

PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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LIST OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Islands on the margins of our consciousness

NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Workshop on dugong recovery programme
Centre to ease environmental norms for promoting
tourism in the Andamans

Assam

Experts from Assam may visit Nepal to learn about
protecting rhinos from poaching
More highlands to be constructed in Kaziranga NP
Highlands provide refuge to wild animals during
floods in Dibru-Saikhowa NP
Experts verify genuineness of rhinoceros horns in
state treasuries
More than a 1000 human deaths in human-elephant
conflict in Assam since 2001

Chhattisgarh

Training for Udanti-Sitanadi TR staff

Gujarat

Gujarat to 'delete' 10,935 hectares of reserve forest

Karnataka

H.D. Kote farmers adjoining Bandipur and
Nagarahole NPs fear increase in man-animal
conflict
Karnataka to use immuno-contraception technique to
control elephant populations

FD objects to widening of road through Dandeli
WLS

Railway proposes land diversion from Dandeli WLS;
wildlife activists fear habitat fragmentation

Madhya Pradesh

Kathiwada forest proposed to be first conservation
reserve in MP; locals had opposed an earlier
wildlife sanctuary proposal

Maharashtra

Horses to patrol Sahyadri TR; other conservation
measures announced

Atlas for management of wildlife corridors in eastern
Vidarbha

Draft ESZ notification issued for Mayureshwar Supe
WLS, Maharashtra

Odisha

Anthrax caused elephant deaths in Similipal
NGT seeks status report on elephant corridors in
Odisha

Relocation of three villages from Baisipalli WLS on
hold after incidents involving Maoists

WTI starts consultations for wildlife management
plan in state

Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu FD to use drones to monitor wildlife
areas; other measures also proposed
Restriction on night traffic on Thimbam Ghat road in
Satyamangalam TR

Uttarakhand

15 wild animal deaths on Haridwar highway in two
months
NGT seeks MoEFCC reply on relocation of Kalagarh
colonies from within Corbett TR

Committee to confirm tiger presence in Kedarnath
33 beaches on the banks of the Ganga suitable for
camping, says Uttarakhand

Water of Suswa River passing through Rajaji TR
contaminated, not fit for drinking

Uttarakhand to use immuno-contraception technique
on monkeys

Uttarakhand to take lessons on tackling human-
leopard conflict from Maharashtra

West Bengal

Two elephants electrocuted in Darjeeling

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

266 projects approved under Forest Conservation Act
in three years; another 174 agreed to in-principle
GPS will be used in elephant census in 2017

Indo-German team to study human-wildlife conflict in Indian states		Tamil Nadu Housing plots around Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary	
SOUTH ASIA	17	Uttar Pradesh UP to compile wetland data to submit to NGT	
Bangladesh		Obituary- Ashok Kumar	22
Bangladesh to conduct fisheries survey in the Bay of Bengal		A DECADE AGO	23
IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS UPDATE	19	PERSPECTIVE	24
National News		<i>Bridging the gap: Conserving a critical landscape connectivity between Eastern and Western Ghats</i>	
Central Wetland Regulatory Authority meets after four years			
Gujarat			
Birds in Thol, Nalsarovar to be neck ringed to track migration			

Protected Area Update

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Islands on the margins of our consciousness

It is not very often that the *PA Update* carries news and information of developments in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This is surprising considering the number of PAs that there are in the A&N. This small group of 500 odd islands in the Bay of Bengal has nearly a hundred protected areas – this is roughly a sixth of the total number of 600 PAs in India. And it is not just the numbers that should matter because this is an island chain with rich forest, coastal and marine systems that are teeming with a wide diversity of life. Endemism here is high and the islands are also home to a number of indigenous hunter-gatherer communities that have been living here for thousands of years.

Yet we see and hear little of all this in the media. The islands exist not just on the physical margins of a country called India; they've been relegated to the margins of our vision and consciousness as well. This issue of the *PA Update* then is a bit of an anomaly for we have not one, but two reports from the A&N islands. The first is an encouraging and promising report on the efforts being initiated for the conservation of the dugong, one of the rarest and most vulnerable of marine creatures, and also the state animal of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. There cannot be a better mascot for the ocean and any effort made for its protection is hugely welcome.

It is the other report, the one informing us that environmental regulations might be relaxed in the islands for tourism development, that should send our alarm bells ringing. There has been much talk in recent months of increasing economic activity in the islands and tourism promotion, while key to this agenda, is only one of a list of things being proposed. And these include, among others, projects for rail construction, port and petro-chemical complex development, the creation of special economic

zones (SEZ) and enhancing military and defence infrastructure.

Project ideas such as these have been around for a long time, but have gained fresh traction on account of a new proposal for development in the islands that was sent recently to the A&N administration from the NITI Aayog. What is of serious concern is that these plans and proposals are completely, even appallingly, ignorant of the historical, social, ecological and legal context of this unique island system. Many of the projects have, in fact, been proposed in areas that are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act as protected areas or under the provisions of the Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation of 1956 as tribal reserves.

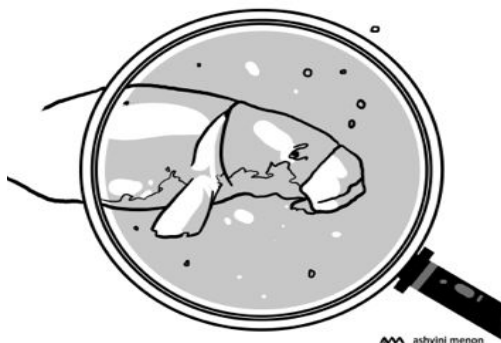
There is no acknowledgement of rights to land and resources that are guaranteed to the indigenous communities and nor does one see any accounting for the rich and rare biodiversity that thrives in the islands. What should be of even greater concern, perhaps, is that the NITI Aayog proposal appears completely ignorant of the fact that these islands are located in one of the world's most seismically active zones, that earthquakes, tsunamis and cyclones are regular occurrences here and that huge costs will have to be paid if these are not factored into development planning here.

In what might be a very apt coincidence, the editorial of the *PA Update* of exactly a decade ago (the issue of October 2006) was also centred on the islands. That one was an account of the damage and destruction that had been wrought in the islands because of the earthquake and resultant tsunami of December 2004 and was asking for a re-orientation of priorities in line with the ecological and geological realities there. That is exactly the point this note seeks to make as well, and it should be a matter of serious concern that no lessons seem to have been learnt of the recent past.

The more things change, the more they seem to remain the same and that is certainly not good news for these islands and their human and non-human denizens.

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Workshop on dugong recovery programme



A consultation workshop under the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) fund for the Dugong Species Recovery Programme based on a participatory approach was organized recently in Port Blair by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands Department of Environment and Forests. The workshop was attended by officials, scientists and researchers from the WII, the Zoological Survey of India, representatives from the coast guard, the fisheries department, marine police, the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team and the Society for Andaman & Nicobar Ecology. Senior officers of the forest department including the divisional forest officers of both territorial and wildlife divisions also participated.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands is the first territory in the country to initiate a species recovery programme for the dugong and restoration of sea grass meadows under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change with research support from the NCF, Mysore.

A NCF researcher presented an account on the importance of dugong conservation, the

status of sea grass meadows including composition, the threats, the need for monitoring the population, conservation and management imperatives and awareness and capacity building. A total of 67 meadows have been surveyed so far during which 21 dugongs were encountered during the last four years.

Senior faculty of the WII made a presentation on the new project, its objectives, methodologies, role of various stakeholders, sensitization and awareness generation of local communities, involvement of communities, strategies to elicit the support, involvement and participation of communities in the recovery programme including the option of incentivizing fishermen communities for successful conservation of the dugong in the territorial waters of the islands.

