai – Singara-Avarahalla. These four corridors were later consolidated into a single entity called the Sigur Elephant Corridor.

The Sigur Corridor Inquiry Committee had reported that illegal resorts have built ‘illegal structures’ near reserve forests and streams regularly used by elephants. Movement of elephants in important parts of the corridor was also inhibited by the putting up electric fences. The committee has also cautioned that if the migratory corridors of the elephants are not preserved, their habitats will become fragmented, which could ultimately lead to the extinction of the elephant population.

The resort owners had argued that some parts of the elephant corridor were not actual elephant habitats. However, the committee pointed out that construction activities by resort owners and installation of electric fencing restricted access which is why the elephants were not seen in those areas.

Forest officials say various scientific methods, including landscape genetics, have confirmed the significance of the areas between Masinagudi, Bokkapuram, and

Mavanallah for animal migration. This is particularly important for the elephants within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Forest Department officials also underlined that the SC's validation of the committee's findings will protect the Sigur corridor for future generations. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, Nos. 6 & 5; Vol. XXVI, No. 6 and Vol. XXIV, No. 5).

Source: KA Shaji. 'Long march to restoring Sigur elephant corridor reaches crucial milestone; Madras HC to hear petition on demolition of 35 tourism resorts', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 26/09/2024

## TELANGANA

### Four villages to be relocated from core of Amrabad TR

In a decision made on 20th August, the Telangana government has agreed to relocate four villages from within the core area of the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR). The formal proposal will now be forwarded to the National Tiger Conservation Authority for its approval.

The four villages — Sarlapally, Kudichintala Bailu, Thatigundal Penta, and Kollampenta — have a total of 417 families. 160 of these families have opted for a one-time payment of Rs.15 lakh each, while 257 families have opted for a relocation and rehabilitation package.

The latter option includes giving each family two ha of agricultural land, land for a house, construction of the house, and development of all community amenities including irrigation for the agricultural land, drinking water supply, sanitation, provision of electricity and communication facilities, construction of a community centre and religious places of worship and burial or cremation grounds.

The principal chief conservator of forest and head of forest force of the state informed that once the relocation is completed,

568 ha of prime habitat for the tigers inside the core area of the reserve, will become free of human habitation. The relocation is expected to cost around Rs. 75 crore.

Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society (Hyticos), an NGO, which was involved in the resettlement and rehabilitation project since its beginning in 2013, said that every social safeguard has been considered and included to ensure that the villagers who have agreed for the relocation, will not face any problems later.

As per the last official count of tigers in 2022, the TR has 20 tigers.

Source: Balu Pulipaka. 'Government Okays Relocation of 4 Villages from Within Amrabad Tiger Reserve', [www.deccanchronicle.com](http://www.deccanchronicle.com), 21/08/2024.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### **Amangarh TR struggles to accommodate increasing tigers; grapples with staff shortage**

The tiger population at Amangarh Tiger Reserve (TR) has significantly



increased over the past decade; from 12 in 2012 to 32 in 2024. Originally part of the Corbett National Park, Amangarh became a separate TR in 2012. Efforts are also underway to rename ATR the 'New Corbett Tiger Reserve' alongside various development plans.

Wild animal numbers, tigers included, have flourished here due to a determined crackdown on poaching. A significant breakthrough occurred in Bijnor in 2013 when 11 poachers were arrested. Another significant arrest came in 2023 when Mishram Jakhad, an 81-year-old kingpin, was apprehended for his role in the trade of tiger parts. According to a former additional director of the Wildlife

Crime Control Bureau, Jakhad was a former field officer with the Wildlife Protection Society of India, and he controlled poaching networks across the country. He was also well connected with other cartels. Since then, strict enforcement has curbed poaching activities.

Amangarh is however said to be getting overcrowded, leading to conflicts between tigers and leopards. The overcrowding has pushed leopards out of the reserve and into nearby sugarcane fields, where they frequently encounter local farmers. A Keharipur villager pointed out that 28 people have died in leopard attacks since last year and it will be a disaster if tigers also start coming to their fields.

While the reserve faces these challenges, the forest department (FD) is also grappling with a staff shortage. The Bijnor division is operating with only 45% of its sanctioned staff, making it challenging to manage the rising tiger population and increasing human wildlife encounters. The reserve has 106 sanctioned posts, 56 of which are vacant; there are only five rangers instead of the required 12. This is said to have impacted not only wildlife monitoring but also efforts to prevent illegal encroachments.

