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EDITORIAL

Conflict, contradictions and compromises

There are two broad sets of stories and issues that stand out for their prominence and also their contrast in this issue of the *PA Update*. The first is a bunch of reports from different parts of the country that highlight the increasing conflict between humans and wild animals, the loss of life on account of this conflict and the various initiatives to deal with the challenge.

Experts have, for instance, advocated a sterilisation program for leopards in Junnar in Maharashtra, where nearly 40 people have been killed and many scores injured in leopard attacks in the last six years. A report from Kerala highlights the increasing demand in the state for allowing the killing or capturing of an animal involved in conflict. Another informs us that 2689 and 382 people respectively have died in elephant and tiger attacks across the country in just the last five years. Yet another discusses the initiatives of the environment and railway ministries to reduce elephant deaths that continue to occur in railways accidents across the landscape. A staggering 79 elephants and counting have been killed by speeding trains between 2020 and 2025 as per MoEFCC statistics.

This really is the sharp edge of the multi-faceted challenges; when lives, livelihoods and survival are at stake, making a case for conservation will only become that much more difficult. The cases above, as we will recognise, are also only representative of a larger reality, versions of which are to be seen and experienced in different ways across the country. One would expect then that the thrust of the efforts, at least from the agencies and the institutions whose mandate is conservation and protection of the environment, would be towards larger, holistic and long term solutions.

It is here that the other set of stories highlight the contrast and the stark contradiction. What we see from both specific cases on the one hand and in larger national policy thinking and initiatives on the other, are moves in the completely opposite direction.

A report from Karnataka for instance discusses the proposed takeover and taking away of forest land for urbanisation. It is a move that will directly impact wildlife habitats and corridors and inevitably increase human-wildlife interaction and conflict. In another move we see the MoEFCC itself allowing for mineral exploration in forest areas and in another significant development that could have serious implications, the National Tiger Conservation Authority has watered down the criteria for tiger corridors. One of the aims as the report clearly points out is to facilitate and benefit mining projects like in parts of Eastern Maharashtra. It is noteworthy that of the 382 human deaths in tiger attacks across the country in the last few years, more than half have been in Maharashtra alone.

Opening up forest areas and wildlife corridors for mining and other such projects is simply no way to deal with the conflict. There are many fires raging out there and our efforts should be to put them out. What we are doing instead is throwing in more fuel and stoking the flames even further.

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

No funds for 'Development of Wildlife Habitats' for Andhra Pradesh in five years

Andhra Pradesh has not received any financial assistance under the Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) sub-scheme of the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) scheme for the last five fiscal years (2020-21 to 2025-26). This was revealed by Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav in a

written reply to a question raised in the Lok Sabha by members of parliament, Byreddy Shabari and Appalanaidu Kaliseti.

The non-release of funds according to the centre was either because the state failed to submit its annual plan of preparations (APO) or sent incomplete proposals that did not meet approval requirements. It further stated that the IDWH scheme provides financial assistance on a cost-sharing basis to States and Union Territories for wildlife and habitat conservation, management, and protection. It also noted that the scheme supports activities such as anti-poaching measures, protection infrastructure, habitat improvement, eco-development, human-wildlife conflict management, and capacity building.

However, while no funds were provided under the DWH sub-scheme, Andhra Pradesh did receive allocations under the 'Project Tiger and Elephant' component of the same umbrella scheme.

See the table for the fiscal year-wise details.

Year	Project Tiger (Rs. lakh)		Project Elephant (Rs. lakh)	
	Allocated	Released	Allocated	Released
20-21	880.60	266.51	198	77.28
21-22	455.32	292.11	87.13	20.55
22-23	0	0	0	0
	Project Tiger and Elephant: Allocated (Rs lakh)		Released (Rs lakh)	
23-24	507.72		For tigers	For elephants
			135.56	13.86
24-25	1,422.53		350.70	14.43

*From 2023-24, Project Tiger and Project Elephant were merged into a single scheme as Project Tiger and Elephant.

Source: Usha Peri. 'Andhra Pradesh gets no funds for development of wildlife habitat for five years', www.newindianexpress.com, 13/08/2025.

CHHATTISGARH

FD reclaims 1800 acres of encroached forest land in Udanti-Sitanadi TR

The Chhattisgarh Forest Department (FD) is said to have recently reclaimed and restored 1,800 acres of encroached forest land in the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (TR). The area was progressively occupied over the last 18 years. As many as seven major habitations and over 300 alleged encroachers were evicted amid strong resistance, with reports of attacks on forest staff during the anti-encroachment drive that began two years ago.

The FD relied on technological interventions to address patrolling gaps, reduce man-animal conflicts, and strengthen the monitoring of forests and wildlife. The TR authorities sought assistance from the National Remote Sensing Centre to acquire satellite images from 2008 to 2010. It also carried out drone mapping of the encroached area to create an imagery database for 2022. The analysis revealed how forest cover loss began after 2012 and continued until 2020, during which encroachers allegedly cleared vast tracts of dense jungle.

In 2022, the Chhattisgarh FD built its own Google Earth Engine-powered remote sensing portal to assess forest cover and surface water changes every week, as well as to identify hotspots of forest loss over the past 20 years using artificial intelligence and machine learning.

It was also noted that alleged encroachers and poachers, mostly from outside the state, were staying on forest land. Based on satellite images, the FD concluded that all the illegal settlements emerged only after 2008, meaning they were not entitled to any land under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA),

which applies only to land occupied before December 2005.

After clearing the encroachments, continuous monitoring of new and old habitations and forest loss areas is being carried out using the portal, with regular enforcement actions taken.

The TR spans two districts, Gariaband and Dhamtari. There are 110 revenue villages converted from forest villages located within the boundary of the TR.

Source: Ejaz Kaiser. ‘Chhattisgarh uses satellite technology, force to reclaim 1,800 acres of encroached forest in tiger reserve’, www.newindianexpress.com, 17/08/2025.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Non-profit raises alarm over sewerage pipeline work close to Hokersar Wetland

The Environmental Policy Group (EPG), a non-profit, has pointed out that the sewerage pipeline laying work being carried out by Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) in Zainakoot on the peripheries of the Hokersar Wetland does not seem to have a sewage treatment plant (STP). Local activists and residents have alleged that the pipes are meant to discharge untreated sewage directly into Hokersar — a designated Ramsar site. They warned that the absence of an STP to process liquid waste before disposal would result in severe and irreversible pollution of the wetland. Unchecked discharge of untreated sewage will alter the water quality of Hokersar, increase pollutants, suspended solids, nitrates and phosphates — directly threatening its fragile biodiversity, they have warned.

EPG said it had received information that the work is being executed at night to keep it away from the public gaze. Despite earlier objections communicated in writing to the regional wildlife warden, the Hokersar Wetland Authority, and the SMC

Commissioner, activists said that the contractor has continued with the work, allegedly under the influence of politically connected persons. A range officer of the wildlife department had attempted to stop the activity but was reportedly ignored. A formal report has been submitted by the officer to the wildlife warden.

EPG has urged immediate intervention by higher authorities, including the Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha and the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, to stop the ongoing work and institute a high-level enquiry into the matter. It has demanded that the construction of an STP must precede any sewer line expansion in the area, in keeping with wetland protection rules currently in force.

Source: ‘EPG raises alarm over illegal sewerage works threatening Hokersar Wetland’, www.ziraattimes.com, 19/08/2025.

