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Protected Area Update
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EDITORIAL

Needed: more-than-a protected area network

Snow leopards in Ladakh, Spiti and Nepal; lions in Gujarat; macaques in the Western Ghats; leopards and tigers across the Indian landscape and sea turtles that traverse the global commons - if there is one thing that connects these large and charismatic megafauna in this particular issue of the *Protected Area (PA) Update*, it is their non-PA centric mode of existence.

Nearly 70% of lions counted in the recent census in Gujarat were reported from outside the famous Gir landscape - some in other protected areas, but many also outside them completely. Something very similar is true of the snow leopard across its range be it in India and Nepal (or elsewhere), and the tiger too has been found in 80 forest divisions outside of PAs across the country as was reported in the previous issue of this newsletter (*PA Update* Vol. XXXI, No. 2). A recent study from Kerala notes that continuous canopy outside of protected areas is hugely important for the long term survival of the Lion tailed macaque and for great travellers like sea turtles and birds, PAs are nothing more than small pit stops, even if important ones, in their great journeys of life and survival.

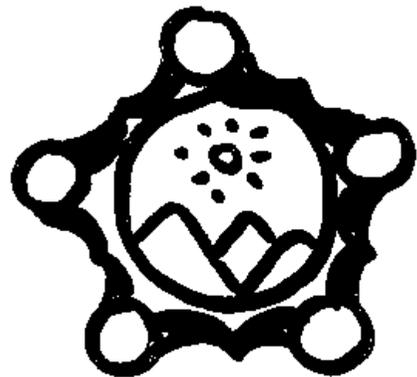
Anyone associated in any manner with the world of wildlife knows this to be a fact of life - PAs and their human made boundaries are not the same as animal cartographies of the same geographies. The compulsions and the impulses are very different and so are the implications and challenges.

Realities on the ground and detailed studies of wildlife populations like we report upon this time are clearly showing us the limitations of the idea of the protected area network as also of the protected area itself. The consequences and impacts of climate change will only increase the intensity and complexity

of the challenge. The PA clearly is not enough by itself and it can only be considered ironic and unfortunate that this realisation comes to us at a time when entire geographies both inside PAs and outside them are under serious threat from the development 'juggernaut'. PAs that were always like islands are becoming even more isolated as the landscapes around them become hostile and the PAs themselves more damaged at the same time. The brunt is borne as much by the wildlife and natural ecosystems as the 1000s of communities that have been sharing these landscapes with wildlife for generations.

This is neither an unknown story nor a new realisation. The *PA Update* has both reported and commented on this innumerable times in the past, but it might still worth be repeating again. The world of wildlife and of nature is much larger than the PA network we have created. The wildlife we seek to protect and conserve is repeatedly telling us this through the research that our scientists are doing and reports that the media brings to our attention.

How representative then is the PA map of the wildlife of this country? What actually is the PA network a representation of? What does this new information and insight tell us? What should we do with it? What can we do with it? Specific answers might be difficult to find immediately, but clearly we have to widen our vision of the meaning of the wild, of wildlife and of wildlife conservation.



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

A&N Islands only remaining nesting sites for leatherback turtles in India: Report

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands host a globally significant nesting population of leatherback turtles, supporting over 1,000 nests annually, revealed a recent report by Dakshin Foundation. While records of leatherback turtles existed on mainland India in the early 1900s, their nesting population is now entirely restricted to the Islands.

The report titled 'Monitoring Sea Turtles in India 2008-2024' highlights that Andaman and Nicobar Islands, along with one site in Sri Lanka, are the only locations with significant leatherback nesting beaches between Southeast Asia and South Africa. According to the report, the population appears to be stable, with some inter-annual variation. Surveys conducted in 2016 and 2019 confirm that important nesting beaches have re-formed after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The beaches of Great and Little Nicobar Islands exhibit the highest nesting density, with over 94% of the nests in the Nicobar Islands found in these two locations.

These findings carry particular significance given the Rs. 81,800 crore development project in Great Nicobar, which includes an international container transshipment terminal, international airport, power plant, and township (*PA Updates* Vol. XXX, No. 5, Vol. XXVIII, No. 6, Vol. XXVIII, Nos.5 & 4 and Vol. XXVII, No. 1). Parts of the project cover critical nesting areas like Galathea Bay. In 2021, the environment ministry's expert appraisal committee had recommended terms of reference for the Great Nicobar township proposal despite concerns about impacts on turtle nesting sites, megapodes, and coral reefs. Environmental clearance was then granted in November 2022.

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The Nicobar Islands fall within the Sundaland Biodiversity Hotspot, covering the western half of the Indonesian archipelago. In 2016, a survey by Dakshin Foundation and the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department identified important nesting sites including Galathea, Alexandria, and Dagmar Bay on Great Nicobar Island and beaches on Little Nicobar Island.

While the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categorises leatherback turtle as 'vulnerable' globally, many sub-populations are 'critically endangered'. The global population has declined by 40% over the past 60 years. The decline is particularly stark in Malaysia, where nesting dropped from about 10,000 nests in 1953 to only one or two annually since 2003. Pacific populations face the highest extinction risk.

Leatherback conservation faces multiple challenges. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), coastal development and rising seas from climate change are destroying nesting habitats. Human-related threats include beachfront lighting, shoreline armouring, and beach driving.

The monitoring programme for leatherback turtles began in 2000 when Harry Andrews of the Andaman Nicobar Environment Team and Madras Crocodile Bank Trust initiated work at Galathea. The report also documents increasing green turtle numbers in Lakshadweep since the early 2000s, attributed to successful conservation efforts at nesting beaches. However, this population growth has led to ecological changes, particularly the loss of seagrass meadows through overgrazing. Researchers found that green turtles move between islands after depleting their food sources.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'Over 1,000 nests of Leatherback turtles recorded every year: Report', www.hindustantimes.com, 18/04/2025.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Nine tigers recorded in Pakke WLS&TR in 2024



Camera traps installed in the Pakke Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Tiger Reserve (TR) recorded nine tigers - five females, three males and a cub - in 2024. Seven tigers had been recorded in the TR in 2023.

The state forest department (FD) completed this phase IV monitoring in the TR including Seijosa, Tippi and Rilloh. Intensive camera trapping was carried out in the Rilloh range with the participation of the Wildlife Trust of India as part of their Asiatic Bear population survey. The sampling zone accounted for a 600 sq. km area. Data obtained from Seijosa and Tippi ranges were only considered for the estimation of the tiger population, informed divisional forest officer (DFO) Satyaprakash Singh.

Other animals recorded included the common leopard (both common and melanistic forms), clouded leopard, marbled cat, leopard cat, golden cat, binturong, Asiatic black bear, Chinese pangolin, wild dog, small carnivore species such as large Indian civet, small Indian civet, yellow-throated marten and others such as sambar, barking deer, wild pig, gaur, elephant, capped langur, Assamese macaque, brush-tailed porcupine, smooth-clawed otter, red jungle fowl and Khaleej pheasant.

The first photographic evidence of a small-toothed ferret badger was captured during the trapping session of 2023-24 in Rilloh range.

Source: 'Arunachal Pradesh's Pakke Tiger Reserve Camera Traps Spot Nine Tigers', www.etvbharat.com, 11/04/2025.

