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Protected Area Update

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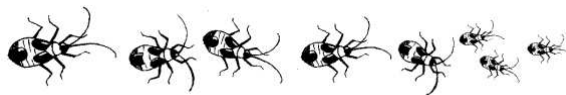
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EDITORIAL

Where is the tiger headed? Where is tiger conservation headed?

If one was to go by a particular set of statistics, a certain historical narrative and frames of understanding conservation, the answer to the questions in the title above are straight forward. Tiger numbers are up and increasing, area under protection is also increasing steadily and tiger conservation in India is indeed one of those rare conservation success stories. Policies are headed in the right direction and now that we have come this far, things can only get better.

While some of this cannot be disputed, the picture from the ground (and ground-up) is far more complex if not outright messy. The *PA Update* forces this realisation on a regular basis and the current issue does the same again. The first thing this particular issue of the newsletter foregrounds (again!) is our continued tiger obsession - both in conservation practice and in the media. 70% of the stories this time, for instance, are about tigers and tiger reserves (TRs). If we can consider the *PA Update* to be a representative sample of the universe of conservation related reporting, it shows how everything else gets overshadowed by the prominence we give to the tiger. This cannot be a healthy thing and a serious effort is needed to understand and perhaps also correct this.

But there is also the more interesting dimension of what these stories are about - their content. At one level the tiger appears to be headed everywhere (literally!) - moving constantly on its own as suggested by 'first' sighting reports from Andhra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and even Bhutan. They are also moving (being moved actually) via massive human intervention - in Jharkhand, in Madhya Pradesh, in Maharashtra, in Odisha, in Uttarakhand. There are almost as many tiger translocation programs now as there are tiger

bearing states in the country. Tiger translocation is not just the flavour of the day, it has become the fashion of the conservation season that has now extended for a pretty long time. And again, while some of the successes cannot be denied, one cannot also help but ask what this is achieving, if there is any evaluation in terms of financial costs, human implications, conservation success and indeed long term viability?

These questions are particularly relevant when one sees the overall thrust of the development paradigm and whittling down of protection via constant changes in the policy and legal frameworks. What long term hope can we really have when an increase, both in the number of environmental and wildlife clearances and the speed at which they are granted, is highlighted as one of the achievements of governance? 12,000 environment clearances, for instance, were granted in 2022 alone - a huge increase from the clearances granted in 2018. A report published in October 2023 by scroll.in also noted that the work of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) was now increasingly characterised by fewer discussions and faster clearances. This has been starkly evident in the clearance granted in recent times to massive projects in sensitive habitats be it Great Nicobar Island, or Hasdeo Arand in Chhattisgarh. Even 'star' tiger habitats such as the Corbett TR in Uttarakhand, Panna TR in Madhya Pradesh and Dibang in Arunachal Pradesh are not safe from big projects.

And then we have the latest move where the NTCA has asked for relocation plans of nearly 600 villages and lakhs of people from within core areas of TRs. This is in violation of their traditional rights, of existing legal frameworks and a complete disregard of the social and economic implications for the affected communities. How can local communities ever become partners in conversation if this is the approach? While the rhetoric is of voluntary relocation and community involvement in conservation, it is the fortress and exclusionary model of

conservation that continues unabated and ruthless.

This is as much a reality of conservation as are increased tiger numbers, happy stories of natural dispersal, successful translocation of tigers and indeed the sacrificing of natural India at the altar of economic development.

If we think we know where tiger conservation is headed, it might help to pause and look around. We might be surprised because there are perhaps more reasons to worry and be concerned about than we might care to believe.

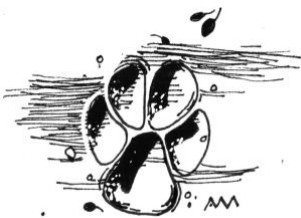
NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Tiger presence confirmed in Nellore district; said to have moved from Nagarjunsagar Srisailem TR

Forest department (FD) officials have confirmed the presence of a male tiger in the Veligonda forest area in Nellore district. The tiger is believed to have migrated to Veligonda from the Nallamala forest of Prakasam district. Within a week of the first sighting another tiger was seen on the highway near Nellore. This tiger has been identified as ID-106 of Atmakur division in Kurnool. The tiger was seen entering Penchalakona forest in Nellore district from Nallamala via Badvel of YSR district. These movements and sightings are believed to be an outcome of a steep increase in tiger numbers in the Nagarajunsagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve (TR).

Forest officials were put on high alert after a driver reported a tiger attack on a car along the national highway in the



Padamatinaidupalle area on June 17. While authorities maintain that a tiger was not responsible for the incident, they have confirmed the presence of male tiger pugmarks in the vicinity of the accident site. Hair samples collected from the scene have been sent to a laboratory in Srisailem for analysis.

The movement of a male tiger was also captured by cameras in various locations, including Marripadu. A forest official informed that cameras captured footage of a female tiger and another tiger roaming in the area on 23 June around 2 pm. Another tigress has also been reported from Veligonda forest areas of Udayagiri, Atmakur, and Rapur for the past two years.

Officials said that they have intensified vigilance and implemented strict measures to prevent any human-wildlife conflict incidents. They are taking steps to monitor tiger movements and have conducted awareness programmes for residents of nearby villages, warning them not to venture alone into the forest for cattle grazing.

Source: D Surendra Kumar. 'Forest officials confirm presence of two tigers in Veligonda, Andhra', www.newindianexpress.com, 06/07/2024.

Samdani MN. 'More number of tigers entering Andhra borders, latest spotted in Nallamala forest', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/07/2024.

DELHI

Just 103 of 7,800 ha of Ridge notified as reserve forest: SC expresses concern

The Supreme Court (SC) recently expressed its concern on the administrative lethargy in protecting the 'lungs of Delhi'. The observation was made by a bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta on being informed that though in May 1994 the Ridge forest area

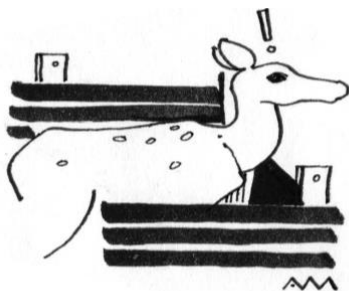
was pegged at 7,784 ha, till date only 103 ha have been notified as reserve forest.

Amicus Curiae K Parameshwar presented the Central Empowered Committee's (CEC) status report on Delhi Ridge, which comprises of the northern Ridge (87 ha), central Ridge (864 ha), southern central Ridge (Mehrauli 626 ha) and southern Ridge 6,200 ha). He noted that the progress of settlements under the Indian Forest Act after issuance of Section 4 notification way back in 1994 was almost nil. He added that there had been many judicial interventions but no progress had been seen in the matter. The Committee also said that around 6,626 ha of Ridge comes under the ambit of Delhi government's forest department and as per official figures 309 ha, or 5%, is under encroachment. It was noted further that the actual encroachment was likely to be much higher.

Source: 'Just 103 of 7800 ha of Ridge notified as reserve forest. 'Shocking state of affairs', says SC', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/05/2024.

GUJARAT

FD begins deer translocation from Gir to Barda WLS; move aimed at augmenting lion prey base



The Gujarat Forest Department (FD) has started translocating spotted deer and sambar from Gir to the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in a move to augment the prey base for the lions there. 23 spotted deer were moved in

June in a process that will continue over the next few months.