Researchers defer on reasons for overlap in ranges of snow leopard and common leopard in Himalayan region



A changing climate is challenging the habitat of the snow leopard and, also, possibly pushing the common leopard into the upper reaches, which can eventually outcompete the former, suggested a study conducted in the Kishtwar Himalayan region by the Department of Wildlife Protection, Jammu and Kashmir (DWPJ&K), in collaboration with the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF)

However, another study titled 'Decades of Leopard Coexistence in the Himalayas Driven by Ecological Dynamics, not Climate Change', published in January 2025 in the journal *Global Ecology and Conservation*, concludes that the co-occurrence of both these species is due to a long-term adaptation of common leopards to high-altitude environments, demonstrated by their ability to survive and breed in temperatures as low as -18°C.

This study makes use of historical accounts dating as far back as the 1950s and winter sighting data from trail cameras from 2016 to 2023 in the trans-Himalayan part of the Annapurna Conservation Area of Nepal (3100 m – 4696 m). It explains that interaction between the two predators “in overlapping habitats with distinct habitat requirements poses critical challenges for conservation and management strategies”.

The former study carried out as part of the high altitude programme of NCF is titled 'The Status of Snow Leopards and Other High-Altitude Mammals in Kishtwar Himalayas, Jammu and Kashmir'. As part of the study, camera trapping was carried out across three sites— the Kishtwar High Altitude National Park (KHANP), Paddar and Warwan. Researchers who were part of the NCF study said that habitats were changing with climate change, and tree lines were shifting upwards due to snow melt. As the common leopard is much more adaptable, it is moving upwards, perhaps attracted by the presence of feral dogs due to garbage. They explained that for the first time, camera traps were placed in the winter of 2024-2025, apart from the usual camera trap time carried out in the late summer and late autumn seasons. The cameras were removed in May. Though not detected in 2023, common leopards were sighted at multiple sites in the snow leopard range during the 2024-25 survey. Both snow leopards and common leopards were detected at the same camera trap locations in Paddar.

A 3rd study, 'Climate Change, Rural Livelihood, and Sustainability: In Higher

Himalayas of Kishtwar, Jammu and Kashmir' also concludes that climate change has brought about multiple changes in the environment and affected the livelihood of communities. This also has a direct consequence on the Snow leopard habitats. The Jammu and Kashmir UT State Action Plan for Climate Change and Human Health (2023) stated that the region in the fragile Himalayan ecosystem is exposed to natural fluctuations in climate and human-induced changes due to large-scale urbanisation. This poses a serious threat to species diversity, habitats, forests, wildlife, fisheries and water resources in the region.

To safeguard snow leopards, the Government of India launched Project Snow Leopard in 2008. The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India is in alignment with the global Population Assessment of the World's Snow Leopards (PAWS). The species is found in the mountains of Central and South Asia. Besides India, it is found in Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The global estimated snow leopard population is between 4,000 and 6,500 individuals.

The common leopard is found across India. There are an estimated 13,874 leopards across India, according to the Status of Leopards in India, 2022 report. On the other hand, there are only 718 snow leopards spread over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

More about the NCF and DWPJ&K joint study:

Researchers conducted the survey between 2022 and 2025 across the Kishtwar Himalayas under the nationwide Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAII) protocol. In 2024-25, snow leopards were recorded during winter months in both Paddar (Jammu division) and Zojila (Kashmir division). This suggests year-round use of the landscape, a critical indicator of stable habitat and a resident population, stated WPDJ&K and NCF in a joint statement.

The joint statement added that over 3,000 camera trap nights across KHANP, Paddar, and Zojila resulted in the identification of at least 12 adult snow leopards, with an estimated presence of up to 20 individuals. The presence of an adult female with cubs in Kishtwar confirms that this is a breeding population.

These findings reaffirm that the high altitude Kishtwar Himalayas in Jammu and Kashmir, encompassing KHANP, Warwan and Paddar Valley, is a critical stronghold for the snow leopard in the Western Himalayas, apart from Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. The statement pointed out that it is time to treat the Kishtwar Himalayas not as isolated valleys, but as part of an interconnected conservation landscape.

Other species captured by the camera traps included the rare Himalayan brown bear, Himalayan wolf, common leopard, Kashmir musk deer, stone marten, pika, Asiatic ibex, and the red fox. The exercise also revealed livestock depredation to be a major challenge impacting the primary livelihood of the over 300 local households across Paddar, Warwan, Dacchan and Marwah.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXXI, No. 3 and Vol. XXX, No. 3)

Source: Deepanwita Gita Niyogi. 'In Jammu and Kashmir, common leopards make their way to snow leopard habitats', www.downtoearth.org.in, 25/08/2025. Rajat Ghai. 'Year-round snow leopard presence and breeding activity confirmed in Jammu and Kashmir', www.downtoearth.org.in, 19/08/2025.

JHARKHAND

Palamau TR prepares action plan to save its gaur population

The Palamau Tiger Reserve (TR) has prepared an action plan to curb the decline in its gaur population. Titled 'Ecology and recovery plan of gaur in PTR', the document is based on

nearly two years of study and ground-level surveys conducted by a team of wildlife experts and project officials. Gaur once flourished in Saranda, Dalma, Hazaribagh, Gumla and other forests of Jharkhand. Now, they are mainly confined to the northern region of the TR as a small and isolated population. Their number that was 150 in the 1970s has come down to 68 now.

Ten herds that included 17 adult males, 24 adult females, eight underage males, nine underage females, seven juveniles and three calves were studied for the purpose. Notably, the study found a slightly female-biased sex ratio (1:1.32), which is favourable for breeding. Low numbers of juveniles and calves have however given rise to concerns regarding population recovery and survival. The study notes that habitat fragmentation has limited the movement of gaur, increasing the risk of genetic bottlenecks and population decline.

Prajesh Kant Jena, deputy director (north division) of the reserve, informed that the action plan represents a comprehensive effort to understand the demographic status of gaur, habitat suitability, feeding ecology and human-wildlife interactions. It includes recommendations aimed at increasing the gaur population in the TR as well as re-establishing its presence in forests like those of Saranda. The number of anti-poaching camps has now increased to 40. The grassland area in the reserve has also increased from 190 to 400 ha.

According to wildlife experts, if the efforts to reestablish gaur in the forests of the Palamau TR and in Jharkhand are successful, the population of tigers can also increase. However, there are 12 villages around Betla, and their population has increased. People have about 150,000 livestock and it is feared that gaur sharing pasture and water with livestock increases risk of disease such as the foot and mouth disease. The reserve authorities, along with the state and the district administration, are currently collaborating on a large-scale vaccination programme.

The Palamau TR, located on the Chhota Nagpur plateau, is spread over an area of 1,129 sq. km, which includes a core area of 414 sq. km and a buffer zone of 715 sq. km. It includes two protected areas — Palamau Wildlife Sanctuary and Betla National Park.

The reserve director SR Natesh also pointed out that there is only one tiger in the reserve as per the latest census. There was a strong possibility, however, of this number increasing as movements of more than one tiger have been recorded. here He noted that gaur and sambar are important prey for predators such as tigers; recovery of the gaur population is essential for the increase in tiger numbers as well.



Source: Niraj Sinha. ‘Gaur declining in Palamau Tiger Reserve, its last stronghold in Jharkhand’, www.downtoearth.org.in, 13/08/2025.