One proposed solution is expanding the reserve by designating more forest land to ease the territorial pressure on the tigers. Another crucial measure involves relocating the Van Gujjar community from within the reserve. There are 131 Van Gujjar families living here and their 3,200 heads of livestock graze on land meant for wild herbivores, disrupting the natural food chain and contributing to human wildlife conflict, said a forest official

To tackle the financial challenges, the FD opened ATR to tourists in 2022, aiming to boost revenue and create employment opportunities for local communities. However, the Bijnor DFO said that eco-tourism must be carefully managed to prevent damage to the fragile ecosystem.



Source: Harveer Dabas. ‘Amangarh: India’s ‘densest’ tiger reserve faces new challenges’, [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 07/09/2024.

## NATIONAL NEWS

### **In first post-election meeting SC-NBWL clears many projects in WLSs, NPs, tiger corridors**

In its first post-election meeting held in July after a gap of five months, the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) cleared a number of projects including a transmission line in the Little Rann of Kutch, a controversial transmission line project in Goa’s Mollem National Park (NP) as well as a clutch of infrastructure projects in tiger corridors of central India.

The SC-NBWL considered 121 projects across 12 states. Despite intense protests against deforestation in Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Mollem NP, the NBWL conditionally cleared the 400 kV transmission line on 27 ha of forest. The conditions laid include the project work should not commence unless the proposal on the Karnataka side is recommended by the board and transmission pillars should be guarded so that wild animals do not have contact with them. It also asked the project proponent to study the impact of transmission lines on biodiversity and wildlife and ensure that the sanctity of the habitat is not disturbed.

Goa’s citizens have been protesting the transmission line as well as the proposal for doubling a railway line and widening a highway passing through the WLS and the NP under the ‘Save Mollem’ banner. The transmission line project will involve felling of 7,881 trees. The matter was also heard by the Supreme Court and in April 2022 it had ordered that the transmission line should be

aligned with an existing 110 kV corridor line to reduce the extent of deforestation (see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3 & 2).

Two other approvals for transmission line projects in Gujarat were also approved. One was in the Kutch Desert WLS in the Great Rann of Kutch and another in the Wild Ass WLS in Little Rann of Kutch over 100 ha. The proposal in the Wild Ass Sanctuary was for a 765 kV D/C Lakadia–Ahmedabad transmission line to evacuate power from the 4.5 gigawatts Khavda renewable energy zone in Surendranagar district. The NBWL said that work on the project would have to implement mitigation measures as given by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

The meeting also approved widening of the National Highway 46 between Itarsi and Betul through the tiger corridor connecting the Satpura and Melghat Tiger Reserves. The project will use 101 ha of forest land and approval was granted with the condition that the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will build animal passages consisting of underpasses and overpasses. Further, the NBWL also asked for a site inspection to be carried out by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Wildlife Institute of India, and environment ministry officials to examine the animal passage plans and check if there are any violations by NHAI.

The SC-NBWL also asked Madhya Pradesh’s tourism department to take action against those responsible for carrying out constructions in Son Gharial WLS and adjacent tiger corridors without permits.

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. ‘In first post-election meeting, wildlife board clears transmission lines in Gujarat’s flamingo habitat, Goa’s Mollem forest’, [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 10/09/2024.

## **NTCA's advisory on relocation of people from TRs violates domestic & international laws: activists**

About 150 people including rights activists and representatives of different organisations demanded on 5th September that the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) take back its June 19 advisory which asked States to submit time-bound plans on relocation of people from tiger reserves (TRs). They made a submission to this effect to the Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav that was also copied to the Project Tiger chief and NTCA member secretary Gobind Sagar Bharadwaj (See <https://kalpavriksh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Statement-Final.pdf>).

The submission said that the rights and role of local and indigenous communities are integral to any kind of sustainable and just model of conservation, and is duly recognized in both domestic and international laws. The step taken by NTCA and these relocation orders are in complete violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (2006) (WLPA), the Forest Rights Act 2006, the right to fair compensation and transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARRA) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. They pointed out that section 38(O) of the WLPA prohibits NTCA from issuing any directions that will interfere with or affect the rights of the local people especially, scheduled tribes (STs).

The groups demanded that an independent committee should review and report on the compliance of laws relating to resettlement and rehabilitation of people from TRs and that NTCA issue another advisory to State authorities.

The NTCA, in its letter dated June 19, 2024 sent to 19 tiger habitat States, mentioned that of the 89,808 families living in 848 villages inside the critical tiger habitats or the core area of 53 TRs across India, 257 villages with 25,007 families have already been

relocated since the inception of the Project Tiger. Now 591 villages with 64,801 families are remaining inside the notified cores. Further, the NTCA asked States to expedite the relocation process for these 591 villages by taking up relocation on priority basis and framing a timeline for the same.