ASSAM

Three elephants poached inside Manas NP; Bodoland council expresses concern

Three elephants were killed by poachers inside the Manas National Park (NP) in early May in the Palengshi Beat area under Panbari range near the Bhutan border.

The Bodoland Territorial Council chief executive member Pramod Boro expressed grave concern over the incident and said that the case would be taken seriously and all necessary measures would be taken. According to Boro, there were no poaching incidents in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) for a couple of years. He added that under the initiative of the government of BTR, hundreds of poachers had surrendered and deposited their handmade firearms and other hunting implements. They were given one-time financial support for alternative livelihoods.

Besides, the government of BTR took initiatives to reduce human-elephant conflict, and compensation was being given to the families of those who lost lives in the conflict with wild animals.

To protect and preserve the wild animals and natural resources, BTR declared Raimana National Park (NP) in parts of Kachugaon Forest Division (FD), and a new Sikhna Jwhlwao NP was recently declared under Haltugaon FD in Kokrajhar district, informed Boro.

Source: 'Assam: Poachers kill three elephants in Manas National Park', www.sentinelassam.com, 03/05/2025.

GOA

Goa to seek exemption from CRZ for sand mining



Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant is set to approach the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), requesting amendments to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notifications of 2011 and 2019 to allow regulated sand extraction in Goa.

Legal sand extraction has remained suspended in Goa since 2018 following strict directives from the High Court and the National Green Tribunal. It would be Goa's second appeal to the Centre after an earlier request in April 2023 failed to secure approval. The government hopes to gain a special exemption, similar to that granted to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where sand mining is permitted on a case-by-case basis for construction purposes. Mines Director Narayan Gad confirmed that the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) received a request in February for a no objection certificate and CRZ clearance.

However, the existing CRZ rules strictly prohibit sand mining in coastal areas, with sustainable mining guidelines only addressing dry riverbed extraction in inland regions. Goa's argument is that its unique coastal geography and dependence on sand for construction make it eligible for a tailored policy approach. Officials claim that allowing controlled sand mining restricted to manual extraction methods would help revive

traditional livelihoods and address the acute shortage of construction material without compromising environmental safeguards.

Earlier this year, the Goa State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) granted one-year environmental clearances for sand mining, contingent on CRZ approval. Meanwhile, the Directorate of Mines and Geology has received nearly 185 applications for mining across 12 zones along the Mandovi and Zuari rivers, mapped through an environmental impact study by the National Institute of Oceanography.

Source: 'Goa seeks CRZ relaxation for sand mining amid ongoing ban', www.dajjworld.com, 19/04/2025.

GUJARAT

Asiatic lion population in Gujarat rises from 674 to 891 in 5 years

The population of Asiatic lions in Gujarat has witnessed a significant increase - from 674 in the last census conducted five years ago to 891 in the latest census conducted in May 2025. Data released by the Gujarat Forest Department indicates that the current population includes 196 males, 330 females, 140 sub-adults and 225 cubs. The census recorded 384 lions from within Gir National Park; the other 507 were found elsewhere - in sanctuaries such as Mitiyala, Pania, Girnar, and Barda, and other areas as well.

The 16th edition of the lion census was carried out over four days from May 10 to 13, covering a vast area of approximately 35,000 sq. km. across 58 talukas in 11 districts. It was conducted in two phases, beginning with a preliminary assessment on May 10–11 and concluding with the final count on May 12–13. A total of 3,000 participants, including officers, enumerators, and volunteers, contributed to the effort. The process was further supported by modern tools including high-resolution cameras, camera traps and GPS-enabled radio collars.

The districts where lion sightings were reported include Junagadh, Gir Somnath, Bhavnagar, Amreli, Rajkot, Morbi, Surendranagar, Botad, Porbandar, Jamnagar and Devbhoomi Dwarka. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXX, No. 4; Vol. XXIX, No. 1; Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, XXVI, No. 3; Vol. XXV, No. 6 and Vol. XIII, No. 2)

Source: 'Asiatic lion population in Gujarat rises from 674 to 891 in 5 years; spreading beyond traditional habitats', www.downtoearth.org.in, 21/05/2025

HARYANA

Illegal constructions threaten Ramsar site of Sultanpur NP



The Haryana wildlife department has identified 25 new illegal constructions in the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of Sultanpur National Park (NP) in March-April this year. These 25 are in addition to 32 cases reported in December 2023 and another 78 by an earlier committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL). Despite its 5 km no-construction buffer, numerous buildings including farmhouses and banquet halls have come up within a km of the NP. The total number of recorded violations now stands at 135.

The latest number is the outcome of continuous identification of such violations being carried out after the standing committee of NBWL directed the state to list out environmental violations in the Aravalis. The department of town and country planning (DTCP) is expected to take action against these illegal constructions. It is reported to have already sent some notices to the violators.

The 5 km ESZ around Sultanpur NP has 22 villages. No construction is allowed

within 300 m of the wetland, while buildings no higher than two storeys are allowed up to a 500m radius. Polluting industries and commercial construction are barred within a 3 km perimeter of the NP.

In December a news reported the presence of ornate gates, banquet halls and both commercial and residential buildings around the park. Additionally, a dozen more construction projects are currently underway within metres of the NP periphery.

Source: Ipsita Pati. 'Buildings encroach bird haven, green buffer shrinks in Gurgaon: Farmhouses, banquet halls among illegal structures constructed close to Ramsar Site', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 21/04/2025.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

HP notifies Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve in Lahaul-Spiti

The Himachal Pradesh (HP) government recently notified the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve (CR) in the Lahaul-Spiti region of the state. The announcement for the same was made by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu during the closing ceremony of the Wildlife Week in October 2024.

The Tsarap Chu CR is the catchment area of the Charap Nallah and it will act as a wildlife corridor connecting Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Chandertal WLS, It borders the Union Territory of Ladakh in the north, shares a boundary with the Kibber WLS up to the confluence of Malung Nallah and Lungar Lungpa in the east, the Kabjima Nallah in the south and shares a boundary with the Chandertal WLS and Baralacha Pass in the west. Thereafter it follows the Yunam River up to its confluence with Charap Nallah near Sarchu. With a total area of 1,585 sq. km. it is the largest CR notified so far in the country.

The CR also falls among the high-density habitats of snow leopard within HP,

besides supporting rich diversity of Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan flora and fauna including Tibetan wolf, kiang and ungulates such as bharal, ibex, Tibetan argali and avifauna such as rose finches, Tibetan ravens and yellow-billed choughs.

Source: 'HP government notifies Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve in Lahaul-Spiti', www.hindustantimes.com, 11/05/2025.

JHARKHAND

New transit treatment centre to address wildlife medical intervention needs of Palamu TR

A new transit treatment centre (TTC) was inaugurated at the Betla National Park (NP) in January to help address the immediate medical intervention needs of wildlife in Palamu Tiger Reserve (TR). The facility primarily treats ungulates, with deer being the most frequent due to stray dog attacks.

The TTC features an operation theatre but requires additional infrastructure improvements such as enhanced water supply and a drainage system. The centre is also coping with challenges in wildlife surgery, particularly in administering anaesthesia to the animals for invasive procedures. Also, treating reptiles, especially snakes, requires special expertise.

Plans are afoot to expand services for treating carnivores, which face distinct health challenges such as rabies, ringworm, external parasites, and leptospirosis.