The stakeholders provided comments and suggestions on issues related to the aerial survey, boat survey and diving/snorkeling surveys of sea grass meadows and the dugong, the implications and need for more research on sea grass meadows, monitoring protocol, mapping of sea grass meadows, stakeholder participation, providing logistics for survey and movement of the research team, infrastructure and facilities to be put in place for carrying out the project activities in North, Middle and South Andamans and also the Nicobar group of Islands.

A need was also expressed to re-look at the dugong awareness programmes already being implemented by various agencies like fisheries, coast guard, marine police and the forest department.

Source: 'Workshop on Dugong Species Recovery Programme held', *The Echo of India*, 06/08/2016.

Centre to ease environmental norms for promoting tourism in the Andamans

The Union Ministry of Tourism has formed a panel to look into the possibilities of opening uninhabited islands in the Andaman and Lakshadweep for high-value tourism. The move has been initiated by the Prime Minister's

Office. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the government is keen to promote tourism on six uninhabited islands, including in wildlife sanctuaries in the Andaman group and four islands that are part of the Lakshadweep group.

The panel has also been asked to redefine existing coastal zone regulations to allow construction of edge-of-the-sea resorts. The idea is to construct world-class resorts and hotels to promote high-end tourism and attract mainly foreign tourists. The investment is expected mostly from private parties, and the government is reportedly willing to ease environmental norms to facilitate the process.

The panel is likely to submit its report within a month after which necessary measures will be taken to facilitate the required construction and infrastructure creation.

Source: Sumi Sukanya Dutta, 'Prod to Andaman tourism', *The Telegraph*, 31/07/16.

ASSAM

Experts from Assam may visit Nepal to learn about protecting rhinos from poaching

Assam Forest Minister, Pramila Rani Brahma, is reported to have responded positively to the proposal by a BJP legislator for sending a team of officials and experts from Assam to Nepal to know how that country has achieved zero poaching success where rhinos are concerned. Brahma told the state assembly that the government would give a serious thought to the proposal and do the needful.

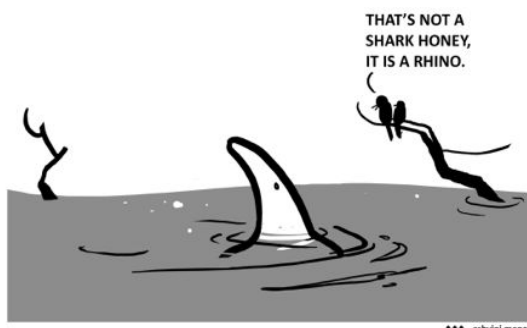
Nepal has a rhino population of 645 and there have been no cases of rhino poaching in 2014 and 2015. An article posted on the WWF Global website in May this year says Nepal's zero poaching success is rooted in a coordinated national response.

Earlier, responding to another legislator's concern about the massive racket of rhino poachers in the state, the minister said that the racket is deep-rooted and that the government was contemplating on the means of eliminating this. Kaziranga and other protected

areas in Assam have lost more than 200 rhinos to poachers since 2001.

Source: Daulat Rahman. 'Nepal model mullied against poachers', *The Telegraph*, 09/08/16.

More highlands to be constructed in Kaziranga NP



The Assam Forest Department will construct more highlands – raised platforms – inside the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) to protect animals during the floods. The state forest minister, Pramila Rani Brahma, told the state assembly recently that though there are 111 highlands in KNP, many of them got submerged in the recent wave of floods, and have been badly damaged by the floodwaters. These highlands will be repaired urgently and their height will be increased too.

The floods in Kaziranga this year are reported to have killed 32 rhinos, 320 hog deer, 14 swamp deer, five wild buffalos, 17 wild boar, six sambar and five porcupines. Animals often come out of the KNP during floods, cross national highway 37 and climb the hills in neighbouring Karbi Anglong district for shelter. While some animals meet with accidents on the highway others fall prey to poachers.

Responding to a question on the compensation given to the victims of human-elephant conflicts in the state, the minister said that the government was planning to increase the compensation to Rs three lakh from the existing Rs one lakh.

In the meanwhile, chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal has called for a

comprehensive action plan for protection of rhinos at a national-level expert consultation for developing stronger strategy for protection of rhinos in Assam. He stressed the need for building a strong intelligence network to track the movements of poachers and strengthen the surveillance system. The state government has also decided to launch a health insurance scheme for forest personnel. The Centre has already released an amount of Rs 20 lakh for the purpose.

Source: 'Highland hope for Kaziranga animals', *The Telegraph*, 12/08/16.

Highlands provide refuge to wild animals during floods in Dibru-Saikhowa NP

The numerous highlands dotting the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (DSNP) helped provide refuge and save a number of wild animals during the floods here in July-August. There was not a single reported case of wild animal death though almost 90% of the 340 km² park was inundated for a week on account of the flooding of the Brahmaputra, Dibru and Lohit rivers.

The divisional forest officer (DFO) of Tinsukia said that once the water level starts rising, the animals flee to highlands situated in the park. This time, forest staff came across several deer cubs that were caught in the floodwaters. All of them were rescued and released in the highlands.

Source: Rajib Dutta. 'Highlands save animals at Dibru-Saikhowa Park', *The Times of India*, 04/08/16.

Experts verify genuineness of rhino horns in state treasuries

A state government-appointed team of experts has started the verification of about 2,000 rhino horns kept in 13 treasuries across Assam. The verification was initiated following reports that fake horns have replaced the original ones. The first leg of the exercise started at the Golaghat treasury where every horn was physically

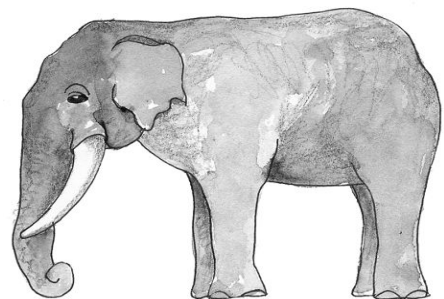
verified for its genuineness with the help of the experts from the government forensic laboratory.

The horns were found to be in good condition. There was negligible decay as each of them was wrapped in plastic. Some of the horns were as heavy as 1.615 kg. The smallest one weighed 20 grams.

Golaghat has the highest number of rhino horns, followed by Nagaon, Tezpur and Guwahati.

Source: Prabin Kalita. 'Rhino horns found in good condition', *The Times of India*, 12/08/16.

More than a 1000 human deaths in human-elephant conflict in Assam since 2001



As many as 1,024 people have died due to human-elephant conflict in Assam in the period 2001 to 2016. The information was provided by the state forest and environment minister, Pramila Rani Brahma, in the Assam State Assembly in a written reply to a question. The minister also noted that families of 972 of 1,024 people who had died had been given compensation.

The yearly maximum number of 118 deaths was reported in 2015 and the division that saw the maximum human casualties was the Sonitpur East forest division where 169 people were reported to have died in this period.

Replying to a separate query, Brahma said that the forest department has taken a series of steps to tackle the human-elephant conflict, including erecting solar power fencing and digging elephant-proof trenches. In certain forest divisions, searchlights have also been provided to deal with the situation.

Year	Number of deaths
2001	49
2002	46
2003	44
2004	54
2005	61
2006	80
2007	41
2008	52
2009	82
2010	61
2011	68
2012	84
2013	81
2014	51
2015	118
2016	52

Source: 'Man-elephant conflict: Over 1,000 killed in 16 years', *The Sentinel*, 11/08/16.