KARNATAKA

Concretisation of forest patches in southern Bengaluru to impact wildlife habitats, corridors

The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) has planned to concretise the remaining forest patches in the southern parts of Bengaluru. The plan includes the formation of six new layouts between Hosur Road and Mysuru Road along Peripheral Ring Road-2 by acquiring 6,217 acres of land. The layouts will cut through elephant corridors and prime wildlife habitats of elephants, tigers, leopards, and other endangered fauna. The Urban Development Department (UDD) communicated the *Protected Area Update* Vol. XXXI, No. 5

government’s consent to the BDA for issuing a primary notification to acquire the 6,217 acres of land in early August.

Several citizens and conservationists have expressed concern about the fact that the layouts cut through elephant corridors and wildlife habitats that connect Bannerghatta forests with Savanadurga forest. This they have said could trigger human-animal conflicts, causing losses to life and property.

As per the UDD's consent letter, the proposed layouts will include villages such as Maragondanahalli, Hulimangala, Bettadasanapura, S Bingipura, Hullahalli, Begur, Hommadevanahalli, Kammanahalli, Mylasandra, Yellenahalli, BM Kaval, Kaggalipura, UM Kaval, Agara, Gulakamalai, OB Choodanahalli, Uttari, Devagere, Gangasandra and Gudimavu. Of these villages, localities such as BM Kaval, UM Kaval, Kaggalipura, Gulakamale, Agara, and Uttari have thousands of acres of deemed forest land, which is frequented by wild fauna, said a conservationist.

However, the commissioner of BDA clarified that the authority would address all these issues about forest clearance and wildlife movement. The state government has claimed that the formation of new layouts by BDA would prevent the formation of illegal layouts by private individuals in the region, as ordered by the Karnataka High Court.

BDA has already planned to acquire 9,000 acres for the extension of Nadaprabhu Kempgowda Layout (NPKL) in southern Bengaluru. A site allottee at NPKL said that the BDA encroached upon the Turahalli forest area while forming Banashankari Sixth Stage, and site allottees were forced to start litigation.

While the forest department (FD) finally recovered some of the sites and converted them into tree parks, several allottees were caught between the BDA and the FD. In fact, several owners have still not managed to build houses as the FD has refused a no-objection certificate stating that their sites are in eco-sensitive buffer zones.

Source: Nirajan Kaggere. 'Greens worry as Bengaluru's civic authority plans six layouts that may cut through wildlife corridors, forests', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 06/08/2025.

KERALA

Community drive in Wayanad WLS to eradicate *Senna spectabilis*



A community drive was conducted recently in the Tholpetty range of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) to remove the invasive plant species *Senna spectabilis*. 46,450 trees from over 383 acres of forest land were uprooted and their root systems destroyed to prevent regrowth. After each clearing, a year-long scouting operation is being conducted, including daily patrols to spot and destroy new seedlings before they can take hold. The initiative covers 560 acres of land in total.

80 native tree species are being replanted and restoration efforts have seen 15 indigenous grasses return naturally. 184 bird species have been documented in zones cleared of *Senna spectabilis* and large mammals such as elephants and deer have also been seen frequenting the reclaimed patches.

Introduced from South America in the 1980s, the fast-growing *Senna spectabilis* was planted for shade, beautification and firewood. Because of its resemblance to Kerala's state flower, *Cassia fistula*, known locally as

kanikkonna, *Senna spectabilis* gained popularity among forest officials.

Each *Senna spectabilis* tree produces up to 6,000 seeds a season, which remain viable for nearly a decade. Trees flower within two years, and even bark-stripped stumps resprout within weeks. A 2021 Rufford Foundation study estimated that *Senna spectabilis* had taken over 23 per cent of Wayanad WLS in just four decades. That figure is now thought to exceed 40 per cent. Kerala Forest Department (FD) estimates put the invasion at 800 ha in Wayanad alone.

A partnership between the state FD, Forest First Samithi (FFS) and tribal youth from the Kurichiya and Kattunaikka communities led to the success of this eradication drive. Tribal people were trained as labourers as well as guardians of restored areas.

Success at Tholpetty is now shaping policy elsewhere as well. FFS has signed a memorandum of understanding with the FD to extend eradication into the DB Kuppe range of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu is also considering similar measures. Reports of *Senna spectabilis* proliferation have also emerged from Andhra Pradesh, Goa and parts of Maharashtra. Conservationists warn that unless tackled early, these regions may repeat South India's mistakes.

Meanwhile, governments are experimenting with ways to use the felled biomass. A recent pilot project converted *Senna* wood into 6,000 tonnes of paper pulp.

Source: KA Shaji. 'Red alert over green menace: How South India is fighting back against the Senna invasion', www.downtoearth.org.in, 01/09/2025.

Kerala for empowering Chief Wildlife Warden to authorise killing/capturing wild animals involved in conflict

The Kerala government is considering the introduction of an amendment to the Wildlife

Protection Act, 1972, to empower the Chief Wildlife Warden to authorise any person to kill or capture a wild animal that causes serious injury to human beings or poses a threat to a public place. The State Law Minister, P Rajeeve, announced the decision while addressing a two-day regional conference on 'Human-Wildlife Conflict and Co-Existence: Legal and Policy Perspectives' organised by the National Legal Services Authority and the Kerala State Legal Services Authority in Thiruvananthapuram in August.

Addressing the conference, which was attended by Supreme Court and High Court judges and leading legal luminaries, Rajeeve said that the current legislative framework was inadequate to protect human lives during emergencies. Stressing the need for a balanced approach, he said that a comprehensive policy must protect human life while also recognising the ecological value of wildlife. He added that if an elephant or tiger strays into a populated area and attacks people, waiting for clearance from top forest authorities is impractical.

The minister also recalled that in February, the Kerala assembly had passed a resolution unanimously urging the Union Government to empower chief conservators of forests to take emergency measures.

According to legal experts, bringing in such an amendment to a central legislation will not be an easy task for the state government. Advocate Kaleeswaram Raj said that only the Parliament can bring in an amendment. Former HC judge Kemal Pasha pointed out that there's another option available for the state. It can table the proposal in the state assembly and secure its passage. However, for it to take effect, the President's assent is essential, he explained. (also see *PA Updates* Vol XXXI, No. 2 and Vol. XXX, Nos. 5 & 4, 3).

Source: 'Kerala mulls law amendment to kill or capture dangerous wild animals', www.newindianexpress.com, 31/08/2025.

MADHYA PRADESH/RAJASTHAN MP postpones signing of MoU with Rajasthan for cheetah corridor

The Madhya Pradesh (MP) government has deferred signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Rajasthan over the proposed cheetah corridor project at the eleventh hour. No reason was provided by the MP officials for the same.

Mentioned in the Cheetah Project, the corridor is to be developed between MP and Rajasthan as cheetahs from the Kuno National Park (NP) have been moving towards Rajasthan. In the first week of August, for instance, female cheetah Jwala had moved as far as Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan. She was brought back to Kuno NP after tranquilisation.

Rajasthan's principal chief conservator of forest and chief wildlife warden Shikha Mehra said that both the MP and Rajasthan governments have approved the MoU. Had the MoU been inked, studies could have started, the Wildlife Institute of India could have got involved, and Rajasthan could have begun work on developing the grassland for cheetahs.

The Rajasthan Forest Department had proposed the matter in its state board meeting on June 23, but two days before the signing of the MoU, the MP FD authorities informed that they would take a call later. (See *PA Updates* Vol. XXX, No. 3 and Vol. XXIX, No. 4)

Source: Rajan Raikwar. 'Eleventh-Hour U-Turn: Madhya Pradesh Defers Cheetah Corridor MoU With Rajasthan', www.freepressjournal.in, 17/08/2025.