The translocation comes over a year after a male lion made his way to Barda from Gir in January 2023 (*PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 1). It marked the return of lions to Barda after the lions vanished from here 143 years ago, stated a press release issued by the FD. Five other lions also subsequently moved from Gir taking the total in Barda to six.

Barda WLS is approximately 100 km from the Gir landscape and the spotted deer population is estimated to be 190 animals. The Gir landscape that includes the Gir National Park and WLS, Girnar, Paniya, and Mitiyala WLSs and revenue areas of Junagadh, Gir Somnath, Amreli and Bhavnagar districts in Saurashtra region is estimated to have over 90,000 spotted deer.

Barda WLS has one breeding centre for spotted deer and two for sambar. However, the population of spotted deer needs to be augmented here. Therefore, the FD has taken up the translocation, said the chief conservator of forests (CCF) of Junagadh wildlife circle.

About a decade ago the FD had also set up an Asiatic lion gene pool centre in the Barda WLS. The centre now has a few lions in captivity. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XIII, No. 2)

Source: Gopal B Kateshiya. 'As lions make Barda sanctuary their second home, Gujarat forest dept starts translocating deer from Gir to Porbandar', www.indianexpress.com, 20/06/2024.

JHARKHAND

Palamau TR authorities gear up to bring in tigers from elsewhere

Efforts are underway to relocate at least two tigresses and one tiger from another tiger reserve (TR) to the Palamau TR. The move is aimed at retaining the four tigers which have recently migrated to Palamau.

Ahead of the relocation, the reserve management is ensuring a prey base for the tigers. The field director of the reserve said that all preparations are in place and the management is waiting for the approval of the Central Zoo Authority for shifting 350 prey animals to the soft release centres (SRCs) set up in the TR. Four SRCs have been set up and two more are being prepared. Animals are placed in pre-release cages located close to the site of their eventual release. The SRCs, one each at Baresadh, Lukaiya, Mundu and Dhardharia, are spread over an area of 10 ha.

Reserve authorities have obtained permission from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for shifting spotted deer and sambar. As many as 200 spotted deer from Betla National Park will be shifted to three different SRCs, while another lot of 300 spotted deer and sambar will be brought from the Bhagwan Birsa Biological Park (Birsa Zoo) in Ranchi.

Several check dams have also been constructed to provide drinking water for the animals. Two portable water sprinklers which can sprinkle water within a radius of 50 meters, to retain the greenery at the grasslands in the TR have been installed. Solar water pumps, used for retaining water level in the water bodies, have also been increased from 16 to 37, informed the TR official.

As soon as the animals are moved to SRCs, the TR authorities will relocate at least two tigresses and a tiger with the NTCA's permission.

According to the 2019 and also the latest census reports, there were no tigers in Palamau TR. Spread over an area of about 1,230 sq. km, it was made a TR in 1973 and reportedly, had a good number of tigers, which came down to three in the 2014 census and zero in 2019.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 2)

Source: Mukesh Ranjan. 'Plan to relocate tigresses to Palamau reserve', www.newindianexpress.com, 17/06/2024.

KARNATAKA

FD urged to not open Sooji Gudda and Banagarapalke for trekking

A section of locals, with the support of environmentalists, have urged the forest department (FD) not to open Sooji Gudda peak and Banagarapalke Falls for trekking. They have pointed out that these areas are part of the biodiversity hotspot in the Western Ghats and also part of an elephant corridor. Organisations including Hasira Tapassu, Mundaje, and Sahyadri Sanchaya, Mangaluru, requested the deputy conservator of forests (DCF) of Kudremukh Wildlife Division to halt these plans.

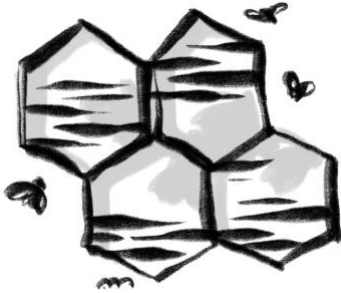
In a letter sent to the principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) and the chief wildlife warden, they have raised several critical questions regarding the accountability for the plastic waste and broken glass bottles left behind by tourists, impacts of the waste on wild animals, and the existence of homestays within one km of the boundary.

The DCF said that a feasibility study is currently being conducted to explore the possibility of opening a trekking route at Banagarapalke. He claimed that trekking is the most eco-friendly activity, that the FD's approach is regulated, and trekking to Kudremukh and Nethravati was opened only after studying the carrying capacity. Bookings are made through an online portal, and trekkers are scrutinised for plastic items, which are collected when they return. Their deposit is returned only when they bring back the plastic.

Further, the DCF said that Kudremukh and Nethravati are highly sought-after trekking destinations. During the recent extended weekend due to a public holiday, the website recorded 20,000-30,000 hits per day. Despite the huge demand, the FD allowed only 300 people. He also said that though some local villagers are in favour of more trekking to create employment opportunities, the FD has not allowed for the increase.

Source: Deepthi Sanjiv. 'Greens write to forest dept against opening of new trekking locations', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/06/2024.

FD initiates honey production from tiger reserves of Karnataka



The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has initiated a honey production project in different tiger reserves (TRs) in the state by involving over 3000 people from tribal communities. They have been producing 20 to 25 tonnes of honey every year over the past couple of years under the brand name of 'Adavi' or 'Adavi Jhenkara'. The communities involved include the Soligas, Jenu Kurubas and Kunabis, who have traditionally harvested honey from the forests. The FD has now started providing them with the technical support and marketing exposure to help them convert it into a livelihood model.

'Swayam' (Saving Wildlife in Association with Young Aspiring Minds), set up by Kali TR under its Tiger Conservation Foundation, provided youngsters training in apiaries and technical exposure to harvest quality honey. The FD provided them with bee boxes and colonies, regular training from experts, bottling infrastructure and marketing platform. Over the last one year, the FD has trained 250 youngsters after assessing their skills and knowledge of flora. The entire profits from honey sale will be transferred to the tribals, informed a deputy range forest officer, Kumbarwada range of Kali TR.

Similarly, members of mainly the Soliga community have in the Biligiri Ranga

Temple (BRT) TR, formed a cooperative society. Madegowda, a Soliga and currently president of Sri Biligiri Rangaswamy Soligara Samskarana Sangha said that 2,000 members have been trained in beekeeping and provided with financial support to kickstart production. The harvested honey is marketed through the society and profits are transferred to beekeepers in the form of dividends. Besides, the Sangha also has dedicated stores in Bengaluru and Mysuru to market their products.

The FD is also helping the communities to add value to the products. At BRT TR, Soligas have been making candles, soaps, and lip balms using beeswax. These have been accredited by various bureaus and sold online.

Source: Niranjana Kaggere. 'Trained tribals initiate honey revolution in tiger reserves', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/07/2024.

Constitution of SBWL delayed in Karnataka

The constitution of the Karnataka State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has been delayed for almost a year, leading conservationists to accuse the State government of unilaterally taking decisions about projects in protected areas. A standing committee of the SBWL similar to that of the Central government which bypassed the National Board for Wildlife was created in March 2024. It then cleared a few proposals placed before the SBWL.