CHHATTISGARH

Training for Udanti-Sitanadi TR staff

Nearly 50 members of the frontline staff eight forest ranges of the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (USTR) participated in wildlife related training from August 10 to 12. The training that covered various aspects such as legal, biological and enforcement aspects of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and wildlife crime prevention was organized by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in partnership the Chhattisgarh Forest Department and Oracle, a multinational IT company.

Source: 'Training on wildlife protection at Udanti-Sitanadi', *The Times of India*, 13/08/16.

GUJARAT

Gujarat to 'delete' 10,935 ha of reserve forest

The Supreme Court recently allowed the Gujarat government to delete 10,935 hectares of land from 'reserve forest' category to enable the state

to carry out activities, which are now prohibited in such areas. The court said Gujarat's plea is justified as it has been accepted by the court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) on certain conditions, including that no mining activity should be conducted in those areas.

The court pointed out that the CEC had endorsed the deletion of the areas approved by the forest settlement officer after acknowledging the rights of the villagers in response to the areas notified under Section 4 of the Forest Act. Further it was also reported that the areas have been excluded on genuine grounds.

The CEC, however, imposed conditions that no area will be allowed to be used for mining without obtaining approval under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.



Source: J Venkatesan. 'Gujarat to 'delete' 10,935 hectares of forest land', *The Asian Age*, 09/09/16.

KARNATAKA

H.D. Kote farmers adjoining Bandipur and Nagarhole NPs fear increase in man-animal conflict

Farmers and the local community of H.D. Kote adjoining the forests of the Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks fear an increase in human-animal conflict in the days ahead on account of the water stress being experienced in the region. There are also fears of severe drinking water crisis in summer because of reckless exploitation of groundwater for ginger cultivation.

The Kabini backwaters coupled with the Taraka, Nugu and Hebbala reservoirs are the main source of drinking water for wildlife in the region during summer. But with the imminent

depletion of Kabini coupled with inadequate rain to shore up the groundwater table, there are fears of the backwaters drying up as early as during January or February. The backwaters play host to hundreds of elephants during summer because of availability of water and fodder, which may become scarce this year. This means animals may be forced out of their habitat in search of fodder and water during peak summer, further escalating the crisis.

H.D. Kote has also emerged as a major centre for contract farming of ginger. It is reckoned that 15,000 to 20,000 ha of agricultural land has been brought under ginger cultivation. Being a water-intensive crop, the contractors have sunk borewells and are flooding the field as a result of which drinking water supply through borewells is expected to be affected in the months ahead. Groundwater, which could be tapped at nearly 200 ft a few years ago, has now sunk below 700 ft and this will have a negative bearing on drinking water supply to the local community during summer.

Source: R Krishna Kumar. 'H.D. Kote farmers fear increase in man-animal conflict', *The Hindu*, 14/09/16.

Karnataka to use immuno-contraception technique to control elephant populations

Karnataka will soon use an immuno-contraception technique to control the elephant population in the state. The technique involves injecting the female elephant with a vaccine that triggers an immune system response to block sperm reception. The technique is reported to have been used successfully in South Africa. The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) will first use this technique on captive female elephants, before using it on elephants in the wild. The wildlife warden of Nagarahole National Park has, however, said the birth control technique should be limited to captive elephants.

The human-elephant conflict has reached extremely high levels in Karnataka owing to a combination of an increase in the pachyderm population along with increased

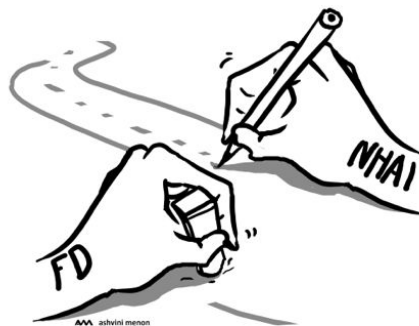
development activities in regions and forests inhabited by elephants.

Karnataka, home to 6,072 Asiatic elephants according to the Karnataka elephant census 2012, has tried various methods such as digging elephant trenches, solar-powered electric fences and relocation of crop raiders, to deal with conflict situations, but success has been limited.

Trampling accidents by elephants alone are responsible annually for at least 50-75 deaths and injuries to around 200 humans, besides crop damage on around 30,000 acres. In the last decade, at least 210 elephants too have died, including in incidents of conflict.

Source: Manu Aiyappa Kanathanda, 'State to control jumbo count with contraceptive vaccine', *The Times of India*, 08/08/16.

FD objects to widening of road through Dandeli WLS



The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has declined to allow widening of the national highway 44 cutting through the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary (DWLS). The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has requested the FD to part with 6.423 hectares (ha) of land between Castle Rock and the sanctuary for widening of a 84 km stretch of the highway from Belagavi to Goa. This is three ha less than the earlier proposal by the NHAI, which in 2013 had proposed to acquire 9.476 ha for the same project.

The FD has insisted that the existing road width of seven metres should not be increased and is inclined to recommend the construction of an underpass or an over-bridge.

The project, if approved, is likely to involve the cutting down of at least 37,000 trees. It will result in round-the-clock movement of heavy vehicles through the forest areas with its severe attendant impacts on the wildlife here.

Work on the widening of the road has already begun in the territorial forest division and towards Belagavi.

Source: Bosky Khanna. 'Forest dept says no to highway widening inside Dandeli Sanctuary', *Deccan Herald*, 11/08/16.

Railway proposes land diversion from Dandeli WLS; wildlife activists fear habitat fragmentation

The South Western Railway has recently submitted a proposal for diversion of 2.22 hectares (ha) of forestland – 1.05 ha in Haliyal Division and 1.17 ha in the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary (DWS) – for the doubling of a railway line here. Based on the proposal, the chief conservator of forests of Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve (DATR) and Canara circle, has recommended for approval the proposal for diversion of 1.17 ha of forestland. The diversion will also need to be approved by the State Wildlife Board, the National Board for Wildlife, the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Supreme Court.

Rail Vikas Nigam Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, has been entrusted with the doubling of railway line in the Hospet-Tinaighat-Castle Rock-Kullem-Vasco section – a total length of 352 km in Karnataka and Goa. The project is being funded by the Asian Development Bank and is monitored by the Prime Minister's Office. The doubling work from on the Hospet-Tinaighat section is already in progress on the existing line.

Wildlife activists have pointed out that the proposal if approved will fragment wildlife habitat and escalate human-animal conflict here. Uttara Kannada district, which has the largest forest cover in the state, is already fragmented by hydel projects, dams, nuclear power stations, highways, railway lines, encroachments and

more. The DATR has at least 14 main roads passing through. Many animals have died in accidents on these roads in recent years and there are two proposals with the state government for further diversion of forestland from the Kumbarwada and Anshi ranges for construction of a bridge within the core area of the tiger reserve. (Also see *PA Update XXI*, Nos. 5 & 3)

Source: Tushar A Majukar. 'Dandeli wildlife in danger as SWR proposes construction of double line', *The New Indian Express*, 09/08/16.

MADHYA PRADESH

Kathiwada forest proposed to be first CR in MP; locals had opposed an earlier wildlife sanctuary proposal

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (FD) has proposed to declare the Kathiwada forests as the first conservation reserve (CR) in the state.

An initial proposal to declare the area a wildlife sanctuary in 2008 had been opposed by the local people due the fear of being relocated. Of the six villages that would have been part of the sanctuary four had opposed the proposal. The other two had agreed, but on the condition that they would not move. A sum of Rs 13.97 crore had also been sanctioned then for the creation of the sanctuary.

The state government has now proposed to declare the area a CR, and the process for the same is to be initiated soon.

Source: Shubham Kishore. 'First conservation reserve of MP likely in Kathiwada forest', *The Times of India*, 18/08/16.