MAHARASHTRA

WII experts approve pilot project for leopard sterilisation in Junnar

Scientists at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have given a go-ahead to the proposed

leopard sterilisation project in Junnar, in Pune district. The project now requires the final approval from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The sterilisation of leopards was first suggested by the Junnar Forest Division (JFD) that also prepared a detailed draft to conduct a pilot project in Junnar tehsil. The principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), Maharashtra, forwarded this draft to the MoEFCC in June 2024 for evaluation. The MoEFCC referred it to the WII to assess the feasibility and ethical considerations. Based on the review, the WII suggested that a pilot initiative in Junnar is possible provided it is done in a controlled and scientifically monitored manner. However, the true feasibility of the project will only be understood after implementation as it is envisioned as a long-term effort, said a senior scientist at the WII.

Over the past few years, Junnar has emerged as one of the state's major human-leopard conflict zones. Frequent sightings near human settlements, attacks on livestock, and even occasional human injuries have heightened tensions in rural pockets, prompting the state forest department to explore innovative interventions.

Nine human deaths, and nine injuries in leopard attacks were reported here in 2024-25. In 2023-24, three people died, and 10 others were injured. In 2022-23, the number of deaths was four while 16 people were injured. In 2021-22, one person died and six others were injured in leopard attacks. 21 deaths were reported in 2019.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 3).

Source: Gayatri Vajpeyee. 'WII approves leopard sterilisation project in Junnar', www.hindustantimes.com, 10/08/2025.

Environmental activists send legal notice to FD about festivities inside SGNP



A day after writing letters and expressing concerns about the festivities taking place inside the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), environmental

activists sent a legal notice to the forest authorities in the month of August.

Representing NGOs Vanashakti and Yeoor Environmental Society (YES), advocate Ronita Bhattacharya Bector sent a notice to the SGNP director, the additional principal chief conservator of forests, wildlife (west), the principal secretary of the environment department, and the chief secretary of the revenue and forest departments.

The notice stated that religious festivities, ceremonies, and social gatherings within the SGNP are prohibited by the Bombay High Court (HC) to prevent disturbance to wildlife. In an order passed in 2022 the HC had directed the forest department (FD) to stop any non-forest activities, including idol immersions and processions within the SGNP. It also directed the FD to take all necessary actions to safeguard the ecology as SGNP is a protected forest under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

According to YES, a Kanwar Yatra took place inside SGNP in July and this was followed by another religious event in August. Soon, the political parties began demanding that the SGNP remain open for idol immersion. Vanashakti pointed out that loudspeakers and other activities are harmful to wildlife. People dipping into the water or immersing idols in it would threaten crocodiles, reptiles, and other aquatic animals.

The activists argued that while commoners and trekkers are prohibited from going to the Dahisar riverside, people are

allowed to bathe in the river as part of their religious rituals. There should be a uniform law in the park. They demanded that range officers be deployed to ensure compliance with the HC order and the issuance of a public notice stating that non-forest activities are prohibited in the park.

Source: Shreya Jachak. 'Environmental activists serve legal action over celebrations inside SGNP', www.hindustantimes.com, 17/08/2025.

TAMIL NADU

FD launches real-time wildlife crime management platform 'HAWK'

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) has in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and NTT Data, launched Hostile Activity Watch Kernel (HAWK), a real-time crime management platform aimed at curbing forest and wildlife crimes. The launch coincided with World Elephant Day celebrations on 12 August.

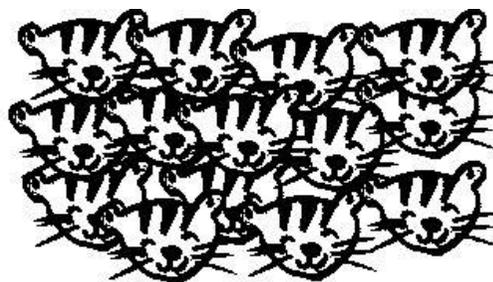
The platform, powered by advanced technology, data analytics, and artificial intelligence, will serve as a centralised state-level intelligence and monitoring system. It is designed to streamline documentation, enhance decision-making, and enable proactive responses to wildlife crimes. Currently, information is siloed within individual forest ranges or divisions. With HAWK, crime reports will be instantly available to all HAWK users across the state, informed the chief wildlife warden.

A WTI representative said that the system would empower forest officials to prevent hostile activities and address threats to habitats. HAWK comprises two modules: Shikra, for recording wildlife mortality incidents across the state, and Peregrine, the core module, which tracks all crime-related data from initial reports to final court judgments.

Source: 'Tamil Nadu launches HAWK to combat wildlife crimes', www.newindianexpress.com, 14/08/2025.

WEST BENGAL

Expansion of Sunderbans TR makes it second largest protected tiger habitat in India



The Sunderbans Tiger Reserve (TR) became India's second-biggest TR on 19 August 2025 after the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife (SC-NBWL) approved the West Bengal government's proposal to increase its area. The SC-NBWL, led by the Union environment, forest and climate change minister Bhupender Yadav, cleared the West Bengal government's proposal of adding 1,044.68 sq. km increasing the area of the reserve now to 3,629.57 sq. km. The ranges added to the reserve are the Matla, Raidighi and Ramganga ranges in the South 24-Parganas district.

Andhra Pradesh's Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem TR with an area of 3,727.82 sq. km is the largest TR in the country.

The idea of including parts of the South 24-Parganas forest division within the Sunderbans TR was mooted nearly 20 years ago. The State had approached the Centre in 2005-06 to integrate the adjoining forest areas with Sunderbans TR, but the proposal was never approved. The idea was mooted again in 2022-23, when a committee led by the Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve's director recommended the amalgamation.

The current proposal was formalised in 2024 after the State Board of Wildlife

cleared it in September 2023 and the NTCA gave it a go-ahead. The final proposal was sent to NBWL in July 2025.

Conservationists have welcomed the move as they believe that the expansion will enhance tiger management in the Sundarbans and attract increased central funding. However, some of the forest officials are not that hopeful. They said that they will know how the situation pans out once the Centre sends formal communication and the state issues the notification. The current TR is facing several problems, mainly the lack of manpower and finance, they pointed out.

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), a platform for small fishermen, has opposed the move. A DMF member claimed that there was no discussion with the fishermen communities before taking the step that would directly affect their livelihoods. A senior forest official however pointed out that fishermen would not face any problem and would be able to carry out their livelihood as they did earlier, as the added area is part of the buffer area.

According to the latest tiger census, the Sundarbans TR has an estimated 101 tigers — 80 inside the current TR area and 21 in the adjoining South 24-Parganas forest.

Source: Jayanta Basu. 'Sundarbans Tiger Reserve now India's second largest, after National Board for Wildlife approves Bengal's proposal to increase area', www.downtoearth.org.in, 22/08/2025.
Jayanta Basu. 'International Tiger Day 2025: Sundarbans Tiger Reserve set to expand by 1,100 sq. km, becoming India's second largest', www.downtoearth.org.in, 29/07/2025.

Pilot project to restore elephant corridors in Naxalbari forest bordering Nepal

The Kurseong Forest Division (KFD) is undertaking a pilot project in Kalabari, under the Naxalbari forest range bordering Nepal, to restore elephant corridors by planting grasses preferred by elephants and by creating new

wetlands. The KFD's initiative covers 10 ha and includes planting four highly palatable grass species locally known as *Dhadda*, *Chepti*, *Purundi*, and *Malsa*.