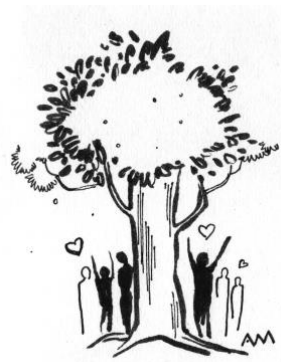
Conservationists have pointed out that the previous SBWL was dissolved eight months ago and there is no news of appointing a new one.

Acknowledging the delay in the constitution of the SBWL, forest minister Eshwar Khandre said the delay had occurred on account of the model code of conduct that was in place due to the general elections.

Source: Niranjan Kaggere. '1 year on, govt dilly-dallies on constituting wildlife board', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 30/06/2024.

KERALA

NGO purchases land in Nilambur ER for 're-wilding'



Kolkata based NGO, Nature Mates Nature Club recently purchased four acres of private land along the forest enclosure in Malappuram's Kurali village, to "re-wild" it, before handing it over to the forest

department (FD). The organisation purchased the land coming under the Sankarankode forest enclosure in the Nilambur Elephant Reserve (ER) and approached the FD with the request to receive and register it in the department's name. The government gave its nod for the project on May 8.

The plan is to shift non-tribal people living or engaged in agriculture inside forest enclosures to non-forest areas. The NGO acquired land from three persons, Afsar, Assainar and Abdul Kareem. The Sankarankode enclosure has 60 acres of land in the possession of non-tribal inhabitants. The stretch is surrounded by new Amarambalam Reserve Forest and is part of the Nilambur ER. It is a forest area having good elephant habitat and active human-animal conflict, said K Vijay Anand, Chief Conservator of Forest (Eastern Circle-Palakkad).

The area is situated in the corridor connecting the Karimpuzha Wildlife Sanctuary, Silent Valley National Park (NP) in Kerala and the Mukurty NP in Tamil Nadu.

In a similar initiative in Wayanad's Thirunelli, another NGO — Wild Life Trust of India — recently purchased private land and transferred it to the FD.

Source: Kerala's thumbs-up to NGO's novel forest conservation initiative, www.newindianexpress.com, 14/05/2024.

Kerala govt. declares human-animal conflict as state-specific disaster

The Kerala government has, in the wake of a recent spurt in attacks on humans by wild animals, declared human-animal conflict as a 'state-specific disaster'. The decision was taken in a meeting held in March where it was also decided to utilise the services of the state disaster management authority in addressing the issue. Committees will be formed at the state, district, and local levels. Their specific roles and responsibilities will be decided after discussions between the Chief Secretary (CS) and Forest Secretary.

The state level committee, to be chaired by the Chief Minister will have the ministers of Forest, Revenue, Local Self Government (LSG) and SC/ST Welfare as members. The CS will be the convener.

Another committee, chaired by the CS, will also be constituted to issue orders and directions at the state level. The panel will have secretaries of Home, Forest, Revenue, LSG, Agriculture, SC/ST Welfare in addition to head of Wildlife Department, principal chief conservator of forests & chief wildlife warden and member secretary of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority.

The minister who is in charge of the district concerned will head the panel that will act as a controlling mechanism at the district level. The panel will direct and oversee all activities related to human-animal conflict at the district level. 'Jagratha Samithis' constituted by local bodies at man-animal conflict prone areas will be in charge at the

local level and will work in coordination with the district level committees concerned.

Appointing the chief wildlife warden as the nodal officer to handle man-animal conflict, setting up a control room at the FD headquarters to monitor wildlife movement and issuing timely alerts to people in man-animal conflict prone areas through WhatsApp groups are other suggestions to mitigate the issue, according to a note issued by the chief minister's office after the cabinet meeting.

More forest watchers will also be deployed on a temporary basis and officials who have expertise in tackling human-animal conflict will be appointed. The head of wildlife department will be tasked with ensuring the speedy disbursement of compensation announced in the wake of wildlife attacks. In addition to Rs. 100 crore allocated to tackle this conflict, an additional Rs. 110 crore will be sanctioned.

It was also decided to convene inter-state coordination committee meetings with officials of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka for coordinating activities related to the issue.

Source: Kerala govt. declares man-animal conflict as state-specific disaster, www.newindianexpress.com, 06/03/2024.

MADHYA PRADESH

Illegal tree-felling depleting forest in tiger corridor on the outskirts of Bhopal city



Activist Rashid Noor Khan has sent fresh letters to the district collector and the divisional forest officer, Bhopal, seeking their intervention to stop tree cutting in

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Chandanpura on the outskirts of Bhopal city. This area is in proximity to Kaliasot-Kerwa dams and part of a 'tiger corridor'.

Khan pointed out that there was a dense forest in the area, which has depleted over a period of time. He contended that construction work had gained momentum in a big way here and that farm houses and resorts were being constructed and trees felled without permission and in violation of the Forest Conservation Act. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) too had asked the forest department (FD) to carry out mapping of the area and count the number of trees in order to protect them. There are parcels of private land owned by individuals and institutions but they are not allowed to cut the trees without requisite permission. Khan noted that he had counted at least 100 felled trees in the area following which he had lodged a complaint in 2020.

The NGT Central Zone had in response asked the regional officer of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to visit the site and look into the matter. In its report as quoted in the NGT order in June 2020, the MoEFCC regional officer based in Bhopal said that the inspection had found the allegations to be true. The NGT in its order in 2020 had asked the State FD to proceed with the recommendation of the MoEFCC with regard to mapping, notifying and handing over the land to the FD within a period of three months, latest by 30 April, 2020. The FD was asked to submit a compliance report as well.

No action has however been taken even though three years have passed. This was revealed in a letter by the conservator of forest (CF), Bhopal, to the Joint Director, Town & Country Planning. The CF, in a letter dated 3 July 2023, said that 357.78 ha revenue forest land was transferred to the FD in compliance to an NGT order in 2020 and it was declared 'reserved forest'. Therefore before giving sanction to construction of any kind in the Kaliasot-Kerwa region, obtaining a no-objection certificate (NOC) of the FD office is

necessary. This office is aware of the fact that construction work in this region is being carried out by different agencies constantly and no NOC has been obtained for the purpose. If any permission for construction without obtaining permission of this office has been given, it should be immediately cancelled or else legal action would be initiated against the person/agency concerned.

Source: Ashutosh Shukla. 'Green Pockets In Kaliasot-Kerwa Tiger Zone Being Cut For 'Illegal' Resorts & Farmhouses', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 27/06/2024.

Leopards in Kuno NP responsible for decline in spotted deer population; impact on cheetahs: FD



Project Cheetah authorities have reached an in-principle decision to shift cheetahs from Kuno National Park (NP) to the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). Kuno currently has 26 cheetahs,

including 13 cubs and sub-adults.

A reassessment of Kuno's cheetah carrying capacity — pegged at 21 in the project action plan — has been necessitated by a loss of over 25% of Kuno's spotted deer population since 2022. The loss of an estimated 2,250 spotted deer is being attributed to Kuno's leopard population of 90. According to the authorities the seven cheetahs that managed to hunt in the wild outside the enclosures during that period took down only around 50 spotted deer. The authorities have also ruled out large scale poaching of spotted deer due to the presence of too many cameras and forest staff on the ground.