MAHARASHTRA

Horses to patrol Sahyadri TR; other conservation measures announced

In a bid to overcome the challenge of logistics and a difficult terrain, the Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) is proposing the use of horses

for patrolling the forests of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (STR). In June, the FD had deployed three mules on a pilot basis, but two of them had died. Now, the FD plans to first recruit a veterinarian, construct stables and also train staff to use the horses, after which the animals will be procured.

The FD will also need to gauge how the animals would adapt to extreme weather conditions like rains and cold. A senior forest official said that they were looking at procuring local breeds of horses that are sturdy, survive on frugal forage and require less medication.

Senior officials say that the priority is to motivate the protection staff to stay in the jungle and a number of initiatives are being taken for the same. Protection huts are being constructed and around 15 of these huts have been provided televisions, LPG connections and volleyball kits. The FD has made a night halt protocol, stating that every officer should make 10-15 night halts in various places with forest guards. The STR is also getting rifles and ammunition to arm the staffers and ensure better protection and deterrence.

At the same time, the state is working on declaring a patch of evergreen forests at Tillari in Konkan as a wildlife sanctuary. There is also a proposal to translocate six tigers (four females and two males) to the reserve from Chandrapur in Vidarbha. The current tiger population in the reserve is said to be seven animals.

Source: Dhaval Kulkarni. 'All for the Big Cat: Maharashtra mulls horse-patrolling of Sahyadri tiger reserve', *DNA*, 12/08/16.

Atlas for management of wildlife corridors in eastern Vidarbha

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has produced a 'Corridor Atlas of Eastern Vidarbha Landscape' in an effort to better manage wildlife corridors in this region. The atlas is an output of the project 'Evaluating pattern of landscape use by dispersing tigers and modeling potential connectivity bottlenecks'. It attempts to bring science and art of corridor modeling

closer to wildlife managers by providing them with fine scale maps of corridors with associated village level ancillary data like human population, village boundaries, livestock and proportion of forest land.

Scientists and officials have welcomed this development saying that for effective management of corridor areas, it is imperative to have detailed knowledge of the extent of corridors and the pressures therein.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'WII's atlas to help manage tiger corridors', *The Times of India*, 06/08/16.

Draft ESZ notification issued for Mayureshwar Supe WLS, Maharashtra

A draft notification for the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Mayureshwar Supe Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) was issued on the 28th of July. The proposed ESZ includes parts of villages of Vadhane, Supe and Kutawalwadi in Baramati taluka and Bhondewadi & Padavi villages in Daund taluka. It is proposed to be spread over an area of 120.20 hectares with an extent of upto 100 meters from the boundary of the sanctuary. The last date for the submission of comments to the notification was 60 days from the issuance of the same.

Link to the Draft ESZ Notification:

<http://ercindia.org/files/esz/Mayureshwar%20Supe%20WLSDraft%20notification.pdf>

Source: Terence Jorge, EIA Resource and Response Centre (ERC), Goa. 22/08/16.

ODISHA

Anthrax caused elephant deaths in Similipal

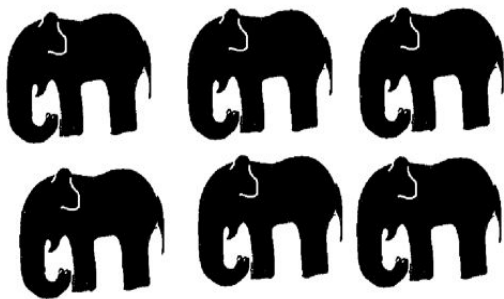
Wildlife authorities have confirmed on the basis of blood test reports that the two elephants - a calf and an adult - whose carcasses were found near Gudgudia under Karanjia forest division in Similipal Tiger Reserve in the second week of September had died of anthrax. The blood samples had been sent to the Animal Disease

Research Institute, Phulnakhara, Cuttack and the report showed anthrax positive. The samples will be sent to Kolkata now for re-testing and for confirmation.

The authorities have now decided to go in for vaccination of domestic animals to check spread of the disease. According to information obtained under RTI by the Wildlife Society of Odisha, six elephants died due to anthrax in different wildlife ranges in Similipal between March 2015 and February 2016. Pithabata wildlife division recorded five deaths due to anthrax while Upper Barakamada range reported one.

Source: Riyan Ramanath V. 'Anthrax caused jumbo deaths in Similipal', *The Times of India*, 14/09/16.

NGT seeks status report on elephant corridors in Odisha



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Odisha government to submit a status report on elephant corridors in the state and has also sought the list of encroachers on forest land. The state government has been directed to provide this information by October 20. The order was passed in response to a petition in this matter by the Wildlife Society of Orissa.

The petitioner said that the state government had identified 14 elephant corridors, which needed to be protected under law by notifying them under section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The corridors have been mapped and described by the Chief Wildlife Warden but the proposals had been lying with the state government for four years. It was also pointed out that though the

state government had spent Rs 20.08 crore during the last five years on management and habitat improvement of these 14 corridors, there was no effort to issue the notification pending since 2012.

In the second case, the petitioner asked the tribunal to issue orders for eviction of encroachers and restoration of 37,482.935 ha of forest land in 39 forest and wildlife divisions of the state.

Source: Hemanta Pradhan. 'NGT seeks status report on elephant corridors in Odisha', *The Times of India*, 15/09/16.

Relocation of three villages from Baisipalli WLS on hold after incidents involving Maoists

Following a recent encounter (in July) in Gumudumaha village, Kandhamal district, where alleged Maoists were killed, authorities of the Mahanadi Wildlife Division have put on hold the relocation of three villages from within the Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

The Gumudumaha incident re-established the fact that the tract of forest from Nayagarh to Kandhamal and Boudh is a maoist hideout. Earlier, the maoists had put up posters opposing relocation of villagers. 98 families in three villages have consented to move out of the forest. According to forest officers the maoists use the villages as their hideouts and have, therefore, been dissuading the villagers from leaving the forests

In the meanwhile, the forest department has announced that villagers will be rewarded if they inform the department about the presence of tigers. The villagers will also be given cash rewards ranging between Rs 100 and Rs 500 on giving information about the movement of poachers.

Source: Riyan Ramanath V. 'Maoist diktat delays relocation of Kandhamal forest villagers', *The Times of India*, 04/08/2016.

WTI starts consultations for wildlife management plan in state

The first consultation meeting between the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the Odisha government for drafting of a wildlife management plan for the state was held recently. The inter-sectoral meeting was chaired by chief secretary of the state, AP Padhi. This is a follow up to the MoU signed between the two in December 2015 (*PA Update* Vol. XXII, No. 1) whereby Odisha engaged the WTI to prepare this management plan.

WTI will hold wide consultations with various stakeholders at different levels for the preparation of the plan. Inputs will be taken from technical experts, field-level executives and local knowledge sources. Each government department will nominate one nodal officer to give necessary data and input to the WTI for preparation of the plan that is expected to be completed within 10 months' time.

The state has reportedly advised WTI to do a balancing act between forest and wildlife conservation on one side and the mining and developmental activities on the other while preparing the plan. They have also been advised to adopt appropriate technological solutions and innovative approaches to resolve differences between wildlife conservation and developmental interventions.

Management plans will be prepared for protected areas as well as areas outside it along with a state-level overarching thematic plan. Themes that will be covered include human-animal conflict, movement of wildlife outside PAs, destruction of habitats and corridors outside PAs, poaching, sacred groves, and peoples' participation in conservation, eco-system restoration and habitat management.