In the past year elephant attacks have resulted in eight human deaths, the destruction of about 20 houses, and extensive damage to agricultural land and standing crops in the KFD alone. According to the North Bengal chief forest officer (wildlife), there are about 150 elephants in Darjeeling and KFD. There is about 3,000 ha of forest cover. Even then, elephants often enter the human settlements for paddy or other crops. This project is expected to provide a sustainable food and water source within the forest, reducing the need for elephants to venture into human settlements. The project will also offer employment opportunities to local village residents, especially women, in grassland expansion.

Similar projects are also being undertaken in other remote forest areas identified as crucial wildlife habitats. There are more than 10 elephant corridors in the Darjeeling district. The grassland will be created in the areas adjacent to and inside the forest. The forest department has already started to grow seedlings of the grass in three nurseries.

According to the forest department, human-elephant conflict across West Bengal has caused 99 human deaths in the state in 2024 alone. Successive studies have revealed that the major contributing factors are elephant habitat fragmentation and the rapid encroachment and urbanisation of forest fringes.

Source: 'A Life Saving Solution: Kurseong Forest Division's New Approach To Human Elephant Conflict', www.etvbharat.com, 02/09/2025.



NATIONAL NEWS

3,251 people killed in attacks by tigers and elephants in the country in five years

Data released by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shows that 3,251 people were killed in attacks by tigers and elephants in the last five years. 2,869 of these occurred in elephant attacks, while the number killed by tigers was 382. Maharashtra reported the highest of 218 deaths in tiger attacks followed by 61 in Uttar Pradesh and 32 in Madhya Pradesh. 17 such deaths were reported from Bihar, 12 from West Bengal, nine from Uttarakhand and four from Assam.

Of the 2,869 people killed in elephant attacks in the same period, Odisha reported the highest number of 624. This was followed by 436 deaths in West Bengal, 383 in Assam and 256 in Tamil Nadu.

An advisory on dealing with human-wildlife conflict issued by the MoEFCC recommends coordinated interdepartmental action, identification of conflict zones, adherence to standard operating procedures, establishment of rapid response teams, and formation of state and district-level committees to review the quantum of ex gratia relief for its expeditious payments.

Guidelines to states and union territories (UTs) have advised them to utilise the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), where the revamped operational guidelines allow states and UTs to provide add-on coverage for crop loss by wild animals. The guidelines also include preparation and implementation of a comprehensive long-term plan for alternate cropping by the state agriculture/horticulture department under different schemes in vulnerable areas.

The MoEFCC has also issued species-specific guidelines to deal with human-wildlife conflict situations involving elephant, gaur, leopard, snake, crocodile, rhesus macaque,

wild pig, bear, blue bull and blackbuck.

Further, it has pointed out that Section 11 (1) (a) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, empowers the chief wildlife warden (CWLW) of the state to grant permits for hunting animals falling in Schedule I of the Act, which become dangerous to human life. Section 11 (1) (b) of the Act empowers the CWLW or any authorised officer to grant permits for hunting of wild animals falling under Schedule-II of the Act, if such animals have become dangerous to human life or property.

Source: Santu Das. 'Wild Encounters Turn Deadly: 3,251 Killed By Tigers, Elephants In 5 Years In India', www.etvbharat.org, 09/08/2025.

NTCA limits criteria for tiger corridors to 'least cost pathways'; move to benefit mining projects

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) issued a clarification in August, limiting the number of tiger corridors, primarily, to only 32 'least cost pathways' identified in 2014. It is less than a month after NTCA had affirmed before the Bombay High Court (HC) that the identification of tiger corridors must take cognizance of multiple scientific studies and parameters.

On July 25, in its affidavit before the Bombay HC, the NTCA cited a letter issued to Maharashtra in 2023 to reiterate multiple benchmarks for defining tiger corridors that are as follows:

- protected areas (PAs) occupied by tigers
- least cost pathways identified in 2014
- corridors marked in Tiger Conservation Plans (TCPs) of each tiger reserve (TR)
- corridors identified by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) — 'Tiger Corridors of Eastern Vidarbha Landscape', in 2016
- corridors identified by WII under the study 'Telemetry-based Tiger Corridors of Vidarbha Landscape', in 2021

- Distribution of tigers based on quadrennial all-India Tiger Estimations (AITEs)

However, at the hearing on August 22, the NTCA modified that stand by placing on record the clarification it issued on August 21. This reduced the benchmarks for tiger corridors only to the 'least cost pathways' identified in its 2014 report and the ones recorded by TRs in their individual TCPs.

Among the potential beneficiaries of the new limited definition of tiger corridors are Western Coalfields Limited (Durgapur open cast mines) and Lloyds Metals & Energy (Surajgarh iron ore mines) in Maharashtra (see *PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 5).

Under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, development projects requiring land in or around TRs or corridors require statutory clearance from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL). In a SC-NBWL meeting in March discussing the Western Coalfields mining project within a tiger corridor connecting the Tadoba-Kanhargoan-Tipeshwar forests in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, a senior government official observed that projects that did not fall within the 'least cost pathways' designated for tigers were being sent from Maharashtra even though such projects should not require SC-NBWL approval.

Considering the same project in a meeting of the SC-NBWL on June 26, the Director General (Forests) noted that "Maharashtra alone is facing this issue" and the environment secretary said that the NTCA should clarify that only the 'least cost pathways' identified by them should be treated as tiger corridors.

However, the NTCA was already issued a notice by the Bombay HC on June 25 in a case challenging the decision taken by the Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) on April 17 to send for SC-NBWL approval only those projects that fell within the 'least cost pathways'. Among the projects up for discussion at that SBWL meeting were two proposals requiring 9.5 sq. km of forest land — for mining of hematite from quartzite, systemic

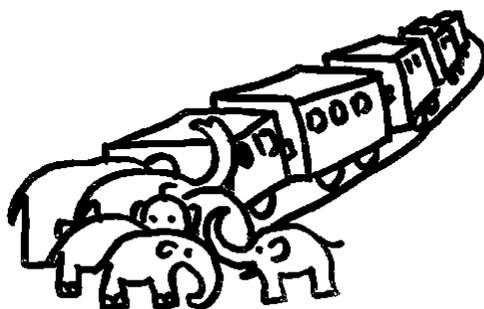
recovery of iron ore, and laying out of roadside conveyors — in Surajgarh mines run by Lloyds Metals & Energy at Etapalli in Gadchiroli district.

The exclusion of multiple WII studies and the robust AITE data has surprised many as the 2014 NTCA report itself cautioned that the corridors shown in this report are minimal requirement and that alternative connectivities do exist in many areas, which need to be conserved.

In the meantime, in July earlier in 2025, researchers from Nagpur-based LRC Foundation applied contemporary circuit-scape modelling, which reflects multiple probable paths of animal movement and not just the shortest route, to come up with 192 corridors from a dense network across 10 central Indian states, enabling tiger movement across 30 TRs and around 150 PAs.

Source: Jay Mazoomdar. 'NTCA limits tiger corridors to minimal requirement, multiple projects to benefit', www.indianexpress.com, 22/08/2025.