While Madhya Pradesh (MP) is in the process of bringing 1,500 spotted deer to

replenish the dwindling stock at Kuno NP and looking to dispatch another lot to Gandhi Sagar WLS, the project authorities have acknowledged the limitations of draining other habitats of prey without a strategy to reduce leopard predation. They pointed out that leopards are sneaking into a 60 sq. km enclosure to feed on spotted deer, thus, hampering the efforts to stock and breed a cheetah prey base in Gandhi Sagar WLS as well.

The Project Cheetah Steering Committee is considering a proposal for introducing tigers in Kuno NP to reduce leopard activities and ease the pressure on the prey base. The committee chairperson Rajesh Gopal who proposed the remedy at a recent meeting said that bringing tigers would be a biological approach aimed at fostering ecological niches. Over the last 15 years, four male tigers reached Kuno from Rajasthan's Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve. One of those tigers is believed to be still present in the larger Kuno landscape. The plan is to translocate a couple of females and expect males to show up on their own to establish a founder population here. Wildlife Institute of India scientist Qamar Qureshi said that introducing a larger cat to have an impact on leopards is an idea which should work in theory. But one has to consider several other issues such as the potential for human-animal conflict due to dispersal.

A retired forest officer who served in Kuno, however, did not agree with the 'leopard theory' behind the fall in spotted deer numbers. He has raised questions such as whether Kuno's leopards are selectively preying on spotted deer or whether the FD is downplaying the impact of bushmeat poaching. A few State forest officials also questioned the consistency of the estimation drives.

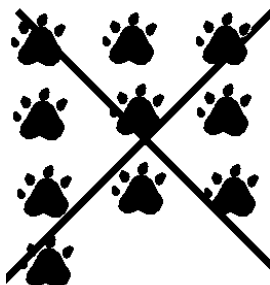
Over the last two decades, project scientists reported per sq. km spotted deer density of 5 (2006), 36 (2011), 52 (2012) and 69 (2013) in Kuno. In 2021, they used two methods, camera trapping and distance sampling to come up with two densities 38 and 23 per sq. km respectively. Going by the lower

density of 23 per sq. km, the Cheetah Task Force estimated that there are more than 8,000 spotted deer in Kuno (345 sq. km) in 2021. The State has released at least 750 spotted deer in Kuno since. Within a year of introducing the first batch of cheetahs in September 2022, the number of spotted deer fell to an estimated 6,500 in Kuno. The downward trend, it is learnt, has not reversed since.

Source: Jay Mazoomdaar. 'Chital stock dwindling in Kuno, plan to move out excess cheetahs', www.indianexpress.com, 02/07/2024.

Madhya Pradesh records highest tiger deaths so far in 2024

Figures released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) show that 75 tiger deaths occurred in the country in the first six months of 2024.



The highest number of 23 deaths were reported from Madhya Pradesh (MP) with at least 10 reports from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) alone. Maharashtra ranked second with 14 followed by Karnataka at 11.

MP, which recorded 526 tigers and 785 tigers (maximum in the country) in 2018 and 2022 respectively, had reported 43 tiger deaths out of 181 in the country in 2023, 34 out of 122 in 2022, and 41 out of 127 tiger deaths nationally in 2021. Bandhavgarh TR has reported maximum tiger deaths in the State in the last three years: 13 in 2023, eight in 2022 and 10 in 2021.

In March 2024 the MP Forest Department constituted a three-member committee on the prodding of the NTCA to probe the high mortalities of tigers inside the Bandhavgarh TR.

Source: '23 tigers died in MP in first six months of 2024, followed by 14 in Maharashtra', www.newindianexpress.com, 12/07/2024.

Tigress reintroduced into wild at Satpura TR dies within a month

A two-year-old tigress reintroduced into the wild at Satpura Tiger Reserve (TR) was found dead on July 12. The tigress, raised in captivity after being rescued as a cub, was released with a radio collar on June 20 inside the reserve. Officials noticed a lack of movement in the radio collar signal on July 11. The carcass was eventually located and an initial assessment suggested that injuries from territorial fights was the cause for death.

On 25 August 2022, a six-month-old cub fell into an open well in Seoni village. The Pench TR rescue team rescued the cub, which had sustained serious injuries, including a prolapsed rectum and hairline fractures. The cub received extensive treatment at the Van Vihar Wildlife Hospital. It was then transferred to a special rewilding enclosure at Malini in Satpura TR on 2 November 2022. Here, the cub underwent a training program to regain its natural instincts for hunting and survival in the wild.

After demonstrating its ability to hunt and survive independently, the tigress was released into a designated area with ample prey and suitable habitat. She was also fitted with a radio collar for satellite tracking. A dedicated team was monitoring her movements.

Officials said that a fresh investigation will focus on determining the cause of death and identifying any shortcomings in the reintroduction protocols.

Source: P Naveen. 'STR's rewilded tigress found dead on 21th day, territorial clash suspected', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 12/07/2024.

SBWL recommends TR status to Ratapani WLS

The Madhya Pradesh State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) had decided to approve the proposal to declare Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) as the eighth tiger reserve (TR) in the State. The recommendation will be sent to the Centre for final approval following which the process for notifying the sanctuary as TR will begin.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) accorded in principle approval to notify Ratapani WLS as the TR in 2011. It has remained pending for different reasons even after the NTCA's nod (see *PA Update* Vol. XXIX, No. 5)

The Ratapani WLS has a total 3,123 wild animals including 56 tigers and 70 leopards, as per the 2022 census.

Source: Rabindra Nath Choudhury 'Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary May Become 8th Tiger Reserve of MP, 1st One With Proximity to State Capital', www.deccanchronicle.com, 15/07/2024.

Sehore villages express concern over inclusion in proposed Ratapani TR

Residents of eight villages in Sehore fear losing their settlements due to the forest department (FD) plan to declare Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) a tiger reserve (TR).

These include the villages of Rabiyaabad, Kathotiya, Sewniya Parihar, Rawakhedi, Sarash, Chikalpani, and Lohapathar that are located in the Budhni and Rehti forest circles and Veerpur range.

The divisional forest officer, Sehore, has said however that they would take opinions of the public representatives and the residents of the villages likely to be included in the proposed TR before taking a final decision.

There are 20 tigers and more than 350 leopards in Sehore and adjoining areas.

Source: Kapil Suryawanshi. 'Proposed tiger reserve may gobble up tribal land on the outskirts of Sehore', www.freepressjournal.in, 28/06/2024.

MAHARASHTRA

Translocation of tigers to Sahyadri TR postponed until after monsoon

The translocation project to shift eight tigers to the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (TR) (*PA Updates* Vol. XXIX, No. 6 and Vol. XXVIII, No. 1) has been put off and will now be implemented after the monsoon, perhaps in October, November.

As per the 2022 tiger census report, the tiger population in Maharashtra was estimated to be 444. 17,400 trap night efforts were made at 435 camera points but no tiger presence was recorded in the Sahyadri TR during the 2022 count. This led to a proposal for the translocation of tigers here.

An operation was launched in April earlier this year to get a pair of tigers from the Tadoba Andhari TR for translocation to the Sahyadri TR. Three tigresses – Bhanuskhindi female (T-120), Roma (T-114), and Bijli (T-115) were identified for the project. The operation had to, however, be put on hold due to lack of approvals from the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) (Wildlife) Maheep Gupta said that the NTCA's technical committee in its meeting held on 9 October 2023, had approved phase II of the Tiger Recovery Programme (TRP) in which eight tigers will be soft released in the Sahyadri TR. These tigers were to be brought from the Chandrapur landscape.