Source: 'WTI starts consultation for wildlife management plan', *The New Indian Express*, 20/08/16.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu FD to use drones to monitor wildlife areas; other measures also proposed

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) has proposed to acquire five drones to help monitor wildlife areas and help deal with poaching. These will be acquired at a cost of Rs 20 lakh after obtaining permission from the Ministry of Defence, the Airports Authority of India and other departments concerned. The information was provided by the state forest minister, Dindigul C. Sreenivasan in the state assembly recently. Surveillance of vulnerable areas, mitigation measures to prevent human wildlife conflicts, GIS-enabled information and technology driven systems for monitoring of wildlife habitats are some of the other policy initiatives that would be taken to address human wildlife conflicts.

The FD would also set up automatic weather monitoring centres in all seven agro-climatic zones in the state at a cost of Rs. two lakh during 2016-17. Schemes to develop forest border areas would be implemented in the Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Dindigul, Madurai, Theni, Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts at a cost of Rs 16.91 crore during 2016-17. The newly suggested grievance redressal camps would be organized once a month in 372 human habitats in 83 villages in Tiruvannamalai district initially, the minister said.

He further added that September 11 would be observed as the FD's martyrs' day every year to remember those who were killed while protecting forests.



Source: 'Drones to monitor wildlife movement, poaching: Minister', *The Hindu*, 03/08/16.

Restriction on night traffic on Thimbam Ghat road in Satyamangalam TR

The forest department (FD) has extended the travel ban for two and four wheel passenger vehicles on the Thimbam Ghat road in Satyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) from 6 pm to 6 am. Three people had been killed in two incidents of leopard attacks in the Thimbam forest area a few months ago and the current decision is a response to those incidents.

Bus and lorry drivers have been advised not to get down on the ghat road for any reason and to call the FD in case of breakdowns. Armed forest officials have also been assigned patrol duty on the ghat road round the clock.

A recent census has shown that the population of leopards has increased here and they are likely to be seen in such areas as Thalawady, Thalamalai, Bejelatty, Germalam and Hassanure.

Source: 'Ban on travel in Thimbam ghat road at Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve extended', *The New Indian Express*, 07/08/16.

UTTARAKHAND

15 wild animal deaths on Haridwar highway in two months

As many as 15 wild animals have been found killed in a period of two months by speeding vehicles on the national highway adjoining forests of the Haridwar Forest Division. This includes a leopard that was killed in the first week of September and a tiger that was killed at the same spot about two months earlier. Other animals found killed include a python and cheetal.

Forest officials say they have intensified monitoring in the area to prevent further deaths. They say they have also written to the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) with GPS locations to erect rumble strips to reduce the speed of traffic. They note that signage for slowing down on this stretch have also not been installed.

Bivash Pandav, scientist with Wildlife Institute of India, has pointed out that this road stretch of 27 km which connects Haridwar with Najibabad (Uttar Pradesh) has already claimed lives of 26 leopards in the last one decade. There are around 100 crossing trails which animals use for movement on this stretch which has the Jhilmil Conservation Reserve on one side and the Haridwar Forest Division on the other.

Source: Seema Sharma. 'Over 15 wild animals' death reported on Haridwar highway', *The Times of India*, 08/09/16.

NGT seeks MoEFCC reply on relocation of Kalagarh colonies from within Corbett TR

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought a response from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on the issue of providing funds for rehabilitating the residents of Kalagarh currently located within the Corbett Tiger Reserve. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson, Justice Swatanter Kumar, expressed concern over delay in non-compliance of the Supreme Court order directing eviction of residents from Kalagarh and asked the governments of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Uttarakhand to expeditiously implement the order.

The tribunal asked the centre to provide details of finances provided to Uttarakhand for the re-settlement from Kalagarh and also directed the Uttarakhand government to file a detailed affidavit giving complete details about the resettlement plan.

The UP government had earlier told the bench that it has demolished three buildings in Kalagarh and assured the NGT that it would take further action in the matter. The tribunal had taken strong exception to UP government's non-compliance of the Supreme Court order of December 2013 directing the UP irrigation department to vacate residential colonies and hand them over to the Uttarakhand government within six months.

The NGT had also constituted a committee comprising Director, Corbett Tiger

Reserve, senior officials from the environment ministry, Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board and irrigation department of UP and Uttarakhand to pursue the matter. It had directed the committee to conduct a survey in the area and submit a report within two weeks.

It had asked the committee to indicate in its report the number of existing structures in the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Kalagarh, status of these structures and the area which is to be marked as an eco-sensitive zone beyond the limits of the park.

Source: NGT seeks MoEF reply on funds to rehabilitate Kalagarh people', *Economic Times*, 08/09/16.

Committee to confirm tiger presence in Kedarnath



The Kedarnath Forest Division authorities have set up a five-member committee to look into the presence of tigers in the snow-bound Kedarnath

region. The committee has been formed after reports of tiger presence in the region that has been known to shelter the striped cat. Camera traps that had been installed to photograph snow-leopards and other high altitude wildlife are reported to have captured tiger images as well in the Kedarnath and Madmaheshwar regions.

There have been other reports too, in recent times, of the presence of tigers in high-altitude areas. Camera trap images have recently revealed the presence of tigers in the Askot region of Pithoragarh and Nainital.

Source: '5-member panel to look into presence of tigers in Kedarnath', *The Tribune*, 05/08/2016.

33 beaches on the banks of the Ganga suitable for camping, says Uttarakhand

The Uttarakhand government, in its submission to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in connection with camping on the banks of the Ganga (*PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 1 and Vol. XXI No. 5), has said that 33 beaches in the belt from Rishikesh to Kaudiyala were suitable for beach camping activities. The Social Action for Forest & Environment (SAFE), a non-governmental organization, said in the court that more studies are needed on 15 of the 33 beaches where the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) had found "direct and indirect signs" of wild animal movement after studying the area for ten days in the winter season.

The state government has argued, however, that the WII and the committee appointed by the NGT which has framed comprehensive regulations regarding beach camping has decided not to accept SAFE's contentions and not to exclude any of these 15 beaches from the list of 33 found fit for camping activities. The state government's submission contended that the WII had made its stand clear on this issue in July when it stated in its report that evidence of wildlife presence collected from the survey area within 10 days include fresh as well as old signs left by wild animals over a much longer period. The mere presence of an indirect sign of wildlife does not make a beach vulnerable.

In the meanwhile, the director of the WII informed that the institute has clearly excluded 18 beaches from beach camping activity. Four of these beach camps were found to be located inside forest areas. However, the WII has allowed for pick up and drop from these four places.

Source: Seema Sharma, '33 beaches in state suitable for camping: U'khand govt to NGT', *The Times of India*, 03/08/16.

Water of Suswa River passing through Rajaji TR contaminated, not fit for drinking

A study by the non-governmental organization, the Society of Pollution & Environmental Conservation Scientists (SPECS), has found that the Suswa River which passes through the Rajaji National Park is highly contaminated with sewage and hence its water may no longer be safe to drink. The residents of the Dudhli valley depend on the river for potable water, irrigation and other domestic uses. The river further extends up to the Chilla range of Rajaji National Park and is important for the forests and the wildlife there as well. Two other seasonal rivers of Dehradun, Rispana and Bindal, join Suswa in the Dudhli valley.

The study was based on water samples that were collected from villages in Dudhli valley such as Sapera Basti (Mothrowala), Daudwala and Nagaland Simlas Grant. Large number of pollutants and chemicals are found in the water and groundwater too was found to be contaminated. The study also notes that while sewage treatment plants have been installed near Kargi Chowk and Doon University in Dehradun, these are non-functional.

Concerns have been expressed over the impact this is having on the human populations living by the river and using the water, and also the wildlife of Rajaji TR that is dependent on the river.