MoEFCC proposes mitigation measures to curb elephant casualties on railway tracks



The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has prepared a comprehensive report outlining targeted interventions to address the increasing fatalities of elephants and other wild animals in railway accidents. Titled 'Suggested Measures to Mitigate Elephant and Other Wildlife Train Collisions on Vulnerable Railway Stretches in India', the report has been prepared after field

surveys across 127 identified railway stretches spanning a total of 3,452.4 km. Based on the intensity of wildlife movement, 77 railway stretches covering 1,965.2 km across 14 States have been prioritised for mitigation along with site-specific interventions.

The proposed measures include 503 ramps and level crossings, 72 bridge extensions and modifications, 39 fencing, barricading, or trenching structures, 65 new underpasses, and 22 overpasses, totalling 705 structures.

The MoEFCC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Railways, has already implemented numerous initiatives to avert elephant fatalities on railway tracks, which include holding inter-ministerial meetings. The management of wildlife habitats, including elephant corridors, is primarily the responsibility of State governments and Union Territory administrations. Capacity-building workshops for Railway officials were conducted in 2023 and 2024 at the Wildlife Institute of India to sensitise them on various aspects of elephant conservation and protection.

The MoEFCC has shared the report with the State governments and the Ministry of Railways.

A total of 79 elephant casualties due to train collisions were reported across the country between 2020-21 and 2024-25, as per recent data issued by the MoEFCC.

(Also see *PA Update* Vol XXXI, Nos. 4 & 2)

Source: 'Govt. Proposes Urgent Measures To Prevent Elephant Deaths from Train Collisions', www.etvbharat.com, 27/08/2025.

More exemptions for mineral exploration in forest areas

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC)'s forest advisory committee (FAC) has approved requests to allow more bore holes to be drilled on forest land for mineral exploration activity

without seeking clearance under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

As per the existing guidelines under the Act, drilling of up to 25 boreholes per 10 sq. km and 80 shot holes per sq. km, along with felling of up to 100 trees in the said area, was exempted from forest clearance. MoEFCC will now allow 62 to 80 boreholes of up to 6-inch diameter per 10 sq. km, for survey and exploration under the exemption category depending on the type of mineral deposits or ore explored. The exemptions for exploratory drilling were granted on forest land when the Act was amended in 2023.

The decision comes on the back of relaxations sought by the Ministry of Coal and the Ministry of Mines. These ministries, keeping in view the fact that a large part of the exploration area falls under forest cover, had sought intervention from MoEFCC for the proposal of enhancement of boreholes/shot holes in the forest areas, stated the FAC. The policy decision was based on a report of the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal, which assessed the issue and its impact on forest areas.

An inter-ministerial coordination and monitoring committee had decided in 2024 that IIFM should conduct a study on the issue along with the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited and the Geological Survey of India, under the aegis of the Ministry of Mines.

While granting the relaxation, the MoEFCC directed that there should be minimal impact of the drilling and other associated activities on wildlife; the survey and exploration activities, including drilling, shall be limited from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. It added that the boreholes should be plugged with cement immediately after completion of all borehole-related activities.

As per the minutes of the meeting of the FAC where the matter was discussed, the FAC noted the IIFM report's observations on the impact on wildlife. It cited the report saying that since the borehole drilling was a temporary activity lasting up to 20 days at each site, it would not have "long-term" impacts on

the wildlife. IIFM, though, added that the noise created by the drilling rig can disturb the wildlife and force them to change their movement paths. The FAC noted that the riparian ecosystems would be impacted if water is blocked and abstracted from the forested stream. It would further result in the discharge of oil and grease into the stream, and can have negative impacts on aquatic wildlife species. The FAC stated that the standard operating procedure (SOP) for mineral exploration in forest areas is to be followed. The SOP states that a reconnaissance is necessary before drilling to identify critical habitats, only to avoid them.

Source: Nikhil Ghanekar. 'More exemptions for mineral exploration drilling on forest land', www.indianexpress.com, 04/09/2025.

ZSI records 683 new species in 2024

A latest report by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has reported discoveries of 683 new species and subspecies in 2024 alone, the highest ever in a single calendar year since formal documentation began in 2008. Of these 683 species, 459 are new globally, while the remaining 224 have been recorded for the first time in India. This surpasses the previous records of 662 species in 2022 and 641 in 2023. Kerala accounted for the most discoveries (101 species), followed by Karnataka (82), Arunachal Pradesh (72), Tamil Nadu (63), West Bengal (56), the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (43), Meghalaya (42) and Uttarakhand (31).

Titled 'Animal Discoveries: New Species and New Records 2024', the report was prepared by a ZSI team comprising director Dhriti Banerjee and scientists C Raghunathan, Anjum N Rizvi and Jayita Sengupta. It was released by Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav during the ZSI's 110th anniversary celebrations in Kolkata, in July.

The report, along with these latest discoveries, also includes information on

105,244 species and subspecies recorded by the ZSI scientists since the institution was founded in 1916. Although comprehensive year-wise data before 2008 is unavailable, ZSI researchers acknowledge that the numbers were significantly lower in earlier decades due to less intensive documentation and the absence of advanced technological tools.

At the conclusion of the Animal Taxonomy Summit 2025, held during the ZSI anniversary celebrations, several recommendations were proposed by Indian and international experts for submission to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Key proposals included conducting comprehensive vulnerability and risk assessments for endemic faunal species in the eastern Himalayas and northeast India, developing targeted conservation strategies, and adopting several key measures to strengthen conservation efforts across the country. These include the establishment of integrated biodiversity surveillance systems that bring together taxonomy, conservation genetics, and community-sourced data to support timely policy-making and public health responses. They also called for the creation of a national stakeholder grid, alongside a centralised digital platform, to enable prompt reporting and coordinated action against invasive insect pests.

To protect wildlife from the impacts of infrastructure development, the report emphasised the need for scientifically designed mitigation features. Among the marine-focused proposals were the formation of a National Repository and Taxonomic Consortium for Marine Species, as well as the establishment of a dedicated regional centre of the ZSI in Lakshadweep.

Source: Jayanta Basu. 'Kerala emerges as India's top biodiversity discovery hotspot', www.downtoearth.org.in, 15/07/2025.

SOUTH ASIA

NEPAL/INDIA

India and Nepal's efforts helped to increase greater one-horned rhino population: IUCN and TRAFFIC



A report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and TRAFFIC has credited 'strengthened monitoring and surveillance' as having protected India and Nepal's rhinos from the scourge of poaching. The report particularly highlighted Nepalese convictions of individuals involved in poaching.

Titled 'African and Asian Rhinoceroses – Status, Conservation and Trade', the report was commissioned by the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It was prepared by the IUCN Species Survival Commission's African Rhino Specialist Group, Asian Rhino Specialist Group and TRAFFIC.

By the end of March 2025, the greater one-horned rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) had an estimated population of 4,075, with 3,323 in India and 752 in Nepal. The IUCN report pointed out that the number was slightly higher than 4,014 reported at CoP-19. It added that since 2007, rhino populations in India and Nepal have shown steady growth. Rhinos numbers in India rose from 2,150 in 2007 to

3,323 by 2024, reflecting successful conservation efforts. The population in Nepal also grew from 413 in 2007 to 752 in 2024.

These trends highlight the success of focused protection both in India and Nepal, it added. In India, nine rhinos were illegally killed between January 2021 and December 2024, while the number in Nepal for the same period was four. Strengthened surveillance and monitoring, the analysis notes, has prevented further such incidents. Between January 2022 and April 2025, for instance, enforcement efforts in Chitwan National Park in Nepal led to the arrest of 52 suspects in connection with rhino related crimes. Seven criminal cases naming 33 individuals were also filed. In three of those cases, Nepalese courts convicted 18 of the accused.