Source: MF Ahmad. 'New Wildlife Transit Treatment Centre Brings Hope for Injured Animals at Betla National Park', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/03/2025

KARNATAKA

Karnataka to use indigenous radio collars to track elephants

The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) will be using indigenously developed radio collars and devices to track the movement of elephants and alert citizens of the same in areas adjoining forests. Speaking on the sidelines of an event for the launch of these devices in Bengaluru in February, state forest minister Eshwar B Khandre said that these indigenously developed GSM-based radio collars will be put on the elephant cow leading the herd.

The device called KP-Tracker has been developed by the FD and Bengaluru-based Infiction Labs Pvt. Ltd.

Earlier the FD was importing radio collars from African Wildlife Tracking in South Africa and from Vektronic in Germany. Due to various taxes, the cost of each radio collar was around Rs. 6.5 lakh. The indigenous one in comparison is much cheaper at Rs 1.8 lakh. The time taken to acquire them also will reduce from upto nine months to 15-20 days now. At 7 kg, these collars are also much lighter than the imported one that weighed 16-17 kg.

Source: 'Karnataka develops indigenous radio collars to track elephants reduce human-wildlife conflict', www.newindianexpress.com, 06/02/2025.

KERALA

Continuous canopy outside of protected forests critical for Lion-tailed macaque' survival: Study

A new study by the Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS) on Lion-tailed macaques highlights that conservation efforts must go beyond merely protecting forest areas. With the Western Ghats increasingly facing fragmentation and development, preserving

continuous canopy cover is critical for the survival of the macaque, noted the study.

Tracking two troops of macaques, one within the core area of Silent Valley National Park in Palakkad and the other in its buffer zone, the study mapped how these animals selectively and strategically use their habitat in response to growing human pressures. Titled 'Highs and lows of arboreal life: Space use and movement strategies of Lion-tailed macaques (*Macaca silemus*) in the Western Ghats of India' the study was published in the *American Journal of Primatology* in April earlier this year.

Sikha Hariharan, a doctoral fellow at CWS, who led the study said that fewer than 4,000 Lion-tailed macaques remain in the wild.

Based on detailed animal tracking and ecological data, the researchers found remarkable behavioural flexibility in how these animals navigate their complex arboreal pathways. An animal's movement reflects how it perceives its environment and balances the need for food, safety, and survival. It is often the first visible indicator of a response to changes around it, said Sikha and added that it took her about one and a half years, spread over three years starting in 2019, to complete the study.

The use of the ground by the species was previously associated only with macaque populations in degraded habitats. This study has however found that even in undisturbed environments, the macaques routinely explore and use the forest floor. The researchers used GPS tracking, vertical space use assessments, and advanced movement modelling to examine how the macaques navigate their surroundings.

Co-authors of the study include Krithi K Karanth, CWS, Bengaluru and Divya Vasudev, Conservation Initiatives, a not-for-profit trust based in Guwahati.

Source: 'Conservation must go beyond forest protection says study on endangered macaques', www.theweek.in, 06/05/2025.

LADAKH

477 snow leopards in Ladakh; study generates photo library of the species

Ladakh has 477 snow leopards, according to a study conducted by the Union Territory's Department of Wildlife Protection along with researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Assessing numbers and distribution across an area of 59,000 sq. km, the study revealed that snow leopards occupied over 47,500 sq. km. Findings were recently published in the journal *PLOS One*.

Over 900 camera traps were set up with perfume sprayed below the equipment to 'lure' the animals towards the cameras. The photos were then analysed to identify individual snow leopards based on the distinctive pattern of markings on their forehead. The study has thus also generated a photo library of snow leopards that could help conservationists monitor poaching and trafficking of animal parts.

Over 60% of the snow leopards in Ladakh were found to co-exist alongside human populations with two animals per 100 sq. km density of snow leopards in Hemis National Park, 1.2 per 100 sq. km in Kargil, and one per 100 sq. km in Leh.

Grasslands with a moderate climate and complex terrain were found to support a higher number of snow leopards, which is likely due to a greater availability of prey and less human disturbance, said the study. Further it stated that deep-rooted reverence for wildlife among Ladakh's communities combined with the economic benefits from snow leopard tourism and conflict management strategies help sustain some of the snow leopard densities.

Source: 'Ladakh home to 477 snow leopards, one of world's highest densities of the big cat: Study', www.telegraphindia.com, 08/05/2025.

MADHYA PRADESH

HC seeks explanation on use of private resort's safari vehicles inside Bandhavgarh TR

The Madhya Pradesh High Court (HC) principal bench at Jabalpur has issued notices to five senior forest officials seeking explanation on plying of a private resort's safari vehicles beyond the roster system in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR). The notices were issued to the principal secretary (forest), chief wildlife warden and principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), chairman of the local advisory committee at Bandhavgarh TR, the TR's field director, tourism officer, the Vindhya Vilas Wildlife Resort and National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Justice Vivek Jain was hearing a plea challenging the March 1 order passed by the TR's tourism officer stating that four vehicles of the private resort will not be part of the roster system specified by the NTCA. The HC asked them to explain which government policy or NTCA guideline has permitted a private resort to operate its tourist/safari vehicles beyond the specified roster system laid down by NTCA.

The matter was brought to the notice of the court by the Bandhavgarh Paryatan Jan Seva Samiti which filed a petition in the matter.

Source: 'Private resort's safari vehicles inside Bandhavgarh tiger reserve, high court's notice to forest principal secretary and four senior officers', www.freepressjournal.in, 25/03/2025.

Two male cheetahs from Kuno NP released in Gandhi Sagar WLS

Two South African cheetahs, Prabhash and Pavak, have been released in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), after they spent two years in the Kuno National Park (NP). They were tranquilised and transported in

specialised vehicles on the 20th of April. The two were part of a group of 12 cheetahs brought to Kuno NP from the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve in South Africa in February 2023 as part of phase 1 of Project Cheetah.

So far, 20 cheetahs have been brought into the country, with 10 (seven adults and three cubs) losing their lives.

According to the forest officials, Prabhash and Pavak were selected for the shift after considering their wild traits and their age. The two male cheetahs, who are around 6 years old, shared a soft-release 'boma' (a temporary enclosure) from September 2023. Between September 2023 and July 2024 they were observed preying on spotted deer, and they took about 5.87 days per kill. Most of the detected kills (38) were made as a coalition with a few being individual kills.

The cheetahs preyed on both males and females spotted deer equally. Among the kills made as a coalition, the majority (79%) were adult individuals. In cases of individual kills, mostly females and young were preyed on. Based on a study of these factors, the FD has augmented the prey base inside Gandhi Sagar WLS with spotted deer and gaur translocated from Kanha, Sanjay and Satpura Tiger Reserves. The FD has also translocated blackbucks along with gazelles.

Additionally, at least 24 leopards were shifted out from Gandhi Sagar WLS since the large number of leopards was affecting the prey base.

The Gandhi Sagar WLS is spread across 368.63 sq. km, lying in both the Neemuch and Mandsaur districts of western Madhya Pradesh, along the border with Rajasthan. At the Gandhi Sagar WLS, the cheetahs will initially be kept in a 15 sq. km enclosure equipped with sufficient prey base, allowing the two to settle down. This will be surrounded by a 64 km-long predator-free area.