Source: Seema Sharma, 'Suswa river contamination poses threat to Rajaji wildlife, residents of Dudhli', *The Times of India*, 06/08/16.

Uttarakhand to use immuno-contraception technique on monkeys

The Uttarakhand Forest Department in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India is going to introduce a project in which female monkeys will be given the oral immuno-contraceptive drug, Porcine Zona Pellucida, in order to help curtail their population. The drug that will be mixed with food given to the monkeys, will be administered once a year for three successive years. The drug works for one year and it will have to be repeated for the same individuals for a period of three -four years.

The monkeys will either be tagged or identified from their traits for purposes of identification and monitoring.

According to divisional forest official of Purola and Govind Wildlife Sanctuary, there is an average increase of the monkey population by about 36% annually.

Source: Seema Sharma, 'In a first in the country, female monkeys to be given oral 'contraceptive' in Uttarakhand', *The Times of India*, 04/08/16.

Uttarakhand to take lessons from Maharashtra on tackling human-leopard conflict

In order to tackle the increasing human-leopard conflict in the state, the Uttarakhand Forest Department has joined hands with its Maharashtra counterpart to train villagers on how to tackle situations involving the feline before official help arrives.

As part of the training, several teams of villagers and forest officials from Uttarakhand will visit the Junnar area in Maharashtra to see and learn how the situation is dealt with there. Wildlife biologist, Dr. Vidya Athreya, will be involved in training the Uttarakhand officials and the villagers in forming community response team (CRT) in the areas inhabited by leopards. The CRTs will be formed in Tehri, Pauri and Almora districts. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXI, Nos. 5 & 2; Vol. XIX, No. 2; Vol. XVIII, No. 1 and Vol. XVII, No. 2)

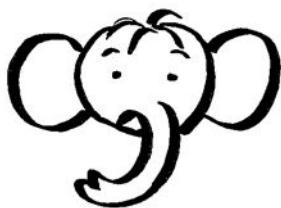
Source: Seema Sharma , ‘U'khad to learn from Maha how to evade man-leopard conflict’, *The Times of India*, 10/08/16.

WEST BENGAL

Two elephants electrocuted in Darjeeling

Two elephants were killed after coming into contact with an electricity pole on the outskirts of a tea estate in Darjeeling in the first half of September. The pair was part of a herd numbering 20 to 40 that was passing through a corridor regularly used by the animals. The rest of the herd left the area safely, avoiding the pole and dangling wires. Locals from the tea estate who rushed to the spot say the second elephant was electrocuted while trying to pull the first one away from the pole.

The district magistrate, Darjeeling said that the region had been experiencing incessant rains and an initial assessment by the electricity department suggested that current was passing through the electric pole on account of the rains and the water.



Source: ‘Two elephants electrocuted in Darjeeling’, *ndtv.com*, 11/09/16.

NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

266 projects approved under Forest Conservation Act in three years; another 174 agreed to in-principle

The Centre has given approval to 266 projects and in-principle approval to 174 more under the Forest Conservation Act in the past three years. The information was provided by the

environment Minister, Anil Dave in the Rajya Sabha in a written reply recently.

Those given final approval include 125 roads projects, eight for mining, 32 for hydro electric projects, five for irrigation, 20 for transmission lines, two for the railways and 74 in the others category. Of those given in-principle approval 78 relate to roads, five to mining, 20 to hydro-electric projects, six to irrigation, one to defence, 12 to transmission lines and 52 were in the others category.

The minister said that the government has taken several measures to ensure expeditious processing of proposals seeking forest and environmental clearances such as launching of a web portal for online submission and monitoring the status of the proposals for forest and environmental clearances, stipulation of time-lines for processing of proposals at each stage at the central and state levels, and increasing the number of regional offices from six to 10.

Source: ‘266 projects given final approval under Forest Conservation Act’, *Business Standard*, 08/08/16.

GPS will be used in elephant census in 2017

The Global Positioning System (GPS) will be used to count and map elephants in the elephant census to be held in April-May 2017. Forest officials and researchers will also use the line transect method as well as the dung decay rate assessment for the purpose. Existing census methods – direct and indirect sightings and water-hole counts – will also be employed. A decision to this effect was taken at a recent meeting of Project Elephant that was held in New Delhi.

The census will help prepare a country-wide map of elephant distribution. Beat-wise maps showing low- and high-population density areas will also be prepared.

Source: Bosky Khanna. Bengaluru, ‘GPS to be used for next year's elephant census’, *Deccan Herald*, 12/08/16.

Indo-German team to study human-wildlife conflict in Indian states

India is in the process of getting a Rs 30 crore grant from the German government to study and mitigate human-wildlife conflict in different parts of the country. An Indo-German mission team has been constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to ascertain the feasibility of various elements of the project. The MoEFCC in partnership with the German Development Cooperation Agency has been implementing various technical cooperation projects in areas of biodiversity conservation, climate change and environmental management and this study is part of this larger engagement.

The four-member team comprising three wildlife conservationists will visit Thithimathi in Kodagu and parts of Nagarhole National Park and Bandipur National Park to study human-elephant conflict. It will also visit Kolkata and the Jaldapara National Park in northern West Bengal to study the persisting human-elephant conflict there. Forest officers from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand too will be present during the Kolkata visit.

The team has already undertaken field visits to Uttarakhand and Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park to study conflict involving leopards.

Source: Ashwini Y S Bengaluru. 'Indo-German team to study man-wildlife conflict in state', *Deccan Herald*, 08/08/16.

SOUTH ASIA

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh to conduct fisheries survey in the Bay of Bengal

The Bangladesh government's department of fisheries will conduct a survey to assess the stock of fisheries in the Bay of Bengal as a part of an ongoing project titled 'Bangladesh Marine

Fisheries Capacity Building Project'. The survey will start in November, later this year and is being jointly financed by the Islamic Development Bank, Malaysia and the Government of Malaysia.

A vehicle has also been procured from Malaysia for the purpose. The multipurpose research vessel is equipped with high-tech equipment for carrying out marine surveys, and it could be used for the next 20-25 years to conduct surveys.

The survey will help assess the stock of pelagic fish, the quantity, distribution and species of marine fishes and their breeding grounds, and to follow their movement. The exercise is aimed, ultimately, at determining the maximum sustainable yield.

The first marine resources survey in the Bay of Bengal was carried out in 1973 with help of the Russian trawlers. Further surveys were conducted between 1978 and 1986. According to a survey conducted during the 1980s, there are 475 fish species including 36 species of shrimp in these waters. The survey also revealed that there was a stock of 1,88,000 tonnes of demersal fish. The same survey put the stock of pelagic fish in the Bay of Bengal between 60,000- 120,000 tonnes.



Source: Anwar Hussain. 'Bay fish survey from November', *Dhaka Tribune*, 07/08/16.

The State of Wildlife in North-East India – 1996-2011

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

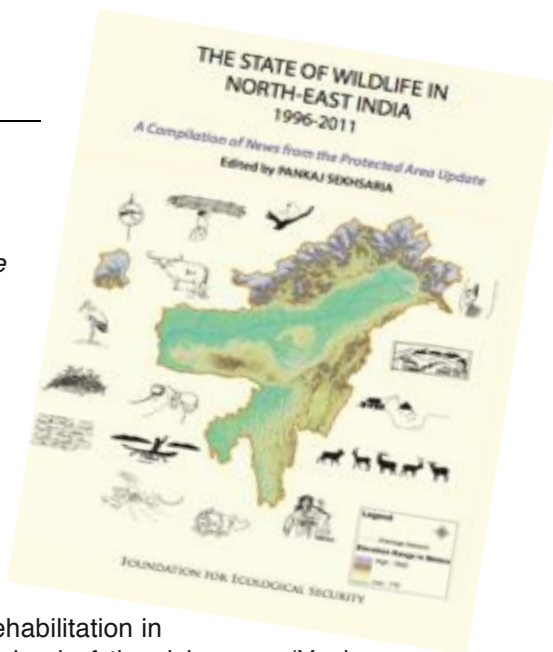
List of Contents: North East India Regional News; News from the States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.