Phase-I, which was implemented from 2017 to 2022, included studies by the Wildlife Institute of India to assess habitat suitability, and prey availability. These studies revealed that the prey density is increasing, thus making the 451 sq. km area ideal for tigers. The FD has planned to alongside also reintroduce the main prey species - deer.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Sahyadri tiger translocation project hits pause button for monsoon season', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22/06/2024.

State approves diversion of 340 ha forest land for rehabilitation of two villages from Sahyadri TR

The Maharashtra State government, on June 7, approved diversion of 340 ha of reserved forest in Satara district to rehabilitate residents of Vele and Male, two villages located within the core of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (TR). Male is in the Chandoli National Park while Vele is located within the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary, both of which constitute the core of the TR.

227.9 ha of forest land of Bahule, Gosavewadi and Kharade villages would be diverted for relocation of villagers of Male and 112.25 ha would be diverted from Mane Colony village to relocate villagers of Vele under Section 2 of Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980.

The forest department officials - Clement Ben, Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (APCCF) (Wildlife West), RM Ramanujam, CCF, Kolhapur, Mahadev Mohite, former Deputy (Dy)CF, Satara and now DyCF, Pune, Uttam Sawant, Dy Director, STR, Jitendra Dudi, District Collector of Satara and Aditi Bharadwaj, DyCF, Satara conducted field visits over the past year to persuade the villagers to agree to the relocation.

Source: Aditi Shekar. 'State okays diversion of 340 ha for shifting of tiger zone villagers', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 13/06/2024.



ODISHA

Tiger cubs recorded in North division of Similipal TR after a gap of several decades



Forest officials have recorded presence of tiger cubs in the North division of the Similipal Tiger Reserve (TR) for the first time in

several decades. With the recent sighting, the number of cubs in Similipal has increased to 12. As per the Odisha Tiger Estimation 2023-24 report, Similipal TR has around 27 tigers.

T24 was camera trapped rearing two melanistic cubs recently in Similipal North, informed a senior forest official. This is also the first breeding recorded through camera traps here. The tigress has given birth to three cubs in the core of Similipal North near Pithabata. They are about three months old now.

According to forest officials the movement of tigers in Similipal North that has a share of around 25% in the TR's total core area, has increased only in the last two years. The breeding recorded within this period is an indication that the area is free of poachers and has adequate prey for the big cats.

Source: Sudarsan Maharana. 'First tiger cubs in decades recorded in Similipal forest, Odisha', www.newindianexpress.com, 18/06/2024.

Odisha requests NTCA for two tigresses from CIL for Similipal TR

The Odisha government has proposed to bring two tigresses from the central Indian landscape (CIL) to add to the Similipal Tiger Reserve (TR)'s latest population of 27 adult tigers. The wildlife wing had in February earlier this year

requested the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to introduce a few female tigers from the CIL to Similipal TR to put a check on in-breeding. Tigers in Similipal TR have not been able to mate with tigers from other habitats as the Similipal TR is isolated from other tiger landscapes in the country.

Anup Nayak, former member secretary NTCA, said that for tiger population to be sustainable and viable, introduction of new genes is required in a habitat that has no scope to be in touch with tigers of other TRs or sanctuaries. Introducing tigers in Similipal was long overdue. He further said that the tigers from the CIL would not have a habitat incompatibility issue in Similipal TR. There are similarities between the CIL and Similipal, including the vegetation and prey species.

In the meantime, officials informed that work on landscape-linking with neighbouring forest and sanctuaries is also underway.

Source: Riyan Ramanatha V. 'To boost gene pool, Similipal eyes female tigers', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 03/07/2024.

Debrigarh WLS to get three tigers from Madhya Pradesh

The Madhya Pradesh (MP) government has consented to translocate two tigresses and one male tiger to Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Odisha. MP Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) Subharanjan Sen said in a letter sent to his Odisha counterpart Susanta Nanda that the prey base in the Debrigarh WLS appears to be more than adequate and the Wildlife Institute of India will be conducting further studies. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has already approved translocation of three tigers. The MP wildlife wing will now proceed for suitable tiger selection from Bandhavgarh and other tiger reserves (TRs). The tigers will be identified and captured in the presence of wildlife personnel from Odisha.

Earlier, the Odisha Forest Department had discussed with its counterparts in MP the criteria for selection of tigers. Senior forest officers from Debrigarh and wildlife headquarters had visited Bandhavgarh TR to study tiger monitoring.

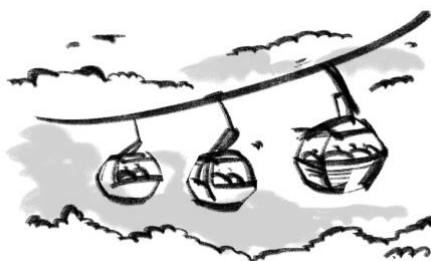
The CWLW of Odisha said that the Odisha FD is working on various logistics and mandatory requirements for the translocation. He said that the FD wants adult tigresses, which have had only one litter, and a male between 2.5- and 4-year-old.

According to wildlife officials in Odisha, the terrain of Debrigarh resembles the central Indian landscape. A large expanse of grassland has been created for herbivores, which can help sustain and breed big cats. Hirakud reservoir is on the eastern part of Debrigarh, while the western part has settlements; however, there is no human habitation inside the WLS.

Source: Riyan Ramanatha V. 'MP to send 2 tigresses, one tiger to Debrigarh', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 16/07/2024.

RAJASTHAN

Proposal for ropeway in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve



The Rajasthan government has announced a plan to prepare a detailed project report (DPR) for constructing a ropeway between Jogi Mahal and Ranthambhore Fort in the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (TR). It aims at facilitating movement of pilgrims to Trinetra Ganesh temple atop the fort.

Critics have argued that the area, home to over a dozen tigers, is an important breeding

zone and will be negatively impacted. Bringing in electricity and running generators for the ropeway could also cause forest fires and pollution, harming the wildlife and forest, said lawyer and activist Tapeshwar Singh Bhati. As per a recent study, as many as 2.2 million pilgrims visit the temple annually, resulting in over 1.75 lakh vehicles entering the area, a number that has been increasing by 8-10% each passing year.

A senior retired forest department officer pointed out that these visitors are not included in the TR's carrying capacity, and many wild animals are hit by vehicles. Facilitating access may also create parking issues and complicate tiger tracking for the forest personnel, in addition to the project's potential adverse environmental impacts.

Former State minister for tourism, environment, forest, and culture Bina Kak said that the presence of hanging electric wires and cable cars inside the deep forest will not only be a threat to the wildlife but also an eyesore. She further said that even the VIPs stayed at the place without electricity, and that is the charm of the forest. The ropeway project will mar the aesthetics and skyline of the fort and Jogi Mahal.

Former state wildlife board member Sunil Mehta said however that e-buses and the ropeway could reduce disturbances in the reserve if private vehicles are phased out, and pilgrims are transported by these means.

Source: Ajay Singh. 'Jaipur: Ropeway through Ranthambore Fort may throw tiger safety to the wind', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/07/2024.

TAMIL NADU

Permission to cull wild boar found beyond 5km from reserve forests: minister

Tamil Nadu Forest Minister M Mathiventhan informed the state assembly on June 25 that the government will allow for hunting of wild

boars that are damaging agricultural crops beyond five km from reserve forest boundaries. The decision was taken at the farmers conflict resolution committee and a final order will be passed following comments from the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Agriculture Department, Revenue Department, and Environment and Forest Department.