The submission said that inviolate areas have to be created without affecting the rights of the STs or other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs). The phrase “inviolate areas” has to be read with the provisions on protecting rights of STs and OTFDs and relocations must be ‘voluntary’ and on ‘mutually agreed terms and conditions’. It noted further that the NTCA continues to offer a monetary compensation of Rs. 15 lakh as the only monetary compensation for the relocation and rehabilitation package by the central government. This constitutes a meagre portion of acquiring and compensating their rights, and does not equate to the total compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation as required by the LARRA.

They warned that such a move would result in conflicts between State authorities and the STs and OTFDs living within the TRs. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 4 and accompanying stories in this issue)



Source: Jayashree Nandi. ‘Experts raise concern as NTCA calls for relocation of villages’, [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 08/09/2024. Himanshu Nitnaware. ‘Conservationists demand NTCA to withdraw relocation of forest-dwelling communities from tiger

reserves', [www.downtoearth.org.in](http://www.downtoearth.org.in), 06/09/2024.

Nikhil Ghanekar. 'Roll back advisory on village relocation from tiger reserves, rights groups tell Centre', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 06/09/2024.

## OBITUARY

### The Vulture aficionado - Robert Grubh

I first met Dr. Robert Grubh when I joined the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in the year 1984 as a junior field biologist. This was after my post graduate studies from the Bombay University. The director/ curator Mr. J.C. Daniel took me to meet him, and I was assigned to the 'Bird Hazard to the Aircraft' project funded by the Aeronautical Research and Development Board (ARDB).

The next few days went off in a haze. I was to pass an ornithology test - basically know the order and families, read the systematic index of families and species in each. I came with a marine biology background and though birds were an integral part of my life, I had not studied systematics in college. I poured over pages of the *Pictorial Guide* and the *Book of Indian Birds* and was sent, in between, to the bird room to check out the bird collections and get introduced to the denizens there.

After a few days I probably passed my ornithological tests and thereon began my introduction to the vultures of the world-both old world and the new. I was asked to identify the species from the remnants of bird hits from both civilian and air force aircraft. An exercise, that both Dr. Grubh and Salim Ali, and I myself enjoyed, was when all three of us could agree from the microphotography slides. On days when the specimens and its distribution range did not coincide, it was a herculean task, with several trips to the bird room with them in tow.

Dr. Grubh was a hard task master and had no tolerance for mediocrity. He was an encyclopaedia when it came to vultures and his enthusiasm when talking about these scavengers was incredible and infectious. He could enthuse the most uninterested of individuals. He was also hugely innovative where his ornithology was concerned and this was an indication of his virtuosity.

He had studied the vultures in the Gir National Park for his doctoral programme and wanted to now study their migratory movement from there. So, we embarked on a vulture ringing programme in Gir after obtaining the requisite permits. There were no vulture capturing techniques for tagging so we set out to design one! After much deliberation and local jugaad, we designed a contraption of strong netting that would ensnare the vultures on a dead cow/buffalo. After waiting for days in the scorching sun, the vultures finally descended from the skies and were wary of going to the carcass. Finally, when they did, we captured 36 of them and put shoulder pads that had been designed in Bombay, I saw the man in action then - tireless, enthused about this vulture capture and finally happy with the outcome. (I remember one pesky vulture nipping a deep wound in one of the team members palms).

Dr. Grubh, was an equal opportunity person. Once I asked why I couldn't visit air force stations when my male colleagues would be whizzing in and out as they pleased. He said he was uncertain about this archaic policy and also something he had not put much thought to. With that he sent me to study vulture and kite movements at the Juhu Aerodrome and at the ATC of the Santacruz Airport. That's where I learnt how air traffic is managed and how a bird hit is dealt with.

Dr. Grubh was a great teacher and also an eager one too. I learnt a lot just looking at the way he handled his work. His innovative spirit was contagious and paved the way for the first policies for to deal with bird hazards to aircrafts at the ARDB.

He loved waterbodies, lilies, water plants and fishes. He had made a small water pond in his balcony in his home in Thane. His home was a virtual zoo, with rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters. His children, Archis and Kumudan, were initiated into the love of the wild and small creatures from early on. Shailaja, his wife and my dear colleague at the BNHS was the environment education in charge at the BNHS.