The report at the same time also underscores the ongoing threat that poaching poses and the critical importance of sustained monitoring and legal follow-through. Sustainable funding is urgently needed in Asian rhino range states, particularly in Indonesia, to improve law enforcement and protect the critically endangered Javan (*R. sondaicus*) and Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), according to the report.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'IUCN-TRAFFIC report praises 'strengthened monitoring and surveillance' for protecting India and Nepal's rhinos from poaching', www.downtoearth.org.in, 08/08/2025.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Mix trends in populations of various rhino species worldwide: a report

The State of the Rhino 2024 report by the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) reveals mixed trends in rhino populations worldwide. Greater one-horned rhinos in India and Nepal have seen a slight increase, while the numbers of Javan rhinos have dropped significantly due

to poaching. The number of Sumatran rhinos has remained the same since the last estimates in 2022, but they are considered to be 'seriously imperiled'. In Africa, black rhino numbers have risen while those of white rhinos in South Africa have decreased.

The report credited the trans-boundary management strategy implemented by India, Nepal and Bhutan, as well as strict government protection and management for the rise in greater one-horned rhino numbers over the last century.

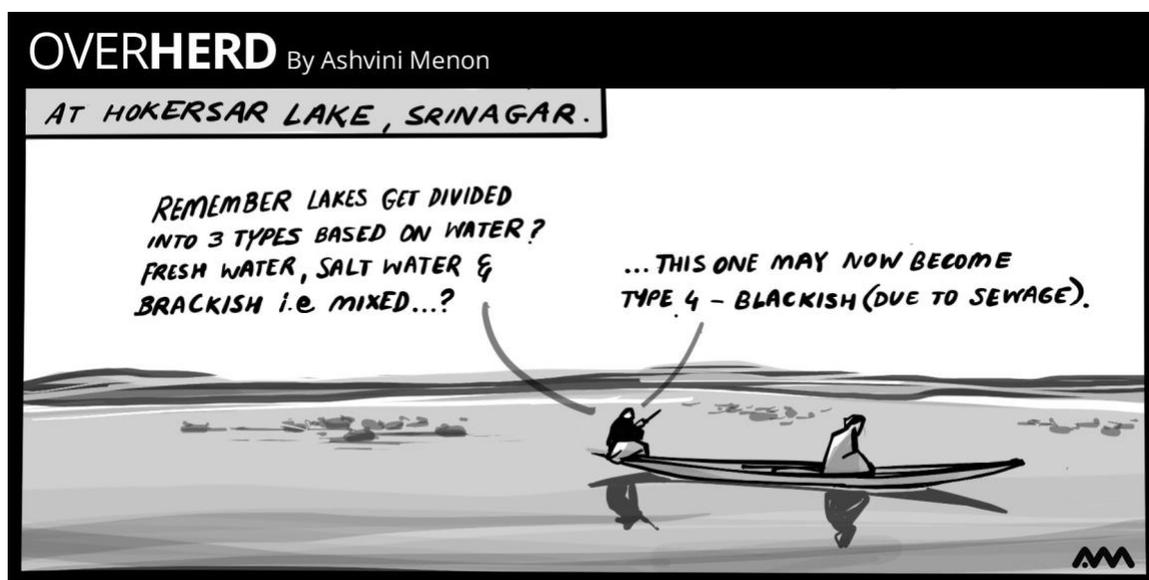
According to a statement by the IRF, white rhino numbers show various trends. These have increased in all range states except South Africa, where poaching caused a slight population decline. White rhinos have declined to 15,752 from 15,942, a drop of about 190 since the end of 2021, when numbers were last officially reported. Javan rhinos declined from an estimated 76 to approximately 50, entirely due to poaching. The Sumatran rhino population remained the same at an estimated 34-47, while greater one-horned rhino numbers rose from 4,014 to 4,075. Black rhinos

increased to 6,788 from the last count of 6,195. These numbers do not include rhinos in zoos.

The IRF statement mentioned that there are 26,700 rhinos across the world. It further added that a significant threat to greater one-horned rhinos is poaching, which has caused local extinctions in various parts of the species' former range. The statement said that another significant landscape-level threat to greater one-horned rhinos is the prevalence of invasive species, which choke out native food plants of rhinos and cause the shrinking of their habitat.

The report has concluded that greater one-horned rhinos could be one of the most affected species by climate change, as stronger monsoon seasons and limited space and resources cause habitat disruption and increase the threat of human-wildlife conflict.

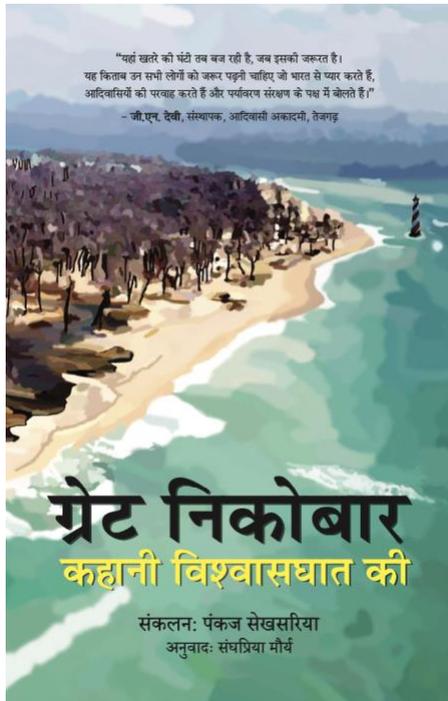
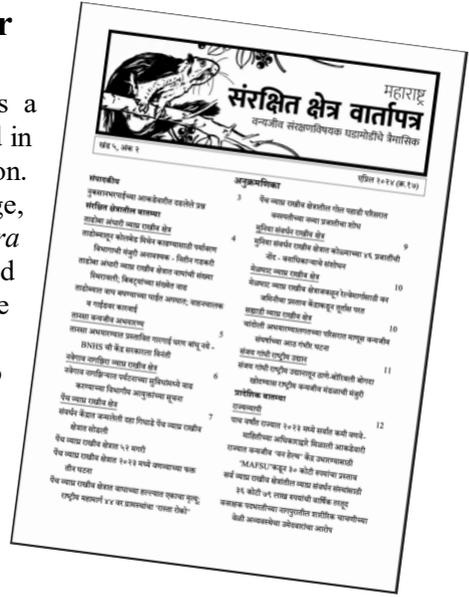
Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Greater one-horned rhino numbers rise slightly, Javan ones plunge, and black rhino numbers increase: State of the Rhino 2024', www.downtoearth.org.in, 08/08/2025.



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 its 6th 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. A publication in regional language has the potential to play a greater role in environmental education and awareness generation among the regional population. We request you to help us reach out to the Marathi readers.