The shifting of the male coalition comes after a delay in the arrival of cheetahs from Kenya and South Africa, who were to be brought into the Gandhi Sagar WLS. According to the Union Minister for

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav, eight more cheetahs are expected to arrive in India, with the first batch of four cheetahs set to arrive from Botswana by May, while another four are expected to come in from Kenya or South Africa later in 2025. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXX, Nos. 6, 4 & 3 and Vol. XXIX, Nos. 6 & 5).

Source: Iram Siddique. 'In their prime & 'perfectly wild', Kuno cheetahs Prabhash & Pavak reach their new home', www.theprint.in, 20/04/2025.

MoU for proposed cheetah corridor in Kuno-Gandhi Sagar awaits MP's nod

A feasibility study for the proposed cheetah corridor in the Kuno-Gandhi Sagar region is on hold on account of the delay in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (MP) governments' signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the same. While Rajasthan has given its go ahead, MP's nod is still awaited.

The draft MoU outlines broader goals, including using the cheetah as a flagship species to restore open forests and savanna ecosystems, enhancing biodiversity and ecological balance. It highlights the potential for carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation, eco-tourism, and eco-development opportunities to support local livelihoods. Additionally, the agreement includes measures to manage human-wildlife conflicts through compensation, awareness programmes, and conflict resolution strategies. As per the proposed terms, both states will permit capture, recapture, or release of cheetahs in emergency situations, adhering to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and protocols set by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The MoU, once signed, will remain effective for five years, with reviews every two years to assess progress and the possibility of extension based on mutual agreement. Any

modifications will require written consent from both parties.

Source: 'Kuno-Gandhi Sagar cheetah corridor agreement delayed', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/03/2025.

Relocation of cheetahs to India not 'environmentally just': research paper



Project Cheetah is not 'environmentally just', the translocations of African cheetahs to India have not adequately accounted for ethical considerations and face several social

and species justice concerns, a research paper published in February 2025 has stated.

Titled 'Delineating the environmental justice implications of an experimental cheetah introduction project in India', the paper published recently in the journal *Frontiers in Conservation Science*. It has been authored by Yashendu C Joshi from the Department of Conservation Science, Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS-India), Bengaluru and Stephanie E Klarmann and Louise C deWaal from the Blood Lions non-profit company in Gansbaai, South Africa. The paper also notes that the cheetah translocations to India presented challenges including differences in climate, prey species, and habitat that African cheetahs need to adapt to and the potential human-wildlife conflict for communities not accustomed to the presence of cheetahs.

For the study, the researchers reviewed reports prepared for the translocation of Asiatic lions and African cheetahs to the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh. Kuno was initially selected for the reintroduction of Asiatic lions, a long-term translocation programme that was due to commence in 2008. The paper states that between 1999 and 2001, 5,000 people from 24

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villages were displaced for the proposed lion reintroductions, which did not occur as the Gujarat government refused to release lions to another state. Subsequent discussions among Indian government officials, state forest departments, and researchers led to the decision to introduce African cheetahs instead.

The authors came down heavily on the methodology used for deciding on cheetah relocation. The paper says that evaluating the 2010 report's methodology, many shortcomings become evident. Surveys were conducted at prospective sites to assess factors including economic well-being, sources of livelihood, and perceptions about wildlife. No questions were posed to respondents; instead, a well-being index was calculated using visual assessments of interviewees' age, sex, attire condition, quality/quantity of ornaments/wristwatches, and transportation. According to the authors, this disparity led to distributive injustice where socio-economic impacts, distribution of benefits, and burdens of conservation efforts are markedly unequal.

Social issues like attitudes towards relocation, exotic species introduction, project acceptance, and perceived risks and benefits were neglected. Instead, the focus was on identifying economically and socially disadvantaged targets for monetary incentives.

The authors add that a recent report used in a case adjudicated by the Indian Supreme Court failed to conduct any social surveys. The paper notes, "The report suggested a "rapid assessment" of potential sites surveyed in 2010 within a few days; the methodology for assessing "anthropogenic activities" was unclear; some sites discussed only linear infrastructures and industrial pressures without mentioning local communities, while others ignored industrial impacts. The Cheetah Action Plan deemed Kuno NP the most suitable site, noting previous village relocations for Asiatic lion reintroductions. It however lacked mention of preparing remaining communities for the arrival of cheetahs."

The paper notes that the argument that the "predominantly Hindu culture advocates tolerance towards animals and reduces the risk of human-wildlife conflict" is highly simplistic. It added that human-animal relationships in a diverse country like India were based on complex webs of socio-ecological systems, and it is therefore "unfounded to assume people would tolerate potential human-wildlife conflict with cheetahs. Hence, researchers must apply more forethought and avoid generalizations regarding this intricate web of relationships."

Concerns were also raised in the paper about the injustice to the African cheetah. This species is under significant pressure with approximately 6,500 mature individuals remaining in the wild. "The translocation of a "vulnerable" species to India raises concerns about ecological and species injustices, particularly regarding welfare, mortality, and risks associated with their intercontinental translocation...Cheetahs are generally susceptible to stress, in particular, associated with the capture of free-ranging animals.

The Kuno cheetahs have not only been transported intercontinentally, but they are regularly subjected to veterinarian interventions, including more than 90 chemical immobilizations. Hence, one can question the long-term impact on their physical and mental welfare, especially considering their long-term existence in captive conditions. Furthermore, live prey is released in what may be classed as "unnatural confinement and exposed to the danger of immediate attack with no recourse", as was ruled in a case by the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa," the paper notes.

The authors concluded that the way in which conservation successes are measured need to be challenged by going beyond measuring ecological processes of birth and death but also gauging impacts on an animal's physical, physiological, and mental health.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Project Cheetah in Kuno National Park not 'environmentally just': Paper', www.downtoearth.org.in, 08/02/2025.

MP notifies 25th WLS; named after Dr. BR Ambedkar

The Madhya Pradesh government on April 11 issued a notification that declared a 258.64 sq. km area in Sagar district as a wildlife sanctuary (WLS). It has been named after Dr. BR Ambedkar, and is the 25th sanctuary in the state.

The area notified as a WLS is spread across reserved forests of the North Sagar Forest Division, Banda tehsil, and Shahgarh forest in Sagar district.

Source: ‘MP gets new Ambedkar Wildlife Sanctuary ahead of April 14 birth anniversary’,
www.telegraphindia.com,
12/04/2025.

MP transfers 20 IFS officials; reinstates two suspended after elephant deaths in Bandhavgarh TR

The Madhya Pradesh (MP) government on April 23 issued transfer orders for 18 Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers while reinstating two officers. The two who were reinstated are conservator of forest (CF) Gaurav Chaudhary and assistant conservator of forest (ACF) Fatte Singh Ninama who had been suspended following the death recently of 10 elephants in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) (*PA Update* Vol. XXX, No. 6).

Gaurav Chaudhary (IFS 2010-batch) had been suspended on 3 November 2024, and has now been posted as CF for the Balaghat Circle. Fatte Singh Ninama, ACF and deputy divisional forest officer (Dy. DFO), Panpatha, Bandhavgarh TR, was suspended on the same day in the same matter and has now been reinstated and posted as Dy. DFO of Shajapur general forest division. A departmental investigation against him will continue.