Perspective & Opinion: The Print Media's Kaziranga obsession – An analysis (Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi); A case study of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in western Assam (Sonali Ghosh: Snow leopards in the land of the rising sun (Yash Veer Bhatnagar); Karbi Anglong: A little known wilderness of Assam (Anwaruddin Choudhury); Elephants and other memories of the Garo Hills (Nimesh Ved); Dams in the North East (Neeraj Vagholikar) and Community conservation of wildlife (Neema Pathak)

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INVITING COLLABORATIONS

The *Protected Area Update*, which is now in its 22nd year of publication, has consistently provided news, information and analysis on matters related to wildlife, conservation and protected areas. It has created a credible forum that allows for discussion on a wide-range of often un-addressed issues in the wildlife, conservation and livelihood landscape. It reaches out widely and also represents a wide-range of perspectives and concerns.

We would like to invite researchers, NGOs, journalists and individuals to collaborate and use the *Protected Area Update* as a platform to further common interests in these related subjects. The newsletter can be used as a platform to put out short analyses and synthesis of ongoing work or work that has already been completed. The *PA Update* can also be used, simultaneously and complementarily, as a platform for seeking and gathering information where it is needed.

Please write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com with ideas, queries and suggestions on how these collaborations could be made to work and for specific proposals that are of interest to you.

Important Bird Areas Update

IBA

Peeyush

NATIONAL NEWS

Central Wetland Regulatory Authority meets after four years



The Central Wetland Authority (CWRA), the apex body overseeing conservation of wetlands in the country met recently after a gap of four years. The meeting was organized for the first time after 2012, only after the National Green Tribunal directed that the CWRA should meet regularly and also notify wetlands at the earliest so that their conservation can be facilitated.

No wetlands were, however, notified in the meeting because the proposals sent by the states were lacking in necessary information. The minutes also suggest that the CWRA has decided to meet only once again before January 2017. This is also a violation of the NGT order of July 2016 which directs the body to meet once every month.

The NGT also took a serious view of the states which has not filed their status report and asked for responses and action to be initiated at the earliest.

Source: 'Panel meets after 4 years, no major steps taken yet to protect wetlands', *The Times of India*, 01/09/2016.

GUJARAT

Birds in Thol, Nalsarovar to be neck ringed to track migration

Neck rings are to be put on birds visiting Nalsarovar and Thol lakes in an effort to track bird migration. The ringing will be carried out by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in coordination with the Gujarat Forest Department.

The move has been catalyzed by the sighting over the last two years of a greylag goose with the tag K-65 in the Vadhvana lake in Dabhoi. Enquiries revealed that the bird had been ringed in Himachal Pradesh and this generated an interest in taking up a similar ringing project in Gujarat as well.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Now, neck rings to track migratory birds', *The Times of India*, 19/08/16.

NAGALAND

Pangti village being denied funds released for Amur falcon conservation: AFRAU

The Amur Falcon Roosting Area Union (AFRAU) of Pangti village has expressed resentment over the fact that they have not received any funds for Amur falcon

conservation though the tourism department, Government of Nagaland, has received a fund of over Rs. four crore for Wokha district under the Swadesh Darshan program. In a letter to the chief minister of the state, the union officials have sought his intervention while highlighting the falcon conservation efforts made by them.

The union claimed that it found out, through an RTI application, that the funds received were to be used for development in villages other than Pangti, which had played an important role in the conservation of bird.

Source: 'No funds for Amur Falcon roosting, claims AFRAU', *Nagaland Post*, 07/09/16.

TAMIL NADU

Housing plots around Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary

More than 20 housing plots have been sold, allegedly illegally, around the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary. These plots are in the five km ecologically sensitive zone of the sanctuary that was declared in 2012 and is a zone where construction is not permitted. The plots have been sold, reportedly, with the involvement of the local panchayat officials, who have given permission without the knowledge of forest officials and the Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP).

A 'no objection certificate' from wildlife authorities is mandatory for realtors who obtain approval for sale or purchase of a plot in the area. A wildlife official said that the forest department has not given any such permission. A senior DTCP officer too said that there is a law restricting construction in Vedanthangal, so there is no question of issuing approvals.

There are also new layouts within two km of the sanctuary, of which at least half a dozen have come up in the last few months. One of the biggest plots spread over 150 acres is located merely one km from the southwestern boundary.

Developers are trying to find loopholes in the government order. A company offering farmhouses in Vedanthangal, says the ban was on construction of high rises alone. Acknowledging the illegal transactions, another realtor said that since DTCP approval is not issued for these lands, buyers cannot therefore approach banks for a loan. Those who pay by cash, however, don't have to be worried about this.

Source: P Oppili. 'Housing plots threaten sanctuary for birds', *The Times of India*, 11/08/16.

UTTAR PRADESH

UP to compile wetland data to submit to NGT

The principal secretary of forest and chief wildlife warden of Uttar Pradesh has requisitioned detailed information from all tiger reserves, sanctuaries and forest divisions in the state, about the status of wetlands in their respective areas. The compilation of the status report is aimed at launching a comprehensive action plan for the conservation of wetlands and is a response to the recent notice issued by the NGT in the matter (see story above).

Digital maps and the GPS coordinates of the wetlands would also be sent to the government for pointing out their locations and updated formations. There are said to be 503 identified wetlands in the state.



Source: Keshav Agarwal. 'UP wetland data to be compiled for conservation', *The Times of India*, 11/09/16.

The *Protected Area Update* needs your support

The *Protected Area Update* is now in its 23rd year of uninterrupted publication. It is published six times a year and mailed to nearly 1800 people. Additionally, it goes out in an electronic form to about 2000 individuals via paupdate@yahoogroups.com and is also hosted by a number of websites that deal with issues related to natural history of South Asia. There is also now an active facebook page for the newsletter <https://www.facebook.com/groups/protectedareaupdate/> which helps continue the outreach and the discussions.

The *PA Update* has been a key source of news, information and also opinion on protected areas from across South Asia, and particularly India and we keep getting this affirmation via communication we receive regularly from its readers. Continued publication has been possible on account of the generous interest and support of a number of organisations and individuals and we are extremely for all this support over the years.

That being said, raising funds for the publication year on year has and continues to be a challenge. Kalpavriksh and the *PA Update* team is committed to bring out the newsletter

regularly as we have done in the past and we seek your help in this endeavor.

Please do considering supporting the *PA Update* via individual and/or organizational contributions and also by subscribing to it for yourself, for friends and others who you think might be interested

We do believe that the long-term sustainability and publication of the *PA Update* can be and, in fact, should be based on the participation of and support from the key stakeholder, the reader of the *PA Update*.

For details of how to send a contribution and for other suggestions and ideas please write to the Editor, *PA Update* at psekhsaria@gmail.com or mail us at the editorial address below



Obituary

Ashok Kumar – the legend passes on

The day legendary conservationist and the man who brought wildlife crime into India's conscience, and policy, Ashok Kumar passed away, also saw the death of two tigers: one was Machli, the famous tigress of Ranthambhore, whose end at a ripe old age was greatly mourned. Friends and colleagues were comforted: it was only befitting that two legends should walk their final journey together. I think different. My heart dwelt on the other slain tiger, shot in the forests of Bandipur in Karnataka. Like most tigers who do not earn a name by virtue of being the cynosure of tourists, he died unsung. I am pretty sure Ashok is busy getting to the bottom of this murder mystery: especially as he has the advantage of questioning the victim himself!