Many years after Dr. Grubh retired from the BNHS, he returned to his roots in Kanyakumari to set up The Institute for Restoration of Natural Environment. He and

Shailaja continued to do good work. His passing away brings back myriad memories of the personality he was. He was truly a pathbreaker and someone I will miss a lot.

- **Lima Rosalind** is a conservation biologist and environment educator and who has worked on interpretation of natural and cultural heritage sites. She is co-founder of Green Future Foundation, a Section 8 company and also a permaculture farmer. Dr Robert Grubh was her first boss at the BNHS - for the period 1984-85. Email: [limarosalind77@gmail.com](mailto:limarosalind77@gmail.com)

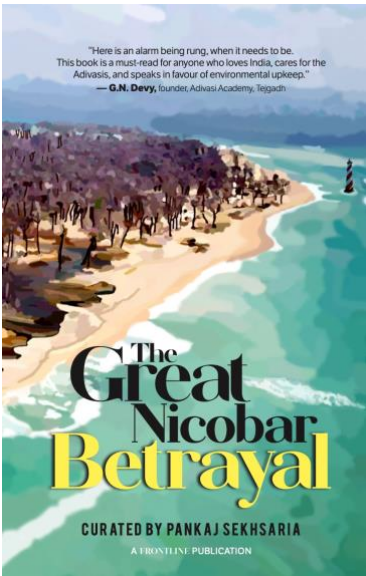


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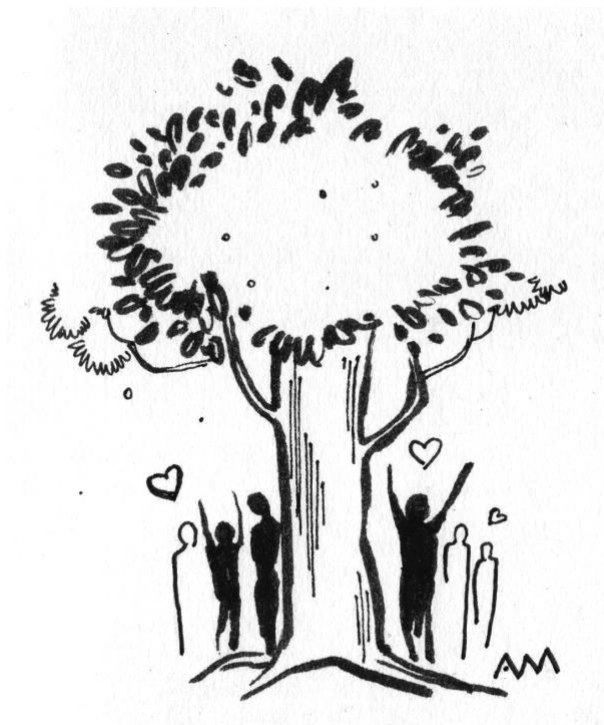
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Articles by Pankaj Sekhsaria, Aathira Perinchery, Janki Andharia, V Ramesh & Ravinder Dhiman, B Chaudhari, Ishika Ramakrishna, Uday Mondal, Mahi Mankeshwar, Shrishtee Bajpai, S Harikrishnan, Manish Chandi, Ajay Saini, and Norma Alvares. Foreword by: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

**Endorsement:** "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

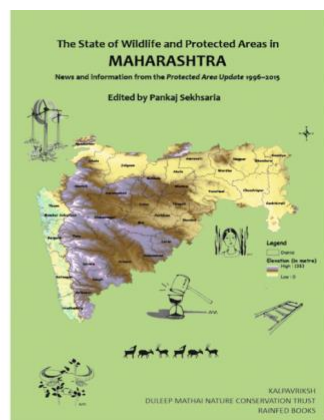
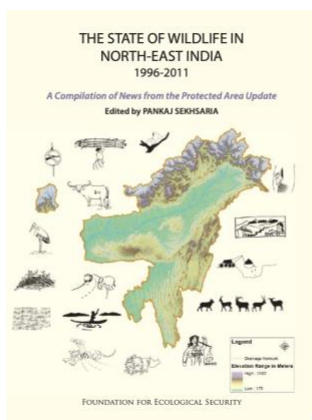
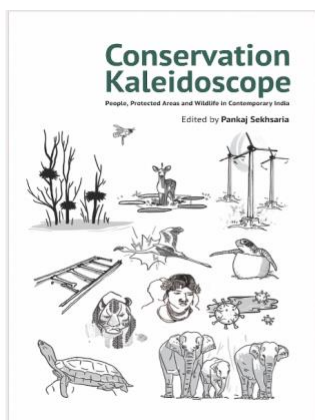


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### BOOKS FROM THE PA UPDATE

- 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

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## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE

### GUJARAT

#### **Land for land, says Kutch WLS inspection team**

A three-member expert inspection team comprising Dr M K Ranjitsinh, Mr Divyabhanusinh Chavda and Dr Asad Rahmani has recommended that land belonging to the Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary could be used for construction of the Narmada canal only when the forest department (FD) is handed over an equal amount of 5,197 ha of land in exchange. Construction of the Kutch Branch Canal is going on but work on a 13.3 km stretch that passes through the sanctuary has been kept in abeyance.