The government also issued transfer order for 18 other IFS officers. HU Khan, who was serving as principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF) (production) has now been

appointed PCCF and chief executive officer (CEO) at CAMPA headquarters. Arvind Pratap Singh, the CCF of Balaghat Circle, has been transferred to serve as CCF of Gwalior Circle, while Ripudaman Singh Bhadauria, who was working as CF at the forest force chief office, has been posted as CF in Sagar. Kshitij Kumar, the officer on special duty (OSD) at the forest department (FD), has been appointed DFO (work planning), Bhopal, and will also hold additional charge as OSD, FD. Priyanshi Singh, previously dy. director, Madhav National Park (NP) in Shivpuri, has been posted as DFO (work planning) Indore.

Other significant transfers include Lavit Bharti, the DFO of Narsinghpur, who is now DFO (work planning), Shahdol. Preeta SM, the DFO of Mandla (production), has been moved to DFO, East Mandla Forest Division, and Vinay Kumar, the DFO of Raisen, will now serve as Dy. CF and Director, Van Vihar NP, Bhopal. Rishabha Netam has been transferred as DFO, East Mandla, to Dy. Director, Satpura TR, Narmadapuram.

Source: ‘Bandhavgarh Elephant deaths: MP govt transfers 20 forest officials, reinstates 2’,
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
24/04/2025.

MAHARASHTRA

SHRC raps state over gaps in CFR compensation for families from Melghat CTH

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has pulled up the Maharashtra government over the lack of clarity and action regarding compensation for community forest rights (CFR) of rehabilitated Adivasi communities, particularly from Pastalai village in Melghat, Amravati district.

During a recent hearing, the SHRC reviewed replies and affidavits submitted by key authorities, including the divisional forest officer, district collector, and the tribal

development department, and noted with concern that there is no clearly identified department responsible for formulating a policy to provide monetary compensation for CFRs granted under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). As per the affidavit submitted by the DFO, the divisional level forest rights committee, Amravati, had in an order dated 9 April 2021, accepted the CFR of Pastalai village — a settlement located in the critical tiger habitat (CTH) — under certain conditions. Notably, the CFR was accepted only in monetary form, pending final approval of a compensation formula by the state government.

Quoting the government resolution dated 28 September 2020, the affidavit stated that the State Government is empowered under Section 42(3) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 to devise such a formula, which is currently “under consideration”. Further communication from August 2021 between the divisional level committee and the chief conservator of forest (CCF) and field Director, Melghat, also acknowledged the same.

The Commission also took note of a related writ petition (WP No. 5376/2022) filed before the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court in which a petitioner has specifically raised the issue of CFR compensation for Pastalai villagers. However, the Commission found that the prayer in the writ petition did not refer directly to policy formation, further underlining the policy vacuum.

The district collector’s reply confirmed that the process to draft rules for calculating CFR compensation is ongoing at the state level but failed to specify which department is leading the process. The Tribal Development Department, in its reply, stated that the subject of CFR compensation does not directly fall under its jurisdiction, though it has sought detailed information from the Amravati Collector on the matter.

Source: Pranali Lotlikar. 'SHRC Raps Maharashtra Govt Over Policy Gaps In CFR Compensation For Rehabilitated Adivasis', www.freepressjournal.in, 29/05/2025.

PIL in HC reveals proposal to cut over 25,500 trees near TATR for mining

25,587 trees in the vicinity of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) have been proposed for felling as 374.90 ha forest land on which they are located has been allocated to Western Coalfields Limited (WCL) for the Durgapur Deep Extension Opencast Project. The matter was brought before the Bombay High Court (HC) through a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Prakriti Foundation.

It was also revealed during a recent hearing before the Nagpur Bench of the HC that the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is scrutinizing the proposal to change the name of the user agency, a step required to modify conditions for additional tree cutting permissions.

The advocate general representing the state informed the HC that the state government will only permit further tree felling once the entire compensatory afforestation area is officially declared a protected forest. The assistant inspector general of forests submitted a copy of a decision dated 21 March 2025, outlining key points discussed in a meeting chaired by the inspector general of forests, Government of India. The meeting suggested the need to amend approval conditions for allowing additional tree felling, but only after the MoEFCC reviews the proposal for changing the name of the user agency.

However, the petitioner, informed the HC that massive tree cutting has already been observed in the southern region of the TATR. The state responded saying that an investigation was conducted by the additional principal chief conservator of forest, who was designated as the nodal officer for the project.

The report was submitted to the state government on 30 March 2025.

The state further said that it would provide detailed information regarding violations of tree-felling conditions and a formal affidavit would be submitted by the forest secretary, elaborating on all relevant decisions and future course of action within a period of three weeks.

Source: 'Tadoba Tree Felling Under Scrutiny; Over 25,000 Trees at Risk', www.nagpurtoday.in, 10/04/2025.

Maharashtra to seek Centre's permission to sterilise leopards



In an effort aimed at dealing with the escalating human-leopard conflict in the state, the Maharashtra government will be seeking permission from the Centre to sterilise leopards.

The move was confirmed recently by the state forest minister Ganesh Naik during an interaction with the media representatives.

Satyajeet Tambe, member of the legislative council, advocated neutering leopards to regulate their escalating population and penned a formal letter to the Maharashtra government accordingly. Acknowledging the letter and the urgency of the matter, Naik responded favourably to the idea of sterilising leopards.

Tambe represents the Nashik graduate constituency and hails from Sangamner in Ahmednagar district. He has made the request following incidents of attacks of leopards and complaints from villagers and farmers in various towns having forest reserves around them. Wildlife experts and environmentalists have however ridiculed the idea saying that the real reason for human-leopard conflict is encroaching of leopard habitats by humans.

Source: Chittaranjan Tembhekar. 'State to seek Centre's nod for sterilising leopards', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/01/2025.

DPS Flamingo Lake in Navi Mumbai declared conservation reserve



The Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has approved Conservation Reserve (CR) status for Navi Mumbai's DPS Flamingo Lake making it the first protected wetland

connected to the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS). The move was endorsed during a board meeting chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on April 17.

The 30-acre lake serves as a critical resting and feeding ground for flamingos that migrate from TCFS during high tide. State Forest Minister Ganesh Naik, vice-chairman of the SBWL, is reported to have said in the meeting that protecting this habitat was not just about conservation, but also public interest and environmental responsibility. The decision comes after sustained advocacy from local environmental groups in Navi Mumbai including the NatConnect Foundation.

A committee was formed in 2024 following the death of 17 flamingos when the lake dried up due to blocked tidal inlets during the construction of a nearby Passenger Water Transport terminal in Nerul. Naik had then directed officials to reopen two tidal inlets and asked the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation to realign pipes to restore water flow.

Source: ‘Navi Mumbai’s DPS Flamingo Lake declared a conservation reserve’, www.indianexpress.com, 18/04/2025.

Kanjurmarg dumping ground site in Mumbai is ‘protected forest’: HC

In a setback to the Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the Bombay High Court (HC) on May 2, restored the status of nearly 120 ha of the Kanjurmarg dumping ground site as a protected forest area under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) and the Indian Forest Act. The HC quashed and set aside the 2009 decision that de-notified the ‘protected forest’ status of the said land for creation of a dumping ground. It said that any proposal to de-notify the same would need to comply with due process prescribed under the FCA. The HC has granted three months’ time to BMC to comply with consequences of the HC’s judgment.

The verdict was passed by a bench of Justices Girish S Kulkarni and Somasekhar Sundaresan in response to a plea filed in 2013 by the non-government organization Vanashakti. The petition had challenged the denotification of 119.91 ha of land located in Kanjurmarg along the Thane Creek for dumping ground/landfill of nearly 141.77 ha created by BMC, which was earlier classified as ‘protected forest’. It claimed that the Kanjurmarg landfill falls under Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) and causes health hazards.

The HC noted that the land was salt pan land and had over time witnessed growth of mangroves. It added that the lease for such land for production of salt expired around 2003 and thereafter, under the CRZ notification and the Environment Protection Act, 1986, it was notified and classified as CRZ-1 area. Senior advocate Gayatri Singh for Vanashakti contended that through impugned notification of 29 December 2009 issued by the divisional commissioner, Konkan, the status of “protected forest” has been modified without

complying with due process stipulated under the FCA.

Advocate General Birendra Saraf argued for the state government that the land in question is only marginally covered by mangroves that are restricted to 20.76 ha, as noticed in the report filed by Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) and nothing in the rest of the area constituted as protected forest. Saraf added that taking note of the MCZMA report, another bench of HC in May 2013 had directed that no further mangroves must be destroyed and had directed the BMC to ensure compliance with MCZMA recommendations. The state government said that the patches of mangroves were excluded from the Kanjurmarg dumping ground.

After perusing the submissions, the HC bench observed that the subject land was clearly covered by the mangroves. It noted that the HC in an order on an earlier public interest litigation had explicitly declared that “land covered by mangroves is automatically CRZ-1 land and falls in the category of protected forest,” and “prohibited dumping of garbage on mangroves.” The bench observed that the state had to conduct detailed satellite imaging of actual mangrove growth and coverage before it issued the forest notification.

The HC pointed out that the subject land, which indeed is salt pan land, attracts growth of mangroves and it is the violative construction of the wall by BMC that led to mangroves being stunted and destroyed. The HC further held that the decision of 2009 was “unsustainable” and that the SC order does not give cover to the argument that the forest notification was a mistake, therefore it deserved to be quashed and set aside.

The HC’s order is likely to be challenged in the SC, says the news report.

Source: Omkar Gokhale, ‘HC restores ‘protected forest’ status of 120 hectares of Kanjurmarg dumping site’, www.indianexpress.com, 02/05/2025.

MAHARASHTRA/ODISHA

Olive ridley turtle tagged at Gahirmatha nests at Guhagar beach in Maharashtra

An Olive ridley sea turtle tagged at Gahirmatha in Odisha in March 2021 was recorded nesting at Guhagar in Maharashtra this year. The turtle '03233' that had been tagged by Dr. Basudev Tripathi, a senior scientist from Zoological Survey of India, was recorded laying eggs on 27 January 2025 at Guhagar beach when a team from Maharashtra's Mangrove Foundation was conducting their flipper tagging exercise. This is the first record of the same individual turtle nesting on the east and the west coast of India.

For decades, researchers thought that the nesting populations for both coasts were different, with no interconnection. The scale of this migration has driven researchers to re-evaluate the patterns, considering different possibilities across the coasts, including population complexities, migration patterns, habitat preferences, and climate-driven migrations.

This turtle nesting season, the WII and Mangrove Cell, Maharashtra Forest Department, started a programme of flipper tagging Olive Ridley female turtles that nest on the beaches of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts. 64 turtles in total were tagged as part of the exercise.

A forest officer from Ratnagiri informed that between March 23 and 26, as many as 107 of 03233's hatchlings were released in the sea.

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

Source: Aditi Shekar & Vijay Singh. 'Tag 03233's epic sea voyage: Olive Ridley turtle swims 3,500km from Odisha to Konkan to lay eggs', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 15/04/2025.

TAMIL NADU

Four-horned antelope & smooth-coated otter education centre at Denkanikottai school



The Hosur Forest Division (HFD) has set up an innovation and education centre at Denkanikottai Government Boys Higher Secondary School for four-

horned antelope and smooth-coated otters. The Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation and Tamil Nadu Innovation and Initiatives have supported the centre with the funding of about Rs. 25 lakh coming from the State Planning Commission.

The centre has life-size models of four-horned antelope and smooth-coated otters. As HFD has Cauvery North Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) and Cauvery South WLS under its jurisdiction as well, students will be informed about these WLSs.

A HFD official said that such centres are to be set up in other places in the state as well with the focus being on animal species of the respective areas.

Source: 'Hosur Forest Department opens wildlife info centre in government school', www.newindianexpress.com, 03/02/2025.

FD obstructing development work in Sathyamangalam TR in violation of FRA: tribal association

The Tribal People's Association has alleged that the forest department is obstructing development works intended for tribal communities in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR) in violation of the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

As per Section 3(2) of the Act and related communications from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 2008, provisions exist for 13 categories of development activities for tribal

communities, provided they did not exceed one hectare in area and involved the removal of not more than 75 trees.

Based on these provisions, user agencies were previously allotted forest land for land-use conversion, and numerous development projects were executed within the Sathyamangalam TR. However, in a recent development, when user agencies sought land for a concrete path in the Mavanatham settlement (Thalamalai Panchayat, Thalavadi Panchayat Union) and a road to Pudukadu village (Hasanur Panchayat), the FD denied the requests citing legal concerns.

The Association has urged the district forest officer of the Hasanur Forest Division to immediately facilitate construction of the road to Pudukadu village. It was similarly stressed that the forest range officer of Sathyamangalam should process the land-use conversion needed for the construction of a concrete path in Mavanatham village.

Source: 'Forest Department urged to not hinder development works for tribal communities', www.thehindu.com, 25/05/2025

Human-wildlife conflict on the rise in Tamil Nadu: CWLW

Tamil Nadu saw 80 human deaths in human-wildlife conflict, 4,235 incidents of wildlife induced crop damage incidents, 259 livestock deaths, 176 cases of property damage, and 138 human injuries for the year 2024-25 (figures till January 2025). The information was provided by the state chief wildlife warden (CWLW) Rakesh Kumar Dogra, during a session on resilient forest management to combat climate change organised as part of the Tamil Nadu Climate Summit 3.0 in February 2025

Source: SV Krishna Chaitanya. '80 killed in human-wildlife conflicts this fiscal year in TN; highest in five years', www.newindianexpress.com, 06/02/2025.

NATIONAL NEWS

UN human rights body flags relocation of tribal dwellers from tiger reserves

The relocation of forest-dwelling tribals from the tiger reserves in 18 states has been flagged by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), one of UN human rights treaty bodies.

In a recent letter to the ambassador and permanent representative of India to the UN office at Geneva, Arindam Bagchi, CERD pointed out that a June 2024 order of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) (*PA Updates* Vol. XXX, Nos. 5 & 4) in the matter violates the safeguards and standards of the domestic legal framework, under Section 38V (5) of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and Section 4(2) of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006.

The violations, it said, pertain to the incomplete process of recognising and determining the rights and acquisition of land of the tribal and forest-dwelling indigenous people, the lack of evidence that their activities or their presence can cause irreversible damage and threaten the existence or habitat of tigers, the absence of confirmation that other reasonable options of co-existence are not available, and lack of available resettlement or alternative packages to impacted communities.

CERD chairperson Michal Balcerzak expressed concern that the allegations regarding the order issued by NTCA, if verified, would infringe rights protected of the tribals under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). It has sought information on the allegations from the Centre by August 1.

Source: Diana Sahu. 'UN human rights body flags relocation of tribal dwellers from tiger reserves', www.newindianexpress.com, 27/05/2025.

Aasheesh Pittie receives HH Bloomer Award for his contribution in ornithology



Aasheesh Pittie, birder, and editor emeritus of the journal *Indian Birds*, was recently awarded the HH Bloomer Award for 2025. He is part of a cohort of eight

who were acknowledged by the award for their role as amateur scientists. Named after British amateur naturalist Harry Howard Bloomer, the award is given by the Linnean Society of London to honour amateur naturalists whose work has made an exceptional impact on biological knowledge.

Based in Hyderabad, Aasheesh Pittie is known for his deep knowledge and meticulous record-keeping though he does not have formal training in ornithology. His journey started in the 1970s, a time when birding in India was still largely solitary and informal. One of his landmark contributions is the *Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology*, a meticulously compiled reference archive of thousands of ornithological works. Through decades of mentorship via field visits, emails, and online forums, Pittie has nurtured a new generation of birders. His recent book titled *The Living Air: The Pleasures of Birds and Birdwatching* is a compilation of essays that urge readers to slow down, look around, and listen to the birds in their surroundings.

Ornithologists have lauded the award as overdue recognition for a man who has shaped the field of South Asian ornithology, all without the support of any institution.

Source: 'Hyderabad birder Aasheesh Pittie receives London's HH Bloomer Award', www.siasat.com, 19/04/2025.

SOUTH ASIA

WWF assessment estimates snow leopard population at 397 in Nepal



A recent study by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in collaboration with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and the Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (DoFSC) has estimated the snow leopard population in Nepal to be 397 individuals. The assessment utilised data on snow leopard distribution and population density collected between 2015 and 2024 from individual studies led by the government, conservation institutions and researchers. It compiled data from seven study regions and its results revealed that there are 397 snow leopards in Nepal, with a mean density of 1.56 individuals per 100 sq. km.

Badri Raj Dhungana, Director General, DoFSC informed that a significant portion of Nepal's snow leopard habitat falls outside designated protected areas. Therefore, he added that strengthening community-based initiatives, habitat connectivity, and human-wildlife conflict mitigation strategies will be crucial for ensuring the long-term survival of snow leopards across their range.

There were 718 snow leopards in India as per the Status Report of Snow Leopards in India released on 30 January 2024. It states that only a third of snow leopard habitat in India is under legal protection.

Snow leopards are found in 12 range countries across Asia. Just about 23% of the snow leopard's global range has been systematically studied, and less than 3% have empirical data on abundance, according to a 2021 WWF publication.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Nepal home to nearly 400 snow leopards, finds survey', www.downtoearth.org.in, 23/04/2025.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Cheetah conservationist Vincent van der Merwe dies at 42

South African conservationist Vincent van der Merwe, a key person behind India's Project Cheetah in Madhya Pradesh, was found dead in Riyadh. His body was found on the evening of March 16, in the hallway of his apartment building with a head injury. CCTV footage indicates he fell and struck his head on the floor.

The 42-year-old conservationist was internationally recognized for his role in cheetah conservation and reintroduction projects in Africa and Asia.

A National Geographic Explorer, he was director of The Metapopulation Initiative (TMI) and its Cheetah Metapopulation Project. Most recently, he was working with the

government of Saudi Arabia as manager of their efforts to reintroduce the cheetah, a species that once thrived on the landscape but became locally extinct more than 50 years ago. On March 13, he had extended his contract for another year in Saudi Arabia. His co-workers said they are committed to carrying on the work in his memory.

Born in 1983 in South Africa, van der Merwe's passion for wildlife led him to a distinguished career in conservation biology. Beginning with 217 cheetahs on 41 wildlife reserves in South Africa, Vincent's Cheetah Metapopulation Project has grown to include 537 individuals spread across 75 reserves in South Africa, plus Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and in a transcontinental first – India.

Source: P Naveen. 'Cheetah conservationist Vincent van der Merwe, key figure in India's Kuno project, found dead in Riyadh', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 19/03/2025.

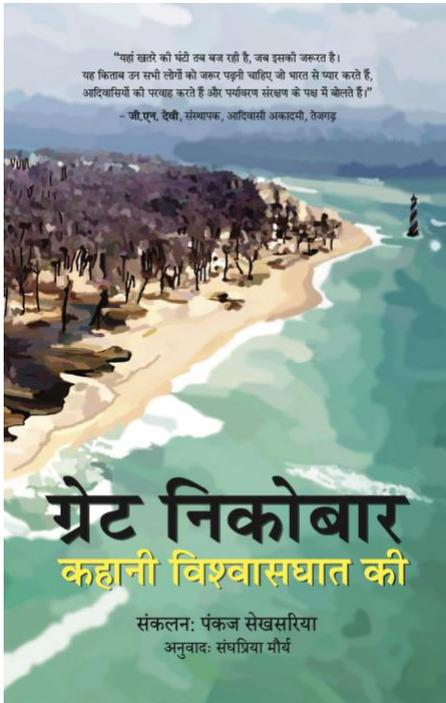
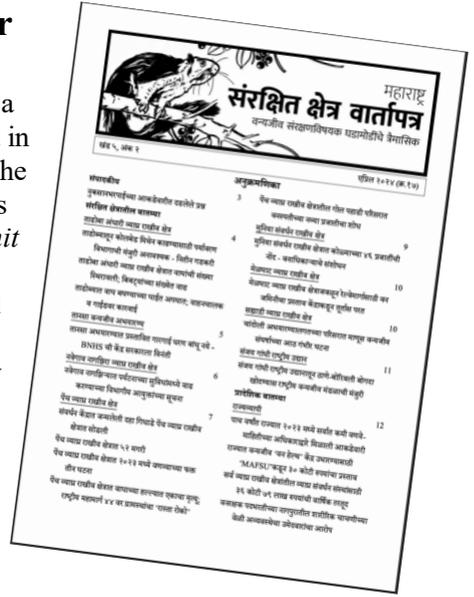


Protected Area Update in Marathi – for Maharashtra

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

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

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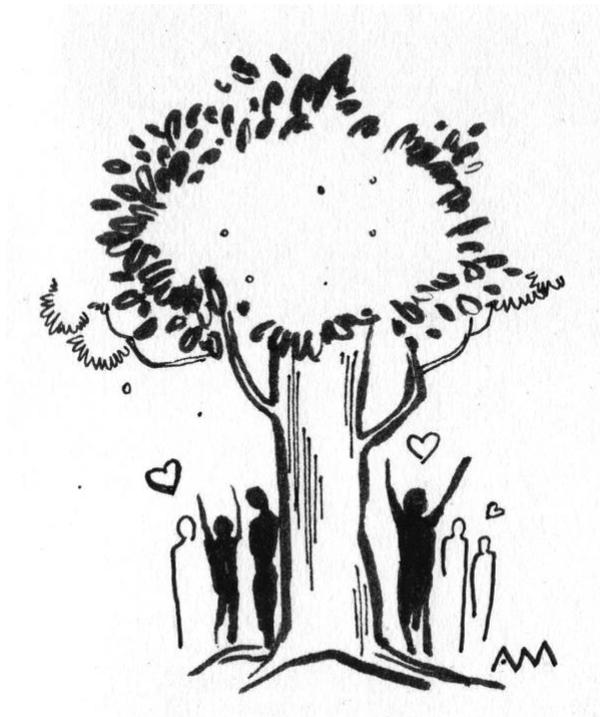
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Endorsement: "Here is an alarm being rung, when it needs to be. This book is a must-read for anyone who loves India, cares for the Adivasis, and speaks in favour of environmental upkeep." - G.N. Devy

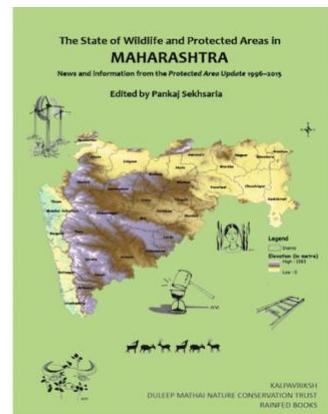
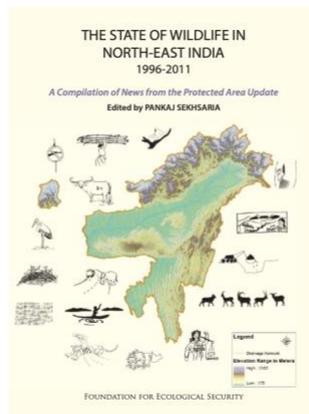
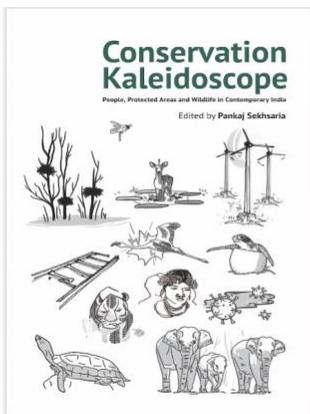
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- 1) *Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India*, 2021, 450 pp, 140 line drawings., Price: 650
- 2) *The State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra: News and Information from the Protected Area Update 1996-2015*, 2019. 250 pp, 100 line drawings, Price: Rs. 400
- 3) *The State of Wildlife in North-East India 1996-2011: A compilation of news from the Protected Area Update*, 2013, 330 pp, 100 line drawings, Price: Rs. 300

For more details and to order copies, please write to psekhsaria@gmail.com



MADHYA PRADESH

Director Panna TR transferred for opposing Ken-Betwa river link

R Sreenivasa Murthy, Director, Panna Tiger Reserve (TR) has reportedly been transferred to the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary because of his opposition to the Ken-Betwa river linking project. In his report to Madhya Pradesh chief wildlife warden, Narendra Kumar, Murthy said implementation of the project cannot be recommended as more than 200 square km of PTR would be submerged. Access to email correspondence has shown that the principal secretary of water resources department (WRD), Mr RS Julaniya was annoyed over Murthy's objections to the project. CCF Narendra Kumar has, however refuted the charges. He said it was Murthy's sixth year running at the same place and he himself wanted to quit Panna for medical reasons.

In another move, activist Ajay Dubey, has said that he is all set to move court against Ken-Betwa river link project. The Rs. 9,393-crore project involves 9,000 hectares of land, half of which is forest area. If the project is cleared, 10% of the tiger reserve will be taken away. It also involves transferring 591 million cubic metre of surplus water in Ken basin through 231.45-km canal to Betwa river. An estimated 6,000 hectares of land is needed for acquisition and the resettlement, and is estimated to cost Rs. 333 crore.

Source: P Naveen. 'Director Panna tiger reserve transferred for opposing Ken-Betwa river linkage; email reveals', *The Times of India*, 12/05/2015.

Conviction in 13-year-old tiger poaching case

In an order that was passed on 10 April 2015, the Judicial Magistrate First Class, Katni, convicted six people for shooting a tiger and

skinning it in the Bahoriband range of Katni division, Madhya Pradesh in January 2002. Two firearms including one muzzle loading gun, and a 12-bore gun, had been seized from the accused at the time. One of the persons convicted in this case was the president of the Van Suraksha Samiti (Forest Protection Committee) at the time of the incident.

The accused were sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of Rs. 10,000 each was also imposed on them. On request by the prosecution, the court directed the fine amount of Rs. 60,000 to be given to the forest department as compensation, for its use in forest protection.

Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India, Email dated 14/04/15.

MAHARASHTRA

Efforts to introduce solar irrigation pumps in Pench TR buffer

Satpuda Foundation, a NGO working on wildlife conservation issues, recently organized a workshop in the Pipariya village of Ramtek tehsil to introduce farmers from the Pench Tiger Reserve buffer zone to solar-powered irrigation pumps. About 25 farmers from five villages - Pipariya, Ghatpendri, Ghoti, Wagholi and Sillari - attended the event. The farmers observed the solar panels and controllers. They were made aware of various government schemes which will provide them with benefits and subsidies for installation of such solar-powered irrigation units. The initiative is supported by Born Free Foundation and IndusInd Bank in Pench.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Pench buffer farmers take to solar irrigation pumps', *The Times of India*, 13/05/2015

PERSPECTIVE

India's carnivore conundrum

The state of Gujarat recently reported a 32% increase in lion populations in the last five years, sparking expert calls to create more habitat for wildlife and for prey. Similarly, tiger and common leopard populations also appear to be increasing based on the country-level surveys. Assuming these numbers reflect real population growth and not a case of inflated estimates, a pressing question arises: how do we accommodate the expanding populations of these large carnivores? Will it require displacing people to make room for these charismatic predators?

As large carnivores are increasingly found outside core regions of protected areas, the problem of conflict with people gets compounded. There has been a rise in livestock depredation incidents linked to all the big cats in India – tiger, lion, common leopard, and snow leopard (no information is available for clouded leopard). It won't come as a surprise if these incidents increase as carnivore populations expand further. What is harder to ascertain is how this increase in conflict is imagined and navigated by the locals who share spaces with the carnivores.

People who live among carnivores have traditional ways of mitigating conflict – *Shandong* wolf traps in Ladakh, reinforcement of corals against attacks from snow leopards, keeping guard dogs against leopards, or in extreme cases poisoning the problematic animal. Although cooperation between forest departments and local communities to manage human-carnivore conflict is rare, it does occur. For instance, the Maldhari community in Gir collaborates with the Gujarat Forest Department to track lions, while in Spiti Valley, locals manage community grazing pastures to sustain healthy prey populations for snow leopards. However, what remains absent is a formal platform for dialogue and collaboration between local communities and forest department officials.

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department and the local community from Spiti Valley provide an example of a possible collaboration. Early this month, the Government of Himachal Pradesh notified the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve – a 1585 sq. km area for the protection of snow leopards in the Spiti Valley. The planning of Tsarap Chu involved discussions with local Gram Panchayats and the Conservation Reserve Management Committee will continue to have representatives from local Panchayats.

A collaboration between local communities and the Himachal Pradesh government departments serves as a valuable model for wildlife conservationists to follow closely. While these collaborations may be cautious alliances marked by guarded relationships, the Himachal Pradesh Government's initiative is a step in the right direction.

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