The minister said that conflict areas will be divided into three zones — A, B & C. Zone A is within one km from the forest boundary, Zone B is one to five km, and Zone C five km and beyond. There will be no action on wild boars in Zone A. The forest department (FD) will capture and relocate wild boars in Zone B, while hunting orders will be given for Zone C by the jurisdictional district forest officer depending on suggestions by the local village committee, which will comprise of a ward councillor, village administrative officer and forester/guard.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'It's official, TN to hunt wild boars beyond 5 km from reserve forest area', www.newindianexpress.com, 26/06/2024.

CM launches Elephant Death Audit Framework



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister (CM) MK Stalin recently launched the Elephant Death Audit Framework to conduct a detailed analysis of the

death of elephants in the wild in the state and prescribe suitable management interventions.

A district level committee has been constituted to prevent the unnatural death of wild animals, especially, elephants by country-made explosives. This committee ensures the

prevention of illegal supply of explosives and setting up of illegal electric lines.

Among the other initiatives for the protection of elephants, the FD has proposed to deploy unmanned drones to keep elephants from wandering onto railway tracks and causing accidents. Drones equipped with loud speakers are proposed to be deployed in Madukkarai forest, Coimbatore, at a cost of Rs. 8.28 crore under the Modernisation of Forest Force Scheme. The government has also sanctioned Rs. 10 crore towards setting up a real time monitoring system to monitor movement of elephant herds under the Tamil Nadu Innovation Initiatives Scheme.

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. 'It's official, TN to hunt wild boars beyond 5 km from reserve forest area', www.newindianexpress.com, 26/06/2024.

TELANGANA

Tiger recorded in Nagarjunasagar division of Amrabad TR after 27 years

A male tiger has been spotted in the Nagarjunasagar division of the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (TR) after 27 years. The tiger, estimated to be between four and five years old, was recently photographed by a camera trap in the Kambalapally area.

The Amrabad TR has three divisions - Amrabad, Atmakur, and Nagarjunasagar. Until now tigers were only seen in the Amrabad and Atmakur divisions.

The tiger recorded in the Nagarjunasagar division has been preying on sambar and nilgai. The division is spread over 42,000 ha and it includes about 40 villages in and around the forest areas. The FD has set up about 80 camera traps in the area. It is taking stock of the habitat and making an inventory to identify road networks and gaps that cause fragmentation. The local forest staff in the division is also being trained in tiger tracking, handling tiger kills and pug mark lifting to

ensure that they are competent in protecting the newly recorded tiger in the division.

Source: 'Telangana: Male tiger seen in Amrabad reserve's Nagarjunasagar after 27 yrs.' www.siasat.com, 04/07/2024.

HYTICOS conducts carnivores' occupancy survey at Kawal TR

The Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society (HYTICOS) recently conducted an occupancy survey of carnivores in the core and buffer areas of the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR). Carried out in April and May, the survey covered the buffer ranges of Laxettipet, Utnoor, Jodeghat, Tiryani, Dimmadurti and Khanapur, and the core ranges of Tallapet, Jannaram, Indhanpally, Udumpur, BirsaiPET, Kadam, Pembi and Tandra.

In the buffer areas, tiger pugmarks were reported from Kagaznagar, Chennur and Adilabad forest divisions. The movement of tigers is high in these regions, reportedly, due to tigers migrating from the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary and the Tadoba Andhari TR in Maharashtra by crossing the Pranahita and Penganga rivers.

Leopards, gaur and other animals were also reported in the core area and blackbucks were seen in the Thallapet and Indhanpally ranges.

HYTICOS researcher Nilanjan Basu led this survey, which involved two researchers, six field assistants and a team of field staff of the forest department.

Source: S Raja Reddy. 'Survey sheds light on Kawal Tiger Reserve's carnivorous population', www.newindianexpress.com, 15/07/2024.



UTTAR PRADESH

Tigers spotted in Lalitpur district; 2nd instance in Bundelkhand region after Ranipur TR

Two tigers have been spotted for the first time in the forests of Lalitpur district. The tigers were photographed by camera trap in June in the forests of Daur Sagar and Lakhanjar.

The camera traps - 14 in Madvara range, four in Gauna range and two in Lalitpur range. - had been installed in mid-June by the social forestry division to monitor wildlife activity in the area. The footage from the Madvara range revealed a tiger and a bear. Subsequently, another tiger was spotted in the Lakhanjar Papda forest within the same range. Local officials have been coordinating with the forest officials in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh to determine if these tigers have moved in from there.

Notably, this marks the second instance of tiger presence in the Bundelkhand region of the state. Previously, tigers were spotted twice in the newly designated Ranipur Tiger Reserve (TR) in Chitrakoot, covering 529 sq. km in the Manikpur range. Ranipur TR, the fourth in Uttar Pradesh, was notified in 2022 to accommodate tigers from the Panna TR, potentially affected by the interlinking of the Ken and Betwa rivers. The tigers sighted in Ranipur TR had moved from Panna, and they venture between the two TRs frequently. The first photographic proof of tigers in the Chitrakoot jungles was obtained in April 2023.

Source: Haidar Naqvi. 'Two tigers spotted in forests of Lalitpur for first time', www.hindustantimes.com, 25/06/2024.

State FD to propose TR status for Suhelwa WLS

The Uttar Pradesh Forest Department (FD) is working towards making Suhelwa Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) a tiger reserve (TR). The

announcement for the same was made during the 10th anniversary celebration of the Pilibhit TR on June 9. Sanjay Srivastav, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (wildlife), said that the FD is working on the proposal that will be first sent to the state government and then to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for approval.

The sanctuary is spread over 452 sq. km in the districts of Balrampur, Shravasti, and Gonda. Of its total area, 232 sq. km has been proposed as the core and 220 sq. km as the buffer area. If declared, Suhelwa will be the fifth TR in the state after those in Pilibhit, Amangarh, Ranipur and Bijnor.

Speaking on the occasion, Manoj Kumar Singh, additional chief secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, spoke about addressing the staffing gaps at Pilibhit TR, adding that these would soon be filled. Referring to the situation in Bijnor, he said that the growing tiger population had driven leopards into rural and urban areas, causing conflict. He further said that the state government has set a target to establish chain link fencing over a 90 km stretch this year to resolve issues related to the straying of leopards.

Sudhir Kumar Sharma, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest said that 1,300 new forest inspectors would be recruited this year to address the shortage of field forest personnel.

Source: Keshav Agarwal. 'Suhelwa Wildlife Sanctuary to be state's 5th tiger reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 10/06/2024.

UTTARAKHAND

Cubs of translocated tigress killed by leopards in Rajaji TR

Two of the four tiger cubs of the tigress that was translocated from Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) to the Rajaji TR, were killed by leopards

in the Beriwada range of the Rajaji TR. The incident is reported to have happened in the last week of June, about a month after they were born.

The translocated tigress had given birth to four cubs in the Chillawali range on May 24.

Source: 'Two tiger cubs translocated from Corbett Tiger Reserve killed by leopards in Rajaji Tiger Reserve', www.telegraphindia.com, 25/06/2024.

NATIONAL NEWS

MoEFCC mandates SC-NBWL approval for considering projects in PAs for forest clearance

In a shift from a decision in March earlier this year to consider projects requiring a wildlife nod only after the project has received a forest clearance the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has issued a new sequence for decision making in the matter. An approval from the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) will now be a pre-requisite for considering projects in protected areas (PAs) further for a forest clearance. All project proponents can apply for all environmental clearances, including forest and wildlife clearances simultaneously, on MoEFCC's Parivesh 2.0 website. Parivesh 2.0 is also integrated with the National Single Window System (NSWS) through which investors can apply for all relevant approvals.

In March, earlier this year, the SC-NBWL had decided that it will consider proposals for wildlife clearance for projects only after they have received forest approvals. According to the new sequence, the proposals with the entire forest land located in one or more PAs, would be considered for grant of 'in-principle' approval under the Van

(Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, only after obtaining the recommendation of the SC-NBWL.

For projects located both within and outside a PA, an 'in-principle' stage I forest clearance can be granted for the portion of land outside the PA, but the stage II or final clearance in such proposals will be given only after a nod from SC-NBWL. Further, no working permission after stage I will be admissible in such cases to avoid *fait accompli* situations. Proposals located in the eco-sensitive zone of a PA requiring both wildlife and forest clearances will be processed simultaneously.

The reaction to the new protocol has been mixed. An environmental consultant said that now all environmental permissions are needed independently and they can be applied for simultaneously, hence they are not interdependent. However, if a proposal falls in a PA, the SC-NBWL nod looks more important than the forest clearance. Another consultant pointed out that even if all clearances can be applied for simultaneously there is a sequential nature for prioritising. When one applies for the environmental clearance, one is asked for the status of the forest clearance. Forest clearance takes the longest because it has two stages and involves study of the area and tree enumeration. However, the same consultant asked why allow stage I forest clearance for projects involving both PA and non-PA when the impacts on wildlife both outside and inside PAs will be similar and both areas need to be prioritised.

Of the 1,888 wildlife clearance proposals since 30 March 2023, 91 have been disposed. 19 of these proposals have been rejected according to the Parivesh 2.0 dashboard. Around 1,046 wildlife clearances are under consideration of State authorities and rest are pending at various levels.

A former member of the NBWL said that almost all decisions of the SC-NBWL to clear projects are not in compliance with Section 29 and Section 35(6) of the Wildlife Protection Act which specifies that there shall

be no destruction unless it is for the improvement and better management of wildlife. The grant of “in-principle” approval for projects within and outside PAs under the new guidelines issued, is a clear green flag for projects and thus renders the recommendation of the SC-NBWL a mere formality. Reportedly, NBWL has not convened since 2014; only its SC has met.

The Climate & Ecosystems team leader at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy said that once NBWL grants its clearance, it might be used by project proponents to persuade the Forest Advisory Committee to also grant permissions, as another authority under the same ministry has approved the project. While streamlining legal procedures and enforcement is beneficial, it is also the duty of the MoEFCC to ensure that the decision-making of both authorities remains independent.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. ‘Wildlife Board will now take 1st call on clearance to projects in protected area: MoEFCC’, www.hindustantimes.com, 11/07/2024.

NTCA seeks action plan on relocation of villages from inside CTHs



In a letter to State Wildlife Departments dated 20 June 2024, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has sought a timeline and action plan for relocation of villages located within critical tiger habitats (CTHs) of tiger reserves (TRs). The letter, written in light of a review of the status of voluntary village relocation from core areas, has asked states to follow-up on the issue on a priority basis.

The NTCA has stated there are about 600 villages comprising 64,801 families residing in core areas. As per provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA)’s 2006 amendment for creating inviolate areas for tiger conservation, the relocation process has to be strictly voluntary and based on informed consent of *gram sabhas* and families involved. Authorities are also legally mandated to complete the process of recognising and settling of forest rights of scheduled tribes and other forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act. Those who voluntarily opt for relocation have to be provided either a financial compensation or resettlement and rehabilitation, as per the NTCA’s protocol.

The financial compensation involves payment of Rs. 15 lakh per family while the resettlement and rehabilitation package includes entitlement to two ha land, homestead land and house construction, a one-time financial incentive and basic amenities such as road, water, sanitation, electricity and telecommunication.

Researchers have however said that the package offered by NTCA does not comply with the legal requirement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 (LAA), which has special provisions for scheduled tribes and forest dwellers. Even the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes had in the past sought consonance of rehabilitation package with the LAA. Denial of due rights in TRs has led to conflicts between communities and tiger authorities in many TRs.

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. ‘NTCA seeks action plan from states on relocation of villages from tiger reserves’, www.indianexpress.com, 22/06/2024.

ZSI launches Fauna of India Checklist Portal covering 1,04,561 species

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) recently released a checklist of India’s fauna, covering 1,04,561 species. Union environment, forest and climate change minister Bhupender Yadav

launched the Fauna of India Checklist Portal on the occasion of 109th Foundation Day of ZSI in Kolkata on June 30.

The portal comprises 121 checklists of all known taxa covering 36 phyla. Out of 455 mammalian species recorded from India, Meghalaya (163 species), West Bengal (161 species), Arunachal Pradesh (142 species), Tamil Nadu (139 species), Assam (138 species), Sikkim (137 species) and Kerala (134 species) recorded the maximum number of species. The highest mammalian diversity in the union territories is in Andaman and Nicobar Islands (68 species) followed by Ladakh (59 species), and Delhi (38 species).

Out of 52 endemic mammal species in India, Tamil Nadu (23 species), Karnataka (19

species) and Kerala (19 species) have high numbers in the country.

High endemism is reported from the Western Ghats hill streams of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Of the 1,358 bird species present in India, 79 are endemic. The Western Ghats biogeographic zone has the highest number of these species at 28 with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands being the next most important area for endemism.

Source: 'Zoological Survey of India releases fauna checklist of over 1 lakh species', www.hindustantimes.com, 30/06/2024.

Protected Area Update in Marathi – for Maharashtra

The *Maharashtra Sanrakshit Kshetra Vartapatra*, is a sister publication of the *Protected Area Update*. Started in April 2020, it has now entered 5th year of publication. The 24-page newsletter in Marathi – a regional language, is published four times a year. The *Maharashtra Sanrakshit Kshetra Vartapatra* provides a curated compilation of news and information related to wildlife protection and conservation in PAs of Maharashtra.

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SOUTH ASIA

INDIA/BHUTAN

Tiger walks from Sikkim's Pangolakha WLS to Bhutan's Samtse district

Camera traps have recorded a tiger's 100 km transboundary walk between Sikkim's Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Bhutan's Samtse district. The information was revealed during an international workshop 'Countering Wildlife Trafficking', held from June 11 to 13 under the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN). Held in Bhutan, the workshop saw participation from officials across South Asian countries.

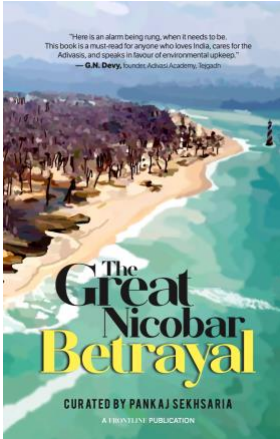
At the workshop, Sikkim's and Bhutanese forest officers agreed to share camera trap images for a comparative analysis. When compared by distinctive stripe patterns of tigers, images matched for one of the tigers which was camera trapped in both Sikkim and Bhutan. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) confirmed the identification. The tiger was

photographed at Pangolakha WLS in February 2024 and again in Samtse in April 2024 suggesting that the animal had moved 100 km in two months.