Ashok always rooted for the underdog, the lost cause, taking up the challenge of turning them around. He did it with a determination to win. One example was his resolve to put Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve on the global tiger map. He invested his time, money, *himself* - brimming with enthusiasm and belief, and infecting others with it - succeeding ultimately in raising Valmiki from obscurity to a buzzing landscape with a good population of breeding tigers.

Ashok's contribution to conservation is seminal, impossible to sum in limited wordage: architect of the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary near Jamshedpur, bringing to fore the immense scale and gravity of the illegal wildlife trade, coining the term "wildlife crime". He played a key role in establishing TRAFFIC India, was instrumental in ensuring the largest seizure ever of tiger bones in India that revealed, for the first time, that tigers were being slaughtered for their bones, and helped initiate greater measures for their protection. He was also Member Secretary

of the Supreme Court appointed Subramanian Committee, which had recommended the creation of a National Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

He was man of courage - never cowering down under pressure, or threats. He was the force behind putting, and keeping, India's deadliest wildlife smuggler Sansar Chand (who had Ashok on the hit list) behind bars. Ashok didn't shy away from taking on governments either - hauling them to court to halt the expansion of a highway in vital tiger and elephant corridors, or from preventing destruction of a wetland in Uttar Pradesh.

Ashok was all heart-personally contributing to get a traumatised, begging elephant off Delhi's streets, *always* lending a hand to forest staff in times of need. His biggest legacy, indeed, is his investment in the people he nurtured as friend and mentor, inspiring and supporting them every step of the way, to go on to become torch-bearers for conservation.

I am privileged to be one among those he took under his wings. It was Ashok who introduced me to India's forests and its denizens, sharing his passion and knowledge, inspiring a lifetime commitment to conserve them. His spirit lives on, as does his amazing legacy in the work I - and many of the others he mentored - hope to continue to do.

- **Prerna Singh Bindra**

Email: prernabindra.work@gmail.com

A Decade Ago **Protected Area Update 63, October 2006**

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Tsunami impact on wildlife, PAs in the Nicobars

A survey in the Nicobar Islands carried out by Dr. K Sivakumar of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the A&N Forest Department between March and May 2006 have revealed that the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004 has severely impacted the islands in general and protected areas here in particular. The report 'Wildlife and Tsunami – A rapid assessment on the impact of tsunami on the Nicobar megapode and other associated coastal species in the Nicobar group of Islands' was published recently.

The survey that was mainly undertaken to study the status of the endemic Nicobari Megapode covered 235 kms of the coastline of the Nicobars over the 15 islands of Great Nicobar, Little Nicobar, Kondul, Menchal, Pilo Milo, Treis, Trax, Meroe, Nancowry, Camorta, Katchal, Tillangchang, Trinket, Teressa and Bompoka.

It was found out that the present megapode numbers were only 30% of the population reported in the earlier survey done more than a decade ago. Presently there are estimated to be 800 breeding pairs of the bird in the coastal zones of the Nicobar group of islands. The main cause of the fall in population is believed to be the huge loss of the bird's primary habitat of low lying coastal forest as it is now under water due to the subsidence caused by the earthquake. Other coastal forest dwelling species including the Giant Robber Crab, the Malayan Box Turtle and the Reticulated python too are reported to have been badly affected though there is no estimation of the numbers.

It was also reported that the small Megapode Island Sanctuary is now fully submerged under water.

The recommendations made by the study include: the need to rebuild the Forest

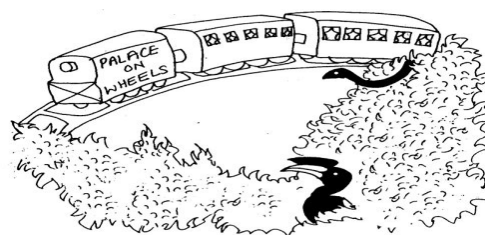
Department infrastructure that was washed away in the tsunami; initiation of a conservation and awareness program in collaboration with the Tribal Captains and ensuring necessary steps to prevent new coconut plantations from coming up in the habitat of the megapodes as also the turtle nesting beaches.

The entire group of the Nicobar Islands is a Tribal Reserve under the provisions of the Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (ANPATR) - 1956.

Source: Dr K Sivakumar, WII

KARNATAKA

Karnataka 'Palace on Wheels' to include PAs



The Karnataka State Tourism Department is in the process of initiating its own 'Palace of Wheels' on lines similar to the very successful venture in Rajasthan. Manufacturing of the train is presently going on in the Indian Railway's Integral Coach Factory in Chennai. Work is expected to be completed by September 2007. The project cost has been pegged at Rs 32 crore.

The route will cover wildlife, heritage and beach tourism destinations. The seven-day, 1,637-km round trip will commence at Bangalore and include Mysore, Hassan, Hospet, Hubli, Dandeli and Goa.

The 18 coach train will have a bar, ayurvedic massage parlour, gymnasium and a library. The wildlife destinations to be visited include Kabini, Dandeli and Devbagh.

Source: 'Train lure for tour', *The Telegraph*, 01/08/06.

PERSPECTIVE

Bridging the gap

Conserving a critical landscape connectivity between Eastern and Western Ghats

The Eastern Ghats, forming the eastern boundary of the Deccan plateau, are much valued for their floral diversity, complex geology and high species endemism. Stretching for about 1750 km, they are also home to many forest-dependent indigenous communities. With more than 2600 species of flowering plants of which about 450 are endemic, and many unique plant associations, it deserves much more scientific attention than it has been able to attract thus far.

This low elevation hill range which is almost contiguous, branches out to the southwest at the Seshachalam ranges and joins the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve in the Western Ghats, the latter being an internationally recognized biodiversity hotspot. The fragmented hill ranges of this branch of the Eastern Ghats running through the western uplands of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh has mixed dry-deciduous and thorny scrub vegetation and harbors some critical habitats of many important species of fauna.

As many as 20 species of threatened mammals, 20 species of plants, 24 biome-restricted birds including some endemics like the Yellow-throated bulbul and Grey jungle fowl have been recorded, for instance, in and around the Madanapalle Forest Range alone.

Within Chittoor District, this fragmented landscape connects two protected areas - Rayala Elephant Reserve and the S.V. National Park. At a larger scale, it runs across the tri-junction of the three states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Although heavily fragmented, forested patches in the landscape serve as important stepping-stones for faunal movement and consists of a habitable matrix for many species that includes among others the wild dog, leopard and the sloth bear. In spite of this, the region has not attracted much scientific attention so far except for some studies on the Asiatic elephants, which occasionally use this connectivity as a migratory corridor.

Conserving this connectivity is critical for the re-colonization of the isolated populations of many threatened species, to overcome barriers to the distribution of various other species, to ensure their genetic exchange and facilitate seasonal movement, particularly during the dry seasons. This human-dominated landscape mosaic of forests, wastelands, agricultural fields and settlements still has good diversity but low density of many species. The patch density and relatively less distance between the patches make traversing through the landscape possible for several animals.

For the predominantly biomass-dependent local village communities, traditionally, these forests have been a major source for subsistence. Some of these forest patches were conserved as sacred groves and in many villages, annual worship of the local deity in the forests is practiced even today. These community protected areas with relatively better diversity and vegetation density still serve as island gene pools of many threatened species at the local level. Involving these communities in securing habitat corridors, vegetating gaps and pinch points to improve contiguity and habitat quality could be an important part of an overall regional landscape conservation framework.

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