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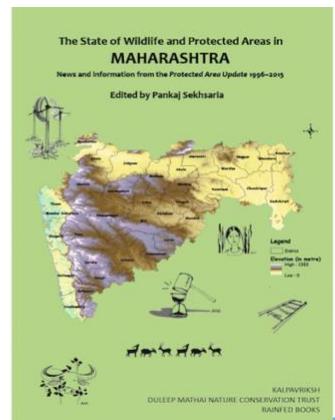
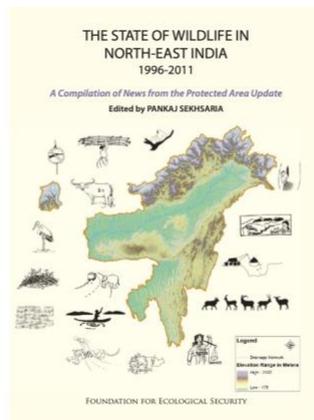
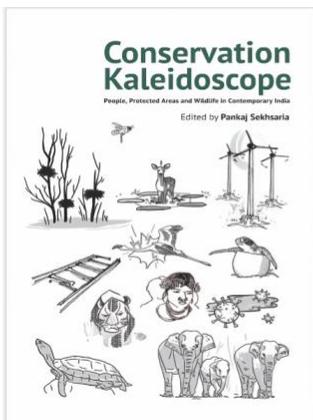
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THE PROTECTED AREA UPDATE DATABASE

<https://pau-database.kalpavriksh.org/>



The *Protected Area Update* team is very happy to announce the creation and publication of the *Protected Area Update Database*, a searchable online resource that archives and brings together nearly 30 years of the news and information published in the *PA Update* since in its beginning in 1994.

The *PA Update*, a 24-page newsletter in English, provides an overview of what is happening in the field of wildlife protection and conservation in Protected Areas from across South Asia, particularly India. It is published six times a year and mailed to nearly 2000 people including students, teachers, activists, and researchers. Additionally, it

goes out as an electronic version via an emailing list to about 4500 individuals and is uploaded on the Kalpavriksh website as well. The newsletter, in its 31st year of publication, has curated and published 6000+ news reports over the years. This number is constantly increasing with each issue of the newsletter.

The *PA Update Database*, a joint project of Kalpavriksh, the Foundation for Ecological Security, The Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Foundation, The Environment and Ecology Research Group (EERG), at C-TARA, IIT Bombay and the DST, Govt of India supported GISE Hub, IITB Bombay brings together about 4500 of these stories from 300+ protected areas from around the country on one single platform to make it more accessible and user-friendly. It facilitates and hopes to provide important insights into the discourse of wildlife conservation in India, how the news media has perceived wildlife, environment, and development issues in the country over the past three decades.



We hope that this online *PA Update* database will provide a starting point for enquiries into and/or studies on wildlife and media reporting for students, researchers, journalists, activists, and concerned citizens. For further details and feedback please write to pskhsaria@gmail.com

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DELHI

New species of spider found in Asola Bhatti WLS

A new species of spider has been discovered in Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary. The ‘jumping spider’ has been named *Stenaelurillus jagannathae* due to its unique colour pattern, which resembles the Hindu deity Lord Jagannath’s face. The discovery was made by herpetologist and assistant professor, Dr. Sanjay Keshari Das of the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, and his team of students. Their finding was published in the International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) and has been endorsed by the World Spider Catalog (WSC) — the database, maintained by the Natural History Museum, Bern in Switzerland.

The male of the specie is 3.75 mm in length while the female is almost double at 6.50 mm. It has two large black eyes on the anterior, akin to the headlights of a car, typical of its ‘Salticidae’ spider family. Its genus is *Stenaelurillus*, which has only 34 known species — 27 found in Africa and eight in Asia. The number now increases to 35 worldwide and nine in Asia.

Source: Balshall Adak. ‘New species of ‘jumping spider’ found in Delhi sanctuary’, www.dailymail.co.uk, 04/08/15.

KARNATAKA

SC Central Empowered Committee says no to railway line cutting across the Western Ghats

The Supreme Court’s Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has said no to the Rs. 2,315-crore Hubli-Ankola railway line cutting across the Western Ghats in Karnataka. It has said that the project is huge and irreparable ecological impact on account of its implementation would far outweigh any benefits that are accrued.

The CEC has noted in its recent report that the net present value of the modified requirement of 727 hectares (ha) of forestland works out to more than three times the project cost. These figures demonstrate the extraordinary high ecological and economic value of the

forestland involved in the project, leading the CEC to recommend to the apex court that it may direct the Environment Ministry not to reconsider or approve the project it had earlier rejected. The CEC’s opinion follows a series of adverse reports the project has attracted since its foundation stone was laid in May 2000 by the then Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee (see box).

The 168 km rail link was conceived in 1998 primarily to transport iron ore from the Bellary-Hospet mines. A joint venture between the Railways and the Karnataka government, the original project involved construction of 329 bridges and 29 tunnels, and required felling of more than 2.5 lakh trees on 965 ha of forest-land. The proposal was rejected by the Environment Ministry in 2004 but revived with modifications in 2006. Pushing the rail link in 2008, the Karnataka government claimed it was “inevitable that the Western Ghats has to be pierced through at some point to ensure this connectivity between coastline and eastern plains of the state.”

2000: Prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee lays foundation stone.

2002: Karnataka Forest Department says no national interest would be served by dissecting forest.

2003: Karnataka forest chief says forest and terrain “do not permit” railway line.

2004: Environment Ministry panel says project will “be a tragedy on the prime forests”.

2005: Railways cuts forest requirement to 720 hectares.

2006: CEC finds work in progress on a 40-km non-forest stretch.

2012: Indian Institute of Science says link would cut through elephant corridor.

2006-2013: Railways says will implement project in stages, Karnataka cuts forest requirement to 687 hectares.

2015: SC panel says “no amount of mitigation measures would be adequate to contain the severe adverse impact on the biodiversity-rich dense forest.

Source: ‘Supreme Court panel says no to mega rail link through Western Ghats’, *The Indian Express*, 24/08/15.

PERSPECTIVE

From laboratory to the larger landscape of the red panda: A personal journey

My journey into wildlife and conservation did not begin in a forest, but in a laboratory. I was initially trained as an engineer in biotechnology, learning to think logically and solve problems in controlled environments. Over time, however, my curiosity shifted from test tubes to ecosystems. I became more interested in how living organisms respond to environmental change, which led me into wildlife conservation and animal physiology.

Over the years, I have worked with several species, including swamp deer, tigers, leopards, elephants, vultures, and red pandas. This experience shaped my independent initiative, Project RED (Research, Education and Development in the Eastern Himalayas), with the red pandas as the focal animal. As an indicator species, the red panda reflects the overall health of Himalayan forests.

My early research focused on red pandas in three Indian zoos, where I studied their behaviour, welfare, and reproductive physiology. This work helped improve captive management practices and supported conservation breeding and reintroduction programmes. Working closely with zoo populations revealed important insights into the environmental and management conditions needed for better health and successful breeding. These findings were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

I also worked on preparing zoo-born red pandas for life in the wild. Since animals raised in captivity lack survival experience, we designed training protocols to develop foraging skills and threat recognition. We tested feeding enrichment methods to encourage natural foraging behaviour and created systems to help red pandas identify predators and human disturbance. These protocols were successfully published and now serve as references for future reintroduction efforts.

While we understand red pandas well under managed conditions, we know very little about how wild populations respond physiologically to habitat change, disturbance, and climate variability. As an Endangered species, red pandas are highly sensitive to bamboo availability, forest structure, temperature, and humidity—making them excellent indicators of forest health.

This knowledge gap led me to the Eastern Himalayas and to my ongoing field research under Project RED in Singalila and Neora Valley National Parks. The project combines habitat assessments — such as bamboo density, forest structure and human pressure—with non-invasive faecal hormone analysis. Hormones such as cortisol and progesterone help assess stress and reproductive health, providing early warning signs of environmental stress long before population declines become visible.

By listening to what red pandas tell us—both externally and internally—we can better protect not only this species but also the fragile Himalayan forests on which it depends.

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