The inspection team report has also stated that local communities, whose members the team had met, want water and opportunities of work, which would be provided by the canal construction. The team has also suggested that 5% of the cost of the canal's construction through the sanctuary should be spent on habitat improvement and wildlife conservation in the sanctuary.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik, 'Compensate for Kutch Desert Wildlife Sanctuary land: Experts', *The Times of India*, 12/08/14.

### RAJASTHAN

#### **State Government may cancel solar power project near Sambhar lake**

The Rajasthan government has indicated that it might cancel the 4,000-Mw solar ultra mega power project (UMPP) that was planned to come up near the Sambhar Lake (*PA Update* Vol. XX, No. 4). The state government has cited the ecological and environmental impact that the plant could have. It has also written to the Centre that the area under consideration is a

prime site for migratory birds and these would be affected if a power plant or transmission line is raised there. It has been suggested by analysts, however, that there were political reasons too, as the project was one of the earlier United Progressive Alliance-II government.

The project, aimed at a massive scaling up of solar power, was launched in September last year, and was to have been set up and run by a joint venture of public sector units - Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd, Power Grid Corporation of India, Solar Energy Corporation of India, Hindustan Salts Limited and Rajasthan Electronics and Instruments Limited. The estimated cost of the project was Rs 7,500 crore. 23,000 acres of land around the lake was to be used for the project of which only 5,000 acres, according to an official of the Union ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), was ecologically sensitive. Around 18,000 acres were to be provided by Hindustan Salts as its equity in the project.

The MNRE is involved in this project through its subsidiary, the Solar Energy Corporation of India, and is now looking for new land for this project. The government, in the Union Budget this year, had announced the setting up of four solar UMPPs across the country, including one in Rajasthan. The state, in fact, was the first to announce a solar UMPP.

Source: Shreya Jai. 'Rajasthan to clip 4,000-Mw solar project to save birds', *Business Standard*, 19/08/14.



## PERSPECTIVE

### Co-existence between humans and wildlife - is it possible?

Human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) are becoming more prominent in rural and urban areas. Having worked in Kanha Tiger Reserve (TR) for four years, I got to understand the rural situation more deeply. Working with the villagers I realized that the number of families have increased over the years and this increase has necessitated the need for more land and livestock. Due to this, there is pressure on forest land to be converted into agricultural land. This has shrunk the green spaces for not just its wild inhabitants but also for livestock.

Livestock left inside the forest for grazing affects the wild herbivores' feeding grounds. While herbivores are diminishing from the forest, livestock are becoming easy prey for the predators. Livestock holds an economical and emotional value for the villagers and any harm caused to them angers villagers even though they are compensated for the loss. I have heard the villagers angrily shouting at the forest guards, "अपने जानवर को लेके जाओ, हमारा नुकसान करते हैं" (Take your animals away, they are causing us damage).

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department gives compensation to the villagers for the livestock they lose. As this compensation takes a month to get sanctioned, The Corbett Foundation (TCF) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) started an intervention under the program Interim Relief Scheme. In this intervention, the villagers were compensated by providing them Rs. 2000 within a week. This gave relief to the villagers till they got their compensation from the government. These interventions have stopped all retaliatory killings as per the data collected.

Apart from this there are many problems associated with HWC but, are there any solutions to this? After working up close with villagers in Kanha, there seem to be many viable solutions: villagers can start to stall feed

livestock by growing green fodder in their fields, they can use rain water harvesting for providing water for the growing green fodder as well as seasonal vegetables in their field and can sell vegetables in the market thus creating an alternative livelihood for themselves. Invasive plant species like *Lantana* needs to be cleared from the periphery of the villages. This won't allow the predators hiding spaces near the village areas.

Unfortunately however, I have noticed that in spite of all the efforts taken by institutions, it is human nature and "change is difficult to accept". If it wasn't for the forest laws, the protected forest areas would have been blown up in smoke!

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