Camera traps installed across Sikkim's high-altitude regions by the Sikkim Forest Department in collaboration with the WII have recorded three tigers in Pangolakha WLS between 2018 and 2024. The trap cameras also photographed a tiger at an altitude of 3,966 m in Kyongnosla WLS, marking the highest altitude where a tiger has been sighted. This is the second-highest record globally after Bhutan, which holds the world record for tiger sightings at the highest elevations, over 4,400 m. (Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 1)

Source: Vivek Chhetri. 'Caught on camera: Tiger makes 100 km arduous journey from Sikkim sanctuary to Bhutan', www.telegraphindia.com, 06/07/2024.
Roopak Goswami. 'Confirmed: Tigers are migrating from Sikkim to Bhutan', www.eastmojo.com, 05/07/2024.





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

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

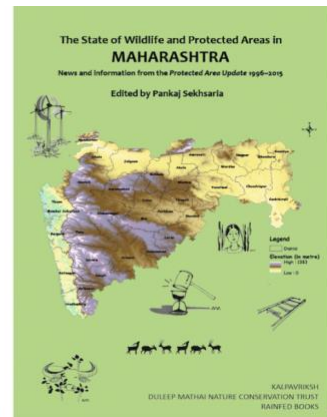
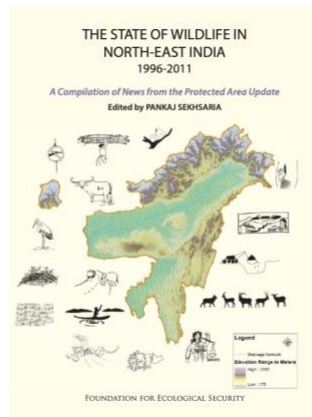
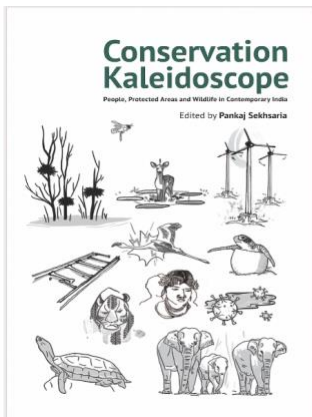
Endorsement: "Here is an alarm being rung, when it needs to be.

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

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

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Approval of radar station at Narcondam Island WLS

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is reported to have approved the Coast Guard proposal for the creation of a radar station at the Narcondam Island Wildlife Sanctuary. The Environment minister, Prakash Javadekar has argued that the radar project was of strategic importance to India and that it will not affect the environment here because only 8-10 people will be employed at the station.

The proposal had been rejected by the earlier government (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 5) following concerns expressed by conservationists of the impact it would have on the forests and particularly on the small population of the endemic Narcondam Hornbill here. The Andaman and Nicobar Command has welcomed the move of the MoEF saying that Narcondam was an ideal location for the radar as there was no other land around the island. It was also pointed out that a total of 18 radar stations are to be set up in the Islands of which four are to be set up in the first phase. One such station at East Island in the north of the Andamans is reported to be almost ready for operation.

The clearance for the radar project by the MoEF is one of many defence related projects that the new government has cleared or declared an intention to clear immediately after coming into power. These include, among others, projects along the border with China and the expansion of the Karwar naval base in Karnataka.

Source: 'Government clears counter-China move in Andamans', 11/06/14, www.rediff.com/news
'Radar at Narcondam will be good for National Security: ANC', www.andamansheekha.com
Vishwa Mohan. 'Green nod for radar station at Narcondam in Andamans', *The Times of India*, 12/06/14.

ASSAM

Traditional 'gamosas' to take vulture conservation message to people

White cotton gamosas with traditional red embroidery will now sport vulture motifs to spread awareness about vulture conservation in Assam. The initiative is being taken jointly by the Bombay Natural History Society and the Assam State government.

An estimated 300 vultures of three species — slender-billed vulture, White-backed vulture and the Himalayan griffon — have died in Assam since 2007 because of poisoning, train hits and electrocution. A number of birds have died after feeding on carcasses of animals that have been administered diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug used as a painkiller. The non-steroidal drug, introduced in India in 1993, was banned for veterinary use in 2006. However, diclofenac for patients, available in pharmacies, is used by farmers for treating cattle. A 19-year-old weaver, Pallabi Das of Bikrampur in South Kamrup, has already woven a number of *gamosas* with the vulture motifs as the first step in the initiative.

Source: 'Gamosas to take vulture message to people', *The Telegraph*, 17/06/14.

Rehabilitation package for Deepor Beel WLS fisherfolk

The Assam government is planning to formulate a rehabilitation package for 815 fisherfolk families dependent on Deepor Beel WLS for their livelihood. The information was provided by the State Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi recently while interacting with a delegation of the Asom Anusuchit Jati Yuba Chatra Sanstha. He also assured the delegation that the government would take all possible steps to stop the flow of contaminated water into the water body from nearby factories and prevent fresh encroachment.

Source: 'Assam plans rehabilitation package for Deepor Beel fishermen', *Business Standard*, 13/06/14.

PERSPECTIVE

What future for our grasslands?

August 13, celebrated as International Wolf Day is an initiative to create awareness about wolves and their importance for maintaining ecological balance. Sadly, the Indian Gray Wolf with a population of 2000-3000 individuals, struggles to hold on to its ever-changing habitats that lay mostly outside the protected areas. Unlike tigers and a few other large mammals, wolves in India lack charisma and don't attract national attention.

Not just the wolves but most of the species that dwell in the grasslands, especially the arid grasslands and their associated ecosystems, are reeling under the pressure of habitat loss and several other threats. Great Indian Bustard, Bengal Fox, Lesser Florican, Blackbucks, and the recently reintroduced cheetah, are some of the species that rely on these open natural ecosystems (ONEs) that have conveniently been classified as wastelands and we are losing them at breakneck speed.

By harboring diverse species and their action-packed interactions, these mesmerizing landscapes with interesting seasonal variations and challenging weather conditions, offer essential services that are invaluable and have everything an avid naturalist would want to witness. Despite this, we still lack focused efforts to monitor and conserve them. As opposed to the forest cover mapping exercise every two years, grasslands, and other ONEs lack a map of their own which limits our understanding of the extent of their loss over the years. Along similar lines, there aren't management guidelines for grasslands which often leads to unscientific or completely counter-productive management practices.

We as a society are fascinated by forests and the species that dwell there which is becoming a major challenge in garnering support for grasslands conservation. For the same reason, most nature enthusiasts get excited about tree plantations or seed ball drives in ONEs without knowing that they are spoiling a thriving natural habitat. Similarly,

we don't see a public outcry when a wolf or blackbuck is run over by a vehicle or is killed in retaliation by humans. Compared to forests, there are only a limited number of protected areas declared to protect grassland species.

While our conservation efforts are primarily focused on forests and are witnessing some successes, grasslands and its dependent species are losing their ground and waiting for attention. Like the saying goes, the grass is not always greener on the other side. It's time we start sincere efforts to secure and conserve grasslands and other ONEs, which cover roughly 20% of India's geographic area.

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