

TigerLink

May 2014, Revived Volume 15



RANTHAMBHORE FOUNDATION

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TigerLink is a knowledge centre, providing access to up-to-date information on the tiger. The journal *TigerLink* collates and analyses news on the tiger across its range countries with particular focus on India, and seeks to support and strengthen on the ground initiatives and influence governments. It serves as an information base for the media, policy-makers and all organisations and individuals concerned with tiger conservation.

We regret if any error has been inadvertently printed in this document.

We welcome any relevant information and feedback. Mail us at : tigerlinknetwork@gmail.com

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TIGERLINK

A Network of Concerned People and Organisations
Across the Globe to Save the Tiger

NEWS

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Dear friends,

No one can question the fact that the principle and ethics of wildlife conservation in Indian politics began with Smt Indira Gandhi. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who shared her personal love for wildlife, contributed while he was Prime Minister. At least environment could find mention in the Congress manifesto, and for the first time, in 1984, in the national budget.

After their tenure, we saw zero political will towards wildlife conservation for a long time.

Over the past ten years, i.e., both terms of the UPA, we have seen tremendous slide in this priority for wildlife conservation in the government's political agenda. Ministers in charge of the Ministry of Environment & Forests were changed more than once for being even slightly rigid in enforcing forest and wildlife protection laws as this came in the way of large investment. In the fag end of the government's term, a new minister was nominated. The motive for such an abrupt change was clear, for forest land has been diverted mercilessly with minimum consideration for conservation.

One wonders what the new government that comes into power will do—whichever party it is formed by. And one hopes that after the Parliament election, whichever government comes into power, recognises the need of conserving our wildlife, many of which is rare and endangered, like the greater one-horned rhino, Asiatic lion, Asiatic elephant—and the tiger. They are not only India's pride, but also a world heritage.

But we will not be able to save these if we do not

save their habitats, which are under a lot of pressure.

All common-property land in India has now been consumed and exhausted by human exploitation. The only land left to exploit is forest land. How much of this will the new government spare?

As we go to press, there is bad news from Manas Tiger Reserve, once one of our finest reserves, and now threatened by the increasing unrest in the region, and the consequent lack of support. Conservationists have raised an alarm over the situation in Manas and called for securing the reserve, which Ranthambhore Foundation fully endorses.

PK Sen
Executive Director
Ranthambhore Foundation

Footnote: We have raised the issue of paucity of funds for keeping *TigerLink* alive before. The situation persists, and this may well be the last issue of *TigerLink* unless we are able to garner funds for the same.

TigerLink is widely circulated among policy-makers, officials, NGOs, NIGs, researchers, scientists, journalists and all those concerned with tiger conservation across the globe. It has played a crucial role in disseminating information and serving as a networking platform as well as a pressure lobby.

It will indeed be a pity of such a publication shuts shop due to lack of funds.

It is difficult to focus on anything other than the elections now, given that we are in the midst of this exciting 'event'. Looking from the perspective of wildlife conservation, it has been worrying, given that wildlife found scant mention in the electoral debate or party manifestos—a subject amply discussed in this *TigerLink*. So, I will move the debate forward and focus on what one can expect from 16th May, when the results are announced.

Given the way the wind is blowing, with major political parties in the fray using a business/investment friendly governance structure as an election plank, I do not envisage a bright future.

The BJP wants to change the environment laws and regulations to suit and facilitate big business; while the Congress has taken to the grave the exemplary legacy of Indira Gandhi—who spearheaded the Wildlife Protection Act, Forest Conservation Act, and Project Tiger—pushing clearances for mines and other such 'red-listed' industry with little regard environment and wildlife, and the regulations governing them. The UPA's second tenure saw three ministers at the helm of Environment & Forests—two unceremoniously removed as they were seen to be 'green' (though the clearance record during their tenure suggests otherwise). The last to take on the mantle of the Ministry of Environment & Forests, also has the oil ministry in his portfolio. Someone forgot to tell the incumbent government that oil and environment don't mix. Or perhaps they knew that only too well...

So will wildlife be on the priority of the next government—whoever and however it be? Or will forests be sacrificed for populist reasons and a race for—unsustainable—growth? Will we have a government with vision for a sustainable future, balancing ecology and economy, or will we continue with the philosophy of “destroy now, and worry about it later”?

The writing is on the wall... but still, I look for shards of hope. The Asiatic lions in Gujarat—a BJP ruled state—are focus of a tremendous conservation effort, and a poaching crisis that hit Gir in 2007, has become a model of tackling cases of poaching (even if the state fails to share 'its' pride!). During the nine year tenure of the Congress dominated United Progressive Alliance, the number of tiger reserves climbed from 29 to 45, (credit must equally go to the concerned state governments), besides an increased budget for the tiger, and an enhanced relocation package for communities within core critical tiger habitats to incentivise voluntary relocation.

Moving onto other issues, I would like to take the reader to reserves unknown...well, not really, but

almost off the map, particularly in the political melee. Reserves like Manas in Assam, Palamu in Jharkhand, Satkosia in Orissa and Udanti-Sitanadi in Chhattisgarh. They are tiger reserves too... though not as celebrated as those closer to power centres. Here, tigers are not an easy photo-capture, nor an easy 'sighting,' and in some their numbers have been questioned. But, they are part of vast, high potential tiger landscapes, significant fragments of just two percent of tiger habitat that remains in the country and harbour other rare species. Yet, they struggle with acute shortage of manpower, uninterested governments...a few are under siege of insurgency, and saddled with dispirited leadership. So will we write them off? Because it is easier to shrug off responsibility? Or will we take them on as a challenge, and turn them around, making them examples like NSTR which has clawed its way back to recovery or Panna which shed the shame of local extinction to nurture a 'new' tiger population, even feeding tigers to other reserves today?

The choice is ours to make. I hope we will have the wisdom and the vision to conserve, rather than allow deterioration and death by apathy.

Kanha & Corbett, Ranthambhore & Nagarhole, Dudhwa & Kaziranga were not made in a day—they are the result of decades of concerted effort, grit and commitment.

Last week, I spent time in Sitabani, part of the Ramnagar Forest Division, contiguous to Corbett Tiger Reserve. We narrowly missed sighting a tiger, but those with us who took a different path had an experience that last nearly an hour. Next morning I ran into elephants and strident alarm calls raised hopes...

The NTCA-WII estimates show a tiger density of 13 tigers/100 sq km here and camera traps have revealed breeding tigresses. With tiger densities higher than many reserves in the country and as a crucial link in the important Shivalik Gangetic landscape, it baffles the mind why Ramnagar Forest Division has failed to get a tiger reserve status.

Lack of a PA status has deprived the wildlife here of funding and technical support, its staff must also engage in commercial forestry, and not be deployed for concerted focus the protection of endangered wild creatures. Besides, without a PA status, the vulnerability of a forest to mining and other such destructive projects is greater.

Yes, it isn't Corbett, but the tigers don't know that...and surely, they deserve as much protection, as much of a safe future as a tiger within the boundaries of a reserve?

Prerna Singh Bindra

NATIONAL NEWS

Oil minister takes over MoEF

Jayanthi Natarajan resigned as Union Minister of State of Environment and Forests (Independent Charge), and was replaced by Oil & Petroleum Minister M Veerappa Moily who now holds additional charge of Environment & Forests. (*Detailed story on Page 13*).

Two new tiger reserves

More tiger habitat has been brought under the protection of the Project Tiger umbrella with the notification of the Nagzira-Navegaon Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region and the Uttar Pradesh cabinet's approval for the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh. However, Pilibhit awaits notification. (*Details under 'News from the States'*)

National tiger estimation begins

The third all India tiger estimation exercise using modern sampling techniques that have replaced the older pugmark-method began in October 2013. The estimation is a collaborative initiative of NTCA and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in partnership with concerned state governments and is conducted every four years. Experts and NGOs will also be involved in the forthcoming census.

The estimation exercise will involve over 40,000 forest personnel who have been trained for collecting data on habitat quality, prey species densities as well as carnivore signs from across tiger habitat. The quadrennial exercise will have three phases. Phase I will involve ground survey data at the beat level, and cover all forests in the country (over 600,000 sq kms), for estimating important parameters through an eight day standardised protocol (tiger signs, prey abundance, habitat characteristics and human pressures). This will determine the occupancy and map relative abundance.

In Phase II statistical and satellite data by the Wildlife Institute of India will be analysed in collaboration with the NTCA. This will help depict landscape characteristics such as forest type, size, elevation, etc as well as anthropogenic impacts viz roads, canals, human habitation on tiger habitats. Phase III will involve use of camera traps and distance sampling for computing population and densities of tigers, co-predators and ungulate prey species.

In Phase IV the intensive annual monitoring of tiger

source populations will continue as an ongoing exercise. Phase IV was initiated as it was felt that while the four-year periodicity served well to estimate tigers, it was not adequate for monitoring important source populations. Phase IV is expected to facilitate robust estimates of population density, change in numbers over time and other crucial parameters such as survival and breeding rates.

Regional workshops were organised by the NTCA for field directors of tiger reserves for training in the estimation methodologies at Dudhwa, Kanha, Periyar, Kaziranga and Sundarbans tiger reserves.

The results of the exercise are expected in November-December 2014.

Using Geo-Information System (GIS) to map tiger habitats and populations, the exercise will also attempt to create a national 'Tiger Atlas'. According to sources in the NTCA, the 'Tiger Atlas' will serve as a benchmark in the new evaluation system. “This will act as an effective monitoring tool to ensure that we keep the pulse of tiger population and its habitat for future generations to come,” they said.

The last all India tiger estimation of 2010 was conducted in 17 tiger bearing states and covered an area of 600,000 sq km which included 46,388.22 sq km of tiger reserves, besides other protected areas and reserve forests. The last exercise estimated a population of 1,706 tigers (lower limit 1,571, upper limit 1,875), up from the 2006 estimate of 1,411 (lower limit 1,165, upper limit 1,657). Apart from the traditional 'tiger states', two new states—Goa and Nagaland—shall be part of the estimation exercise this year. New tiger reserves notified in the intervening period since the last estimation viz Sathyamangalam (Tamil Nadu), Nagzira-Navegaon (Maharashtra), Kawal (Andhra Pradesh) will also be part of the estimation.

India leads the way amongst all tiger range countries in population estimation and monitoring as no other country has such an intensive and extensive methodological approach.

Source: 'Stripes', Volume 4, Issue 5, 'A tiger head count', *The Statesman*, 21, August 2013, Dehradun; "Benchmark 'tiger atlas' soon", *The Pioneer*, 16, September 2013, New Delhi

Moily: fill staff vacancies

The Union Minister of Environment and Forests M Veerappa Moily wrote to the chief ministers of the 17 tiger states urging them to “launch a special drive” for filling up frontline staff vacancies in tiger reserves in a time bound manner. In a letter dated 12th March 2014,

Moiily wrote that “the frontline staff is the backbone of field management and shortage of regular staff adversely affects the day to day management and protection of tiger reserves.” It was pointed out that under section 38V of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 states are required to prepare a staff development and deployment plan, and that it also forms part of the agreed actions from the states in the tripartite MoU executed by Project Tiger/NTCA with tiger states.

The letter explained that a review done by NTCA had revealed a paucity of field staff, especially of forest guards, foresters, rangers.

The staff situation across tiger reserves (and other PAs, including tiger habitats) is serious with shortages averaging about 30-40 per cent across India. In some reserves, it is as high as 80 to 90 percent. The situation is expected to worsen further. A good portion of the staff is nearing retirement age and with recruitment frozen—in some cases for over two decades—in most states, there is no replacement to fill in the vacancies.

An initiative to address this, and other frontline staff related issues including institutional reform in recruitment, promotion and posting policies as well as welfare was taken up by the NBWL last year (for details check *TigerLink*, November 2013). However, this has floundered and has seen little progress.

A TigerLink report

Compendium of NTCA guidelines

The NTCA has published a 'Compendium of Guidelines/Advisories/Gazette Notification'. This was released by Minister of Environment & Forests (MEF) Veerappa Moily on 19th February at the All India meeting of Field Directors of tiger reserves held in New Delhi. The compendium is a useful handy publication which compiles the numerous advisories, notifications and guidelines issued by the Authority over the years.

Value of tiger reserves

The importance of natural forest ecosystems to human beings cannot be overstated. But it is largely ill-understood. It has been argued that putting an economic value on forests will help quantify the immense contribution of ecology and biodiversity—beyond what is the obvious in terms of timber, firewood, minor forest produce, etc.

Forests play irreplaceable roles in climate control, soil

fertility, ground water recharging, forming catchments of rivers, influencing monsoon rains and myriad other ecosystem services.

Those in favour argue that being 'free' we tend to take forests and the ecosystem services they offer for granted and hence they are easily dismissed and destroyed. For example, a standing forest is considered to have no economic value, while a forest destroyed for mining is calculated in the GDP.

It is reliably learnt that the NTCA has initiated an exercise to define in economic terms the value of tiger reserves. As a pilot project, this will be carried out in the six tiger reserves of Corbett, Sundarbans, Kanha, Kaziranga, Periyar and Ranthambhore.

The parameters shall cover an entire gamut of ecosystem services such as catchment for rivers, recharging groundwater, sequestering carbon, stable climate, fresh water, fertile soil, stable monsoons, etc.

The task is being undertaken by Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal. The process is ongoing. It is felt that this exercise will help strengthen the case for protecting reserves against various threats particularly from mining, infrastructure projects etc.

This reasoning is sound, but how accurately can one compute the services rendered by biodiversity? If we do not understand their intrinsic value, how can we put a “fair price” on eco-system services? There are also those who argue that nature should not be further commodified.

A TigerLink report

Evaluating management of tiger reserves

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has constituted committees for the Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of tiger reserves in 2014. The committees have been announced via an office memorandum dated 10th December 2013. The quadrennial MEE exercise evaluates the prescribed management practices and their implementation in tiger reserves, provides recommendations and grades every reserve according to an established standard protocol in an IUCN framework.

As per the memorandum, the 44 tiger reserves of the country have been grouped into five clusters, each being evaluated by a two-member committee chaired by a retired IFS officer with an expert member. It must be noted here that in the last MEE exercise (2010), the committees were more robust and consisted of four members, thus allowing for more representation from independent candidates, and also from the Wildlife

Institute of India. This time, that isn't the case. For example, in one of the clusters (Cluster IV, tiger reserves of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu), the current evaluation committee doesn't have any non-official member at all and consists of a retired divisional forest officer (DFO) and a retired chief wildlife warden.

A TigerLink report

Changes in Terai forest cover

The NTCA is has initiated a study to find out the changes in the forest cover in the Shivalik-Gangetic Plains landscape. The study, to be undertaken by the Forest Research Institute (FRI) will detect changes in forest cover over the past 20 years in core critical tiger habitats, buffers of tiger reserves and up to a distance of 10 kms from the boundaries of tiger reserves within this landscape.

The Shivalik-Gangetic Plains region, also known as the Terai Arc, is a crucial tiger landscape and hosts a number of other endangered species such as elephants, barasingha, vultures, hispid hare, Bengal florican, etc. According to the 2010 All India Tiger Estimate, this landscape has about 20,800 sq km of potential tiger habitat in the part of it falling in India (the rest lies in Nepal). Tigers occupied 6,712 sq km of forested habitats with an estimated population of 353 (320 to 388) in five separate populations. These were Rajaji-Corbett landscape in Uttarakhand, Dudhwa-Pilibhit and Suhelwa in Uttar Pradesh, and Valmiki in Bihar.

The Shivallik-Gangetic Plains landscape is characterised by its ability to sustain high densities of tigers.

A TigerLink report

NBWL reconstitution delayed

Although the term of the last National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) ended in September 2013, the new board is yet to be constituted six months on. The earlier Union Minister of State for Environment & Forests (MEF), Jayanthi Natarajan, delayed its formation and though her successor Veerappa Moily placed it as a 'priority', it is yet to see the light of the day.

There was said to be pressure for its early formation as the Board's Standing Committee regulates projects within Protected Areas and a zone of ten kilometres around them. Without the committee in place, projects are pending without clearance. Mint quoted an

environment ministry official saying that around 40-50 clearances are pending since the term of the existing members expired.

Conservationists, however, say that the complacency is reconstituting the NBWL reflects the lack of priority given to wildlife. They assert that a strong NBWL was essential as Protected Areas are the last refuge of many endangered and endemic species and that the NBWL is the only non-official body for important conservation related policy decisions. The delay in the formation of the NBWL has held up key initiatives and decisions taken by it in its previous term.

It has been reported that the board was delayed due to intense lobbying—by both conservationists, and other vested interests.

Source: “Many projects delayed as wait for new wildlife board continues”, Neha Sethi, *Mint*, 6, December 2013; “Lobbying delays Wildlife Board formation”, Nitin Sethi, *The Hindu*, 14, February 2014; with inputs from *TigerLink*.

Relief from arbitrary transfers

Three months after the Supreme Court's direction to the Centre to insulate civil servants from political pressure by giving them a fixed minimum tenure, the government has amended rules governing Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers mandating at least two years per posting. Cadre officers shall now be appointed by a state level Civil Services Board under the chairpersonship of the chief secretary. The board shall examine cases of premature transfers, consider for transfer before fixed tenure based on circumstances it thinks fit, and recommend to the competent authority names of officers for premature transfer with reasons to be recorded in writing.

Source: “2-year fixed postings for IAS, IPS and forest service”, Bharti Jain, *TNN*, 31, January 2014

Note: This will further strengthen the NTCA directive of 5th September 2013, advising the states not to transfer IFS officers posted in tiger reserves without consulting it, adding that a minimum tenure of three years should be ensured. This is of significance as arbitrary postings were hampering continuity of work. It is hoped that this order from the apex court will put an end to the indiscriminate transfer of officials in tiger reserves motivated by political and other vested interests.

“No new roads in PAs”

A MoEF panel has denied permission to state governments to build new roads and widen existing

ones in Protected Areas. The recommendations were outlined by a sub-committee chaired by National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) member MK Ranjitsinh in the 28th meeting of the standing committee of the Board following concern over the many proposals it received for the expansion and construction of roads in PAs. The report of the panel, noting roads have “detrimental ecological effects on both terrestrial and aquatic natural ecosystems”, emphasised that roads and highways should bypass PAs.

Instituted in June 2013 by then MEF Jayanthi Natarajan, to frame a comprehensive set of guidelines for construction/repair of roads passing through PAs and design best practices for such existing roads for wildlife conservation, the sub-committee has recommended guidelines like avoiding new roads in PAs and core/critical tiger habitats and maintaining and repairing existing roads in the best possible condition without widening or upgrading them. However, culverts and resurfacing of damaged road sections can be considered for approval for providing connectivity to remote villages in sanctuaries, the report states.

The methods of such road construction, such as blasting, borrow-pit digging and their impacts on wildlife should be a criteria for consideration, states the committee. The committee also advised similar considerations to roads within one kilometre of PAs and core/critical tiger habitats.

The sub-committee sought that the WII should formulate detailed guidelines for roads through these areas. The report suggests a ban on night traffic, regulations on timing and volume of traffic, no stoppage of vehicles within the PA, strict adherence to speed limits and setting up speed-breakers, banning horns and littering on roads passing through PAs. Measures like retaining natural animal tracks across roads, underpasses and other structures and closing construction/repair activities between 6pm and 8am were also recommended in order to minimise disturbance to wildlife.

The sub-committee's report suggests that although roads are a key to development of the nation, their presence in ecologically sensitive areas is extremely detrimental to wildlife and habitats. “Besides fatal accidents that kill rare wild creatures, roads in protected areas fragment wildlife habitats, break contiguity, tree cover and canopy, slice vegetation and impinge on forests and well-worn migratory paths of animals. Roads also serve as conduits to soil erosion and landslides. Roads provide access, and are the first

step to ancillary development and an increasing human footprint. Simply put, roads spell the end of wilderness,” said Prerna Singh Bindra, former member of the NBWL, who was also part of the sub-committee.

It must be noted that the National Wildlife Action Plan, 2002-16 also emphasises the need to plan roads in such a manner that all PAs are bypassed and the integrity of protected areas is maintained.

The recommendations of this committee, though accepted by standing committee, still await final notification.

Source: “No nod for new roads in wildlife protected areas”, Anubhati Vishnoi, *The Indian Express*, 25, November 2013, New Delhi; “Don't allow new roads in sanctuaries, says MoEF expert panel”, Akriti Shrivastava, *Down to Earth*, 26, November 2013

Ecologically (In) Sensitive Zones

Following the 31st December 2012 MoEF order to states to notify Eco Sensitive Zones around sanctuaries and national parks, the Centre is currently reviewing about 400 ESZs from Protected Areas across the country, but the exercise, aimed to protect the ecology, environment and local livelihoods, appears to have been reduced to a sham. Worried about how the process would hit 'development' and reportedly under pressure from the mining and industry lobbies, most states have excluded several ecologically important areas around PAs, thereby defeating the very purpose of the ESZ. Worse, the Centre seems to be colluding with the states in this process, so that development projects can bypass the mandatory wildlife clearance.

A case in point is Sikkim's miniscule ESZs which spans a mere 25 to 200 metres from park boundaries and are aimed to accommodate the state's hydel ambitions, rather than safeguard the ecology of the Protected Areas.

In Orissa, tiger habitats are being severely compromised to cater to mining interests. The state forest department had prepared its proposal for ESZs around PAs within the February 2013 deadline, but, in meetings with the mining, industries and revenue departments, the proposals were tweaked, altered and held up. In a meeting on 21st May, chief minister Naveen Patnaik, under recommendation of the state revenue minister, asked the forest department to reduce the extent of the ESZ for Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary in Balasore district to exclude stone quarries and crushers operating there. This was done despite the chief wildlife warden's opposition as the

region in which the ESZ was compromised is a vital elephant (and tiger) corridor that connects Kuldiha to the Similipal Tiger Reserve, both of which are part of the Similipal Biosphere Reserve and Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve. In another case, the proposed ESZ for Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary—a prime tiger habitat of southern-central Orissa, tenuously connected to the Central Indian Tiger Landscape, was 'revised' to limit it to only one kilometre in order to leave out bauxite deposits in the region that are being eyed by mining giant Vedanta for its refinery at Lanjigarh. In the Kapilas Wildlife Sanctuary, the proposed ESZ of 10kms was reduced to a mere 500m.

In Jharkhand too, it was largely the writ of the mining industry that dictated the ESZs. In 2011, steel major Tata wrote to the Centre asking for the ESZ of Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary to be halved from the 10km proposed by the state, citing “fears of adverse effects on its industrial activities”. Two years later in January 2013, a senior official of Tata Steel again appealed to the Centre to reduce the safety zone to a mere 500m, a move resisted by concerned forest officers who called this demand “unreasonable, and not in the interest of protecting the park's biodiversity”.

In Madhya Pradesh, the state government fixed ESZ boundaries in most PAs at two kilometres. For Satpura Tiger Reserve in Hoshangabad district, the forest department had proposed that five kilometres around the boundary be notified as ESZ, but it was reduced to two kilometres on state Cabinet's instructions.

A high-ranking official in the environment ministry admitted that most ESZ proposals sent by states are flawed. “States like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Goa kept the mining areas out of ESZs, irrespective of their ecological value. Besides, no ground investigation has been done in most proposals. The areas are randomly marked on topographic sheets,” he said. In an internal meeting of the environment ministry in May 2013, its wildlife division expressed concerns over the quality of the state ESZ proposals. “Most proposals do not follow ecological aspects of the objective of this exercise,” says the division's note sent to the Director General (Forests) before the meeting. The note points out that in most of the proposals, distance from the PA boundary was made the only criterion for defining ESZ and factors such as habitat connectivity and ecological integrity of the region were rarely considered for identifying the zones.

Taking note of this, members of the NBWL's Standing Committee, pointed out in a meeting that “the

methodology of selection of many ESZs appears to be arbitrary, and at times, influenced by factors other than ecological” and pressed for “a careful oversight mechanism”. Yet, the process has been opaque, with negligible involvement of ecologists, conservationists or scientists outside of the government either at the state or at the centre.

Source: “Eco-sensitive Zones Subverted”, Kumar Sambhav S, *Down to Earth*, 30, November 2013; Prerna Singh Bindra, *The Pioneer*, 9th April, 2014.

“Distemper alarm is undue”

Responding to fears of the deadly canine distemper virus (CDV) affecting wild tigers, the NTCA has issued a letter to Chief Wildlife Wardens of all tiger range states in the country on 13th January asking them to launch a special drive with state veterinary departments to deal with the problem. The advisory was issued after a wild tiger in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve tested positive for the virus, which is usually transmitted from free-ranging. The disease is practically incurable except under intense veterinary care.

In June 2013, the NTCA had issued an advisory asking for regular preventive inoculation exercises for livestock and free-ranging domestic animals, particularly dogs, in the buffer areas of tiger reserves. It also asked for blood and tissue samples of dead tigers to be collected and tested for the virus. Periodic checking of water quality in tiger reserves was also advised.

Commenting on the issue, tiger biologist Dr K Ullas Karanth of the Wildlife Conservation Society has termed quarantine and inoculation measures as “tokenism” that “may make us feel good but will achieve little else”. According to him, such measures could be impractical, highly expensive and very ineffective in a country like India where tigers and people exist together in a matrix of forest and human-used landscapes.

Source: “NTCA sounds alert for deadly virus stalking tigers”, Ankur Paliwal, *Down to Earth*, 14, January 2014; Advisories by NTCA (www.projecttiger.nic.in); “Disease is not the most urgent threat to wild tigers”, Dr K Ullas Karanth, Conservation India

STOP PRESS: MANAS IN DANGER

There is bad news from Manas, one of India's nine ‘original’ tiger reserves established in 1973, and also a World Heritage Site. With renewed disturbances in Bodoland Territorial Area District (the recent violence here has led to the loss of 30 lives) and especially

around Manas NP, the situation there is very volatile, and the wildlife, and its protectors at great risk. Over 5,000 local villagers surrounded and mobbed the Bansbari Range of Manas causing extensive damage, and staff was compelled to fire in self-defence. Another camp in the national park, Narayangudi has been burnt and destroyed. Alarmed, conservationists have appealed for renewing protection and stepping up security in the reserve. Instead, it is reported that there is a move to withdraw all arms from forest staff in Manas NP. If this is done, how will they defend themselves—and the wildlife of Manas in the face of such threats? Member, NTCA and director-WCS India Ullas Karanth wrote to the MEF Veerappa Moily drawing his attention to the situation, and calling for his personal intervention. “We need to strengthen the security by putting para-military forces in Bansbari range till situations improve and facilitate normal patrol inside Manas NP,” he wrote. Equally, the forest staff and management of Manas must be supported and strengthened.

A TigerLink report

FOCUS

Human-tiger conflict peaks

Between November 2013 and April 2014, at least 20 cases of human fatality from tiger attacks have been recorded across the country—primarily in landscapes with high tiger density: Bandipur-Nagarahole-Mudumalai-Wynaad, Tadoba, Corbett-Rajaji, Dudhwa-Lakhimpur Kheri-Pilibhit, Ranthambhore and Kaziranga regions. Conflict between humans and wildlife is inevitable in a densely populated country like India (361 people/sq km according to 2011 census) which also has iconic and diverse large species like tigers, leopards, sloth bears and elephants sharing space with people. In fact, wildlife biologists assert that given the proximity of large carnivores and people, conflict is actually at a low scale than it could be. A study by Vidya Athreya and other scientists, published in PLoS last year, illustrates a situation where a population density averaging ten leopards per 100 sq km are sharing space with dense human populations in a completely modified landscape. However, human attacks by leopards were rare despite a potentially volatile situation. The recent case of a young male tiger—believed to have originated from Satkosia Tiger Reserve—who stayed almost inside Bhubaneswar city for about eight months, preying on cheetal and other wild prey in the outskirts and not getting into a single instance of conflict with

people proves that if left undisturbed, tigers go to extreme lengths to avoid contact with humans when in human-dominated landscapes. Most instances of conflict arise only when people mob the animal, in case it happens to get detected, and corner it.

In the past few months, we have seen several cases of intensifying conflict and accounts of tigers killing humans. Below, we detail and analyse some such cases.

27th November-3rd December, Karnataka

Within a span of a week, four people were killed by tigers in the Bandipur-Nagarahole region. At least three of these were by the same tiger. Orders were issued to tranquillise and capture the tiger. It was captured, and found to be an old and injured tiger. It was sent to Mysore zoo. However, the local people insisted that the tiger be killed even as it was being transported. They allegedly set fire to a forest department jeep and ransacked a forest rest house.

25th December-22nd January, Uttar Pradesh

A tiger, suspected to have originated from Corbett Tiger Reserve, killed seven people in the Moradabad and Bijnor districts.

On 29th December, a tigress was spotted resting in a sugarcane field after killing a man. Soon a mob of locals gathered and started stoning and mobbing the animal. One man was injured by the panicked tigress when he tried to approach her, armed with a stick. In the melee the 'man-eater' escaped and went on to kill three other people. In every instance, it could not eat the corpse as a mob situation arose, forcing it to run away and claim more victims.

It was declared a 'man-eater' by the Chief Wildlife Warden and shoot-at-sight orders were issued on 9th January after five people were killed. However, these orders were suspended following opposition from the animal rights activists. It was reported that attempts would be made to tranquillise the tiger. But the forest department could not succeed at locating and tranquillising the tiger and the killings continued.

On 22nd January, one person was killed in the Bijnor district.

All of these killings occurred in the sugarcane belts of the Terai that have been notorious as hotbeds of human-tiger conflict after immigrants into the region cleared off the Terai grasslands and planted the rich alluvial soils with sugarcane, a crop that is indistinguishable to tigers from natural grasslands. The sugarcane provides cover and solitude and people and tigers often come dangerously close to each other

triggering panic attacks by the large carnivores.

Over the past two months there has been no reported incidence of man-killing and the conflict tiger is believed to have moved away to safer habitat, reinforcing the fact that cases of deliberate stalking and predation on humans by tigers is very rare, conflict situations arise largely when the animal gets cornered, surrounded by people or faces an abrupt encounter.

The NTCA held a meeting on the ongoing conflict situation with the local administration, forest officers. It is learnt that the NTCA will deploy camera traps, and assist with the training and capacity building of staff. It is hoped that this will help in addressing the human-wildlife conflict.

The local administration proposed to bring the forests divisions under Najibabad district as part of Corbett Tiger Reserve's buffer area, though it was advised that the entire area could potentially be designated a tiger reserve, which will help consolidate the region. Currently, the Amangarh range is part of Corbett's buffer.

27th December, Bandipur, Karnataka

A villager was killed by a tiger near Maddur Colony near Gundulpet taluk in Chamarajanagar district. According to other villagers, the victim had ventured deep into the forest illegally to graze cattle and was sitting near a bush when he was attacked by the tiger and dragged away.

After much confusion over the identity of the tiger as three other tigers had been camera trapped in the area, a tiger was baited and captured after a week's combing using domestic elephants. It was put in a cage and shifted the next day to the rescue centre at Bannerghatta, near Bangalore. But, in the meanwhile it had injured itself badly in its violent efforts to escape. It lost a canine and injured its left shoulder. The action was criticised as there no strong evidence to prove that this particular tiger—from among the three camera trapped—was responsible for the human death. Locals claimed that the attack took place in the forest fringes, but officials and conservationists refute it citing that the attack took place deep in the forest where the victim had entered illegally. While compensation for such attacks inside the forests is not usually given, Rupees five lakhs of *ex-gratia* was given to the victim's family on humanitarian grounds.

9th January 2014, Maharashtra

On 9th January, a group of villagers who had illegally entered the completely restricted core/critical tiger

habitat of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve were allegedly ambushed by a tiger who killed one of them and charged the others away. The attack took place near the Pandharpani meadow, a prime tiger area in one of the best parts of Tadoba. The body has not been recovered.

4th-23rd January, Tamil Nadu

A tiger killed three people in the Nilgiris area, close to the popular hill station, Ooty. The incidents led to a wave of panic in the region as district administration shut down 45 schools across 24 affected villages with a population of 15,000 people. Landless labourers suffered as fear kept them from going to work. The media played up the incidents causing even more panic.

After a two-week long search, the tiger was shot dead on January 22. During the 20-minute operation, three rounds comprising more than 15 bullets were fired using AK-47 rifles. The post mortem showed that the lower jaw of the big cat was injured and it was severely underweight.

17th February, Maharashtra

A man was killed by a tiger in Pombhurna beat, Devai Range forest. A group of villages had gone into the forest for bamboo cutting, when the tiger attacked them suddenly and killed the victim on spot. A mob collected and they demanded that the tiger be captured.

20th February, Uttar Pradesh

On 20th February, a tigress killed a man in the Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, close to Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. It was, however, a chance encounter that resulted in tragedy as the victim and the tiger surprised each other. In a carefully analysed and planned manner, the UP Forest Department concluded that the young tigress ended up in a conflict situation while she was probably dispersing in her search for safe habitat. They tranquillised her and released her in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve where she is being monitored closely for any possibility of further conflict. The site of release, Chandpara beat, was chosen carefully after it was found unoccupied by other tigers and with ample prey base.

12th March, Maharashtra

Two people were killed one in March, and another just about a month later, both in the Aaksapur beat of Ballarsha division near Tadoba.

Causes & solutions

Indications exist that instances of human-tiger conflict could be rising as tigers get cornered in increasingly

small, fragmented reserves with relative protection where they breed and proliferate, but with no 'sink' or 'dispersal' habitats to spread out into. Also, PAs are fringed by large numbers of villages from which people enter forests for collecting firewood, minor forest produce, grazing livestock, etc and expose themselves to the risk of encounters with tigers, leopards, sloth bears, elephants, etc.

Although tigers are generally shy and avoid human beings, sporadic incidents do occur. Dispersing young tigers walk into deathtraps when they step out of protected reserves—where populations are relatively stable—and move into forests with lower prey base passing through human dominated areas. They often end up killing cattle, and on rare occasions, humans. Young tigers looking for new territories or older males ousted away by stronger heirs set out to look for sanctuary away from reserves and move into fringes or into adjoining habitats through forest corridors, often to find that long-used corridors have vanished, as have many erstwhile 'sink' habitats. Disoriented yet desperate, they are landing up in the midst of human habitation and urban sprawl hundreds of kilometres away from the reserves they originate from. These so-called 'stray' tigers face a bleak future, and would be lucky to escape death by poison, cudgel, stoning or electrocution. The less unfortunate may be condemned to life in captivity in zoos—a sad fate for a wild tiger. It should be remembered that dispersal has been a crucial part of tiger biology and they cross large distances to disperse. It is just that now—with fragmentation and habitat loss—it has become more difficult for them to do so.

While long-term solutions need to focus on increasing the expanse of natural habitats, protecting forest corridors, bringing larger tracts of habitat under the ambit of protected areas, encouraging people to move out and away from wildlife habitats while simultaneously reducing their dependence on forests as a source of livelihood by providing alternate means, etc., more immediate mitigation measures need to be adopted urgently to minimise human and wild animal injury and mortality.

To this effect, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has prescribed a standard operating procedure (SOP) for dealing with situations of human-tiger conflict. Released last year, the SOP asks for imposition of Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to ensure law and order. This is essential to avoid agitation/excited local people surrounding the animal spot which hampers capture operation,

leading to serious injuries to people, staff—and the animal.

Leading conservationists and scientists, like Dr K Ullas Karanth of the Wildlife Conservation Society reason that it may be impractical to try and capture every conflict tiger in India, particularly around reserves where successful conservation efforts have caused tiger populations to increase and reach saturation levels locally. Karanth questions the necessity of keeping man-eaters alive. "The animal should be euthanised quickly because trapping or chemical immobilisation is difficult and time consuming," he says. The tiger may continue to attack humans, which might turn the residents of the area hostile. "This may jeopardise the conservation of the species as there can never be any conservation without people's support," he says. Besides, if the tranquillised tiger is old, it is unlikely to adapt to life in captivity and may remain severely stressed in comparison to young tigers, who are able to adapt.

It must be kept in mind, however, that not all conflict arises in areas that are saturated with tigers. Low density tiger landscapes in areas like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa also witness human-tiger conflict. Healthy, young and dispersing tigers—critical to rebuilding tiger populations in presently low tiger density habitats—have also been known to come into conflict while passing through human dominated landscapes. Each conflict situation has its own complexities and dimensions and calls for a site specific approach and action.

According to the SOP, attempts should be made to first trap the tiger in a cage. If this fails, officials can resort to chemical immobilisation of the tiger, but it should be done by an expert team with a veterinarian on board. It categorically prescribes that "under no circumstances, a tiger should be eliminated by invoking the Wildlife [Protection] Act, 1972, if it is not habituated for causing human death."

Source: Big Cats in Our Backyards: Persistence of Large Carnivores in a Human Dominated Landscape in India, Athreya et al, 2013; "Tigers on the prowl", Ankur Paliwal, *Down to Earth*, 15, February 2014; Tiger population reaches saturation point", Divya Gandhi, *The Hindu*, November 30, 2013; "Tiger mauls forest watcher in Nagarhole National Park", K Jeevan Chinappa, *The Hindu*, 1 December, 2013; "Killer tiger gives forest department the slip, Amit S Upadhye, *Deccan Chronicle*, 2 December, 2013; "Another farmer killed by tiger in HD Kote in Mysore", R Krishna Kumar, *The Hindu*, 3 December, 2013; "Orders issued to shoot man eater", R Krishna Kumar, *The Hindu*, 2 December, 2013; "Maneaters must be swiftly killed", Amit Bhattacharya, *TNN*, 8 December, 2013; "Shoot or Trap? Tiger Expert, Department Differ", Meera Bhardwaj, *The New Indian Express*, 7 December, 2013; "Man-animal Conflict Likely to Rise in High Density Areas, Says Karanth", Meera Bhardwaj, *The New Indian Express*, 6 December, 2013; "Tiger

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For the detailed SOP, check

http://projecttiger.nic.in/whatsnew/Final_SOP_11_01_2013.pdf

Inputs by *TigerLink*

Elections 2014: No wild party

The year 2014 saw what are being tipped as India's most exciting Parliamentary elections. But sorely missing in the electoral fervour, speeches and promises, debates and issues is the *environment*.

Going through the speeches of the prime ministerial aspirants, including currently unofficial aspirants, for some coherent intent on environment, let alone wildlife, issues yielded little—though of course Narendra Modi did proclaim that people "sitting in the (Assam) government were conspiring to kill rhinos so that they could settle Bangladeshis in the space thus emptied". One doubts, though this was out of concern for the rhinos or more of a pointed barb at the ruling Congress party.

The same PM wannabe also admirably called "water, land, forests and air," our heritage, however, how these are to be conserved is summed up "through modern technology". A word of (unsolicited) advice: good old protection and refraining from clearing/destroying forests will serve the purpose more than adequately. The insensitivity to wildlife is perhaps best symbolised in a headgear that the PM aspirant donned while on a campaign trail in the northeast. The cap comprised derivatives of three wild animals—two endangered—including a wreathed hornbill's head,

Himalayan black bear hair, besides the *tush* of a wild boar.

Electoral debate apart, the environment isn't central to the manifestos either. Main political parties in the fray listed some green issues like renewable energy, water conservation, ecology-green audits safeguarding the rights of tribals dwelling in forests, etc. But it is not envisaged how the environment objectives will be met—at best they remain wishlists, especially when they stand in stark contrast to other agendas, centred around economic growth, infrastructure, investments—without factoring in social and ecological costs.

Manifestos, of course, are largely ritualistic exercises, but are still important as statements of intent of the political parties, to help facilitate rational decision making amongst the electorate.

For the purposes of *TigerLink*, I have largely focused more on issues concerning wildlife conservation.

The most worrying point in the BJP manifesto is the promise to "Frame the environment laws in a manner that provides no scope for confusion and will lead to speedy clearance of proposals without delay." A strong legal and policy framework is the backbone of wildlife protection and such a compromise will be its death knell. The problem is, with dilution of the legal framework, other priorities in the agenda take on ominous tones—like "Ensuring an environment to make 'doing business' in India easy; and investment and industrial regions as global hubs of manufacturing." Similarly, there is much emphasis on expediting freight and industrial corridors (also there in the Congress manifesto), but within a weaker regulatory regime, one wonders whether there will be any checks and balances on the havoc this will cause to our prime wildlife habitats.

It's symbolic that the BJP manifesto lists only coal, minerals and spectrum among natural resources, those which are directly marketable (have an equity market). The most critical of natural resources—land, forests, rivers, water sources, biodiversity find no mention. It does mention that it will protect the existing forests and wildlife reserves—but follows it up with a catastrophic "wastelands of the country will be used for social forestry." To be fair, this has pretty much been the philosophy of successive governments, largely the Congress which has laid much emphasis on 'greening' deserts, and social forestry, while what is crucial is to protect existing, old growth, biodiversity-rich forests and preserving natural landscapes such as



Courtesy: Rohan Chakravarty

undermined either. The Trans-Himalayas feed the Himalayan rivers that sustain more than half of India. The Indian National Congress manifesto is equally disappointing—given its legacy of an exemplary environment and conservation vision—though it shouldn't have been given their track record over the past few years. In its nine years, six lakh hectares of forests were diverted, over 2.5 lakh hectares for mining, industrial and infrastructural projects (see 'Forest Clearances' for details). The run up to the elections saw the ouster of former environment minister Jayanthi Natarajan, who was perceived as being a 'roadblock' to growth, though going by statistics during her tenure most of the green clearances sought were granted—at times even overruling the decisions of regulatory bodies for forests and wildlife—and others were cleared, even with blatant violations of mandatory norms. What followed after was worse, with the government handing over the additional charge of environment to a minister with the oil portfolio.

No surprises then that like the BJP, it is also using as an election plank, a business-friendly governance structure, which clearly mentions that the party intends to streamline the regulatory structures and create an investment friendly environment. The idea of developing a single window clearance mechanism for all investors also is much in line with what BJP promises. Wildlife and, forests find little mention, save for a promise to protect India's unique biodiversity.

The most welcoming thing one finds in the AAP manifesto is that they have clubbed economy and ecology together calling for “a dynamic, equitable and ecologically sustainable economy”—even though it is weak on how this is to be achieved. At least it acknowledges that environment and economic growth are not two separate creatures. There can be no 'economy' without the ecology. Even the World Bank estimates that environmental degradation is costing India around 5.7 per cent of its GDP annually, thereby negating India's 'growth'. What is also appreciable is that it is the only party to have included animal welfare in its manifesto, that too under the heading of social justice. The strengthening and enforcement of the Wildlife Protection Act and preventing the encroachment of protected forest land finds mention here.

One would only like to reiterate here, that none of the parties, including the AAP show a road map how the objectives will be achieved.

AAP's agenda calls for a mechanism for decentralised

governance structure and decision making on all resource allocations—from mining to exploitation of forest resources, to harnessing potential of renewable energy. It stresses on the role of *gram sabhas* and/or *mohalla sabhas* in decision making at their respective levels and their integration in the overall governance process. The manifesto specifies “reforming the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and its agencies so that they can empower and help *Gram Sabhas* to be effective custodians and managers of their local natural resources.”

I am as wary and critical of environmental governance (or the lack of it) and the worrying perception of MoEF's role as a 'clearance facilitator' instead of that of an environment protector, but I would be cautious of handing over management and control of natural resources to the *gram sabhas*, particularly given that demands on natural resources, including minor forest produce, has increased exponentially. The market for natural resources—including minor forest produce—particularly from crucial wildlife habitats cannot be governed by a laissez faire system and must have strong checks and controls.

Another worry is the Congress plank of including bamboo as a minor forest produce. This move was strongly opposed by senior officials in the MoEF and conservationists, who reasoned that, “transfer of ownership of standing bamboo from the State to the *gram sabha* would be like handing over ownership of trees or timber in the forest. Bamboo looks like exaggerated grass, but is a timber and construction material that can compete with metal in terms of tensile strength and durability. It, therefore, has a sustained market demand and is very susceptible to non-sustainable harvest due to the lure of market forces, particularly for its use in building and construction, and for papers. The effects of wildlife on such removal of bamboo will be disastrous: Bamboo clumps provide good cover for a variety of wildlife—ground birds, small mammals, reptiles and tigers. It is also a principal source of fodder for elephants and some ungulates. In many parts across India where primary forests have been destroyed, secondary growth of bamboo provides the majority, sometimes the only, green cover. Unregulated and large scale extraction of bamboo will further escalate human-elephant conflict.”

We certainly need a more democratic model of governance, work with local communities and ensure that they are the first beneficiaries of conservation and of natural resources. *Gram sabhas* and local

communities must play a decisive role when their lands and natural resources are being acquired, or in projects that impacts their livelihoods. Equally, important wildlife habitats and Protected Areas must be inviolate—and here, protection and conservation of wildlife with an iron fist must take priority.

Prerna Singh Bindra

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FOREST CLEARANCES

Jayanthi out, Moily is forest minister

In what the press termed as a 'bizarre turn of events', Jayanthi Natarajan resigned as Union Minister of State of Environment and Forests (Independent Charge), and was replaced by Veerappa Moily, the Union Oil and Petroleum Minister. He holds Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) as an additional charge.

This move was met with severe criticism, the main issue being 'conflict of interest', since projects from the Ministry of Oil & Petroleum come to the MoEF for environment clearances. It was also strongly felt that the MoEF needs a dedicated minister, and that it was being short charged.

Reports asserted that Natarajan hadn't 'resigned for party work' as claimed—she was not given any important party assignment there after—but was removed from her post because she held up clearances of projects. According to *The Indian Express*: “Prime Minister Manmohan Singh cracked the whip, ensuring the resignation of Jayanthi Natarajan on 21st December 2013. The PM was learnt to have summoned Natarajan the day before and asked her to put in her papers, although it was projected as her decision. Sources said the Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi was instrumental in Natarajan's ouster and that several batches of industrialists had met him in recent times and singled out the environment ministry for having vitiated the investment climate through “arbitrary objections”, creating “bottle-necks” and “rent-seeking”. The day before Natarajan's ouster, at a FICCI meet Rahul Gandhi admitted to India Inc that green clearances were a problem. “Many of you expressed your frustrations with environmental clearances, that they are delaying projects unduly,” he said, adding that “industry cannot suffer.”

What does it say of a government where environment ministers are eased off, apparently for doing their job? Jayanthi Natarajan's predecessor, Jairam Ramesh was dubbed as 'Mr Green', and Natarajan is reported to have created a hostile environment—for industry. Both, or rather the MoEF, which they represented, were viewed as hurdles, and as pointed out by a leading national daily, the “PMO responded, removing Jayanthi roadblock”, though of course, official statements stated differently.

But were they roadblocks to India's growth story? Facts speak otherwise.

Since 2004, reports a leading national daily, the government has given clearances for the diversion of no less than six lakh hectares (ha) of forests (over a third for mining), while the diversion of only 14,000 ha was rejected. The rate of clearances granted has accelerated by the year. An analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment revealed that last year, till April 2013, the MoEF's rate of granting clearances for forest land diversion increased by 42 per cent, while that of rejecting projects nosedived to a mere 3.5 per cent. In the first three months of the same, the MoEF's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) allowed the diversion of about 15,000 ha of forest land, just a little less than the total forest land diverted in 2012.

Many such clearances not only sidestep environment, forest and wildlife concerns, but also regulatory and mandatory procedures. Not just accelerated clearances but rules that safeguarded forests and upheld coastal regulations were diluted, wildlife concerns thwarted as in the case of opening up Saranda—a prime elephant habitat—for mining.

Contrary to the myth that the coal shortage has been triggered by 'green hurdles', clearances given exceed targets in all key sectors viz. power, coal, steel, cement, etc. For example, the MoEF granted environmental clearances to 181 coal mines with a combined capacity of 583 million tonnes per annum, and forest clearances to 113 mines giving away 26,000 ha of forest land for the 11th Plan period till April 2011. This is expected to double capacity. Between 2006 and August 2011, 2,10,000 MW of thermal power capacity were cleared. That's 60,000 MW or 40 per cent in excess of what has been proposed till 2017, but only 32,394 MW of the power capacity was actually built in the past five years. Our capacity in energy and coal lies under or unutilized—yet there continues to be a clamour to seek new clearances—with an eye perhaps on the control of

valuable natural resources like minerals, land and water.

The pattern of green clearances in the past one decade indicates that the problem is not with ministers or the ministry—it is the environment that is being undermined, not the industry. Those playing the green card again and again have a problem with environmental laws and associated governance structure. Demands for making the environment ministry 'business-friendly' actually mean that make it a rubber-stamp.

Oil and Environment don't mix

In an interview to *Mint*, the newly appointed minister, Veerappa Moily, said that his top priority in the ministry is to make sure the clearance process runs smoothly. “We are loaded with more rules and laws than is necessary; let us try to simplify things. Why should rules and regulations be difficult? You should not create barriers,” he said. He, however, cautioned that environment and forests have to be protected. “Whatever policy decision we take, or to execute any decision, we'll have to take care that environment and forests are not compromised. Life will be possible on this planet provided we are able to balance. But there is space for everybody—there is space for forests to be sustained, for wildlife to live in, and for human beings. Many times, there will be conflict between them and we need to get over that conflict by not encroaching on each other,” he said.

Though the statement appears fuzzy, the intent of the MoEF was clear in the subsequent days as green regulations were ignored while granting clearances. In what was perceived to be a bid to make the ruling United Progressive Alliance government appear investor-friendly, Moily gave green clearance to 73 projects, within 20 days of assuming office, ignoring forests, wildlife—and even community forest rights. One of the first decisions was the dilution of rules governing mining. It did away with the requirement of holding a public hearing for getting environmental clearance to expand the existing mines by up to 25 per cent of original capacity. Earlier, the ministry had said that public hearings and Environmental Impact Assessments would not be mandatory for brick earth and river sand mining projects of a certain size.

Impact on tiger & wildlife habitats

Several project proposals which were taken off the list for forest clearance as they fell within wildlife zones or

were awaiting comprehensive assessment were also considered afresh by the Forest Advisory Committee of the MoEF in January.

The proposals in Singrauli (Madhya Pradesh) include exploration for coal in the tiger-rich forests of Dongri Taal, Patpahariya, Marki-Barka East and Marki-Barka West blocks that were earlier identified by the ministry as being part of a wildlife corridor. They are in close proximity to the Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve—in fact Dongri Taal is practically on the border of the reserve. The blocks were earlier earmarked by the Ministry as falling within areas with tigers. Even a 'refined' study by the NTCA concluded that two of these were important for tiger conservation. The NTCA noted that they fell within the zone that should be declared an ecologically sensitive area.

The MoEF also allowed for the expansion of a coal benefaction plan in Orissa by two million tonnes annually and in the FAC meeting in January, stage I clearance was given to SAIL for diversion of about 636 hectares (ha) of forest land in Saranda, the heart of the Singhbhum Elephant Reserve in contravention to FAC's own directions in 2009, wherein it said that an integrated wildlife management plan is required by it for the approval of the expansion project. (see under “Jharkhand' for details).

The minister also staunchly supported the controversial Netravathi Diversion Project in the Western Ghats, which threatens the source of the Nethravathi river, and is expected to drown and fragment vast tracts of forests which host tigers, and other endangered, and endemic, wildlife.

PMO orchestrates dilution of regulations

In a series of orders and missives sent to the MoEF over 2012-2013, the PMO instructed that regulations and norms protecting environment and forests had to be diluted or done away with. A report in *The Hindu* stated that some of these changes were ordered on the direct instructions of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and required time-bound compliance by the Ministry. To ensure dilutions, the PMO directed that a committee be set up with a pre-meditated outcome of rolling back the specific regulations. The orders were sent by Pulok Chatterjee, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, and other officials. Most of these were followed up and complied with, though some were opposed in parts for various reasons.

The PMO recommended that the requirement of

environmental clearance for projects worth up to Rs 500 crore be done away with entirely. Projects worth up to Rs 1,000 crore should be evaluated only at state level and should not come to the Union government for clearance. Clearances at the state level are usually perceived to be a push over. The PMO also asked that all buildings, real estate projects and Special Economic Zones be taken out of the purview of environmental clearance. These are expected to have impacts on wildlife habitats as only those projects which need environment impacts in ecologically sensitive zones near Protected Areas mandate wildlife clearances. If environment clearances are dispensed with, it will have a trigger effect of diluting wildlife regulations.

On forest clearances, the PMO asked that projects requiring up to 40 hectares of forests, instead of the then existing limit of four hectares, be handled by regional offices of the Ministry—regional officers are again, seen to be 'easy'.

Easing of norms for the SEZs was done as desired by the PMO. Through an office memorandum the Environment Ministry ordered that public hearings for individual projects within the SEZs be done away with. A committee was set up to look at various issues the PMO had raised and it delivered the results as demanded, leading the Ministry to dilute the norms.

Western Ghats betrayed

The protection of the Western Ghats received a major blow with the environment minister Moily bowing to pressure from the Kerala government and acceding to reduce the state's area under Ecologically Sensitive Zone. The MoEF had earlier accepted the recommendations of the high-level Kasturirangan committee to declare over one-third of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive to protect the region from mining and other industrial projects. But it modified its decision just a day before the general election dates were announced and the model code of conduct came into force. On 4th March, the government announced that more than 3,100 sq km of “agriculture land, plantations and habitations” in Kerala will be omitted from the ESZ notification. The centre also dithered on implementing the Kasturirangan committee, seeking to dilute this report, and insiders say, “it has been as good as dumped”.

The Kasturirangan committee was appointed after the Madhav Gadgil panel—appointed during the tenure of Jairam Ramesh in 2011—was scuttled. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) was

appointed to draw up a roadmap for preserving the biodiversity of this global biodiversity hotspot. The Gadgil report sought to identify the entire Western Ghats as an ESZ, creating three categories of protection regimes, defining activities that would be allowed in each based on the level of ecological richness and land use. Fearing a backlash from the industry, and states, the MoEF sat on the report for months, refusing to release it even for public discussion. It was only under court orders that the document became public. Reportedly under pressure from states for the restrictions imposed by the Gadgil report on exploitative and intrusive developmental activity, particularly mining and industrial activity, the Ministry appointed a new panel, headed by K Kasturirangan which submitted its report in 2013. The MoEF's decision to accept the Kasturirangan report was met with protests in the states where people feared that their rights and livelihood will be affected by the ESZ notification despite the ministry clarifying that the ESZ notification will not affect land ownership rights of people and agriculture, horticulture and plantation practices will continue.

Immediately after taking charge of the environment ministry Moily made it clear the concerns of the state governments related to ESZs would be addressed before the report was implemented. According to the *Business Standard*, Environment Secretary V Rajagopalan said that "When we take a final call on the report, the concerns of these states would be addressed and accommodated".

The Western Ghats, extending from Gujarat to Tamil Nadu along India's western coast cover an area of over 1,64,000 sq km and have been identified as one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots. The mountain range has also received the UNESCO World Heritage Site tag last year.

Former MEF opposes clearance blitz

Even as the government railroaded environment regulations to facilitate clearances, there was opposition within, by the former MEF and current Rural Development minister Jairam Ramesh (though perceived as a 'green' crusader, he had an almost equally high rate of clearances). In an interview to *Frontline*, Ramesh trashed the argument of green regulations holding up India's growth rates, "I do not buy this argument that delayed environmental clearances of mega projects are responsible for the economic slowdown. This is not to say that projects should not be cleared within the stipulated time frame

provided for in the clearance procedures. I don't think that we should get into a mad scramble to clear projects and give a go-by to the Environment (Protection) Act and the Forest (Conservation) Act. If a government finds these laws obstructionist, then it should just say 'Sorry. We are declaring a law holiday as far as these two laws are concerned and for the next ten years, we are going to have click-free clearances." But we have them on the statute books. We passed these laws with a noble intent and we should not be bypassing them. By all means, let us be business-like; by all means, let us root out all rent-seeking in environmental regulation." He added that, "the Forest Ministry and the Environment Ministry could not be expected to take a gross domestic product-centric view. They necessarily have to take an ecology-centred or biodiversity-centred view."

Apex court asks for regulator

The Supreme Court on 6th January directed the government to appoint a national regulator to take up comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of projects.

Brushing aside the Centre's opposition to a national regulator, a bench of Justice AK Patnaik, Justice SS Nijjar and Justice FMI Kalifulla said such a regulator was the need of the hour as the present mechanism "is deficient in many respects". This would bring an end to rapid EIAs, conducted earlier by the MoEF for important projects. "What is required is a regulator at the national level having its offices in all the states which can carry out an independent, objective and transparent appraisal and approval of projects for environmental clearances and which can also monitor the implementation of the conditions laid down in environmental clearances," the bench said.

Asking the regulator not to encroach into the Centre's powers under the Environment (Protection) Act, the bench said while exercising powers under the EPA, the national regulator would "ensure that the National Forest Policy, 1988 is duly implemented". It asked the government to set up the national regulator with head office at Delhi and branches in as many states as possible by 31st March.

While the new authority may appear to enjoy autonomy from extraneous pressures, the concern that such a body may function outside the public sphere of influence and, therefore, be less democratic with decisions being taken by a few selected unaccountable experts also appears genuine. Surely, in

its search for procedural efficiency, the court should not be missing substantive justice.

Source: "PMO pushes for dilution of environmental clearance norms", Nitin Sethi, *TNN*, 11, January 2013; "PMO pulled out all stops to weaken eco, forest norms", Nitin Sethi, *The Hindu*, 27, February 2014; "Playing the green card", Dinesh C Sharma, *Mail Today*, New Delhi, December 25, 2013; "Projects falling within wildlife zones back in reckoning", Nitin Sethi, *The Hindu*, 4, January 2014; "Moily clears projects worth Rs 1 lakh crore within 20 days", Shine Jacob, *Business Standard*, 11, January 2014; "In 20 days, I cleared over 70 projects", Sujay Mehdudia, *The Hindu*, 12, January 2014; "Jairam Ramesh: I don't subscribe to the mad scramble to clear projects", TK Rajalakshmi, *Frontline*; "License to plunder", Sagnik Dutta, *Frontline*, 21, February 2014; "Supreme Court wants regulator for environmental clearances of projects", Dhananjay Mahapatra, *TNN*, 7, January 2014; "Moily set to red flag green report on Western Ghats", Shine Jacob, *Business Standard*, January 3, 2014; "Western Ghats: lessons in protection", Sunita Narain, *Down to Earth*, 31, March 2014; "Western Ghats: Moily agrees to reduce area of eco-sensitive zone in Kerala", Kumar Sambhav S, *Down to Earth*, 5, March 2014; "Western Ghats: lessons in protection", Sunita Narain, *Down to Earth*, 31, March 2014, "It's all about control over land and water", Prerna Singh Bindra, *The Hindustan Times*, December 25, 2013.

FOREST RIGHTS ACT

FRA implementation: CAG probe demanded

Seeking transparency, Wildlife First, an NGO working for wildlife conservation has filed an application in the Supreme Court demanding a committee of independent experts or the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India to examine implementation of the impugned Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

Many cases have come to the fore where FRA has been misused for land grabbing. One such example is of Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary in Jalgaon, which is under siege under the garb of FRA. Wildlife First along with Nature Conservation Society, Amravati and Tiger Research and Conservation Trust had filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court on the Forest Rights Act in 2008. Even as this petition was pending, the implementation of the FRA had resulted in a huge number of ineligible claims being approved across the country. One of the petitioners, Wildlife First, moved an interlocutory application on 10th February 2014 in the writ petition and sought to know the procedure adopted for identification of genuine claims and grant of forest rights in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and a report to the court in two months.

Wildlife First has pleaded that the SC issue directions to the states to give a report on the extent of forest land that has been physically occupied by ineligible claimants after the cut off date of 13th December 2005 or whose claims have been rejected under the provisions of the impugned FRA, and the extent of

forest land that has been recovered from such ineligible claimants or encroachers.

The petitioners also want voluntary resettlement of people residing within national parks and sanctuaries where people were willing to move out without insisting on settling their rights therein under the impugned Act and have pleaded the Court to direct the Centre to issue directions to all states for mandatory use of satellite imagery for verification of all the claims as a proof of actual occupation of the forest lands as on cut-off date of 13th December 2005 before granting any new rights.

They have also sought a stay on commercial extraction of all non-timber forest produce (NTFP) from national parks and sanctuaries in view of the prohibition provided in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and by the court on 14th February 2000 till the disposal of the present petition.

Stung by the NGOs' petition, Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD)—a platform of forest dwellers' organisations along with some members of Greenpeace, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Nature Conservation Foundation, ATREE etc—have written to the NGOs expressing dismay. They have said that while people are fighting to protect forests and natural resources across the country, the NGOs want the FRA struck down. The pro-FRA body has urged the NGOs to withdraw their petition.

Wildlife First strongly refuted the claims of CSD and others that they were facilitating the loot of the country's forest resources by the corrupt forest bureaucracy and corporates. Stoutly countering the serious accusation of not opposing illegal diversion of forest land for development projects, Wildlife First has said that they have been battling against commercial interests destroying wildlife habitats, and in some cases gravely affecting the interests and livelihoods of local communities as well. To give an example, they filed an Interlocutory Application (IA) in the Supreme Court which led to the closure of iron ore mining inside the Kudremukh National Park by a large public sector company. The stoppage not only ensured protection of the park but also saved the Bhadra river, on which thousands of marginal farmers are dependent for their livelihood.

Wildlife conservationists have flayed mudslinging by CSD for demand of CAG or independent probe into FRA implementation.

Debi Goenka, executive trustee, Conservation Action Trust (CAT), said CSD's contention that several

committees have been appointed to look into the implementation of FRA is no reason why the Supreme Court could not be asked to probe. “Why is CSD afraid of an audit under the SC?” he asked. Goenka said it seems apparent that the number of encroachments in forest areas is steadily increasing. This is happening mainly because people are being misguided and encouraged to break the law knowing well that encroachers who have filed a claim cannot be removed from the forests until the claims are finally decided.

Rajendra Nannaware, convener of Satpuda Bachao Kriti Samiti, Jalgaon, said it is evident that even protected areas like Yawal sanctuary in the district have not been spared. Though the cut-off date for regularising encroachments was 13th December 2005, more and more claims are being filed even today as there is no cut-off date for filing claims.

TigerLink has earlier reported on the impacts of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, on tiger and other wildlife habitats. Two tiger habitats that suffered immense damage are Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh, and Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh. In Katarniaghat (part of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve) villagers demanded blanket regularisation even of encroachments. In Kawal (a proposed tiger reserve) thousands of trees were axed and over 600 acres of prime forest ploughed within the sanctuary the day FRA came into force. Reports coming in across the country indicate that under the guise of giving recognition to forest dwellers, large scale intrusions and encroachments into forests are taking place, encouraged by business interests. Forest land is reportedly being doled out for political gains and votes, and also miners and real estate agents are grabbing land under the guise of the law. In the face of this, genuine community interests are being ignored and sacrificed in a rush to grab forest land under the guise of the FRA. It is reported that *gram sabhas*—the competent authority to authenticate the right holders—are blindly recommending cases. According to some estimates, to date over 15 lakh hectares has been distributed under the FRA. It may be remembered that when this Act was promulgated, it was assured that only about two per cent of the existing forest land would be required and diverted for this purpose; however about five per cent of forest land has already been doled out—and the process is still on. States most impacted include Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Tripura.

In fact, in 2011, the then Director General of Forests and Special Secretary had circulated a note expressing his concern over the large scale illegal encroachments under the guise of the FRA, and had emphasised the need to undertake a review of all titles that have been granted under the FRA so that fresh encroachments by ineligible persons do not take place.

It was pointed out that illegal or irregular grant of occupancy to ineligible candidates will attract the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act.

We encapsulate below some reported cases of land diversions and encroachments. We also highlight a case in Karnataka where tribal families have renounced their “Forest Rights” to avail the beneficiaries of voluntary relocation.

Andhra Pradesh

Kawal Tiger Reserve in Adilabad district has lost no less than 27 sq km of dense forest area between 2000 and 2010 due to cutting of trees and encroachments. In the Jannaram Forest Division, in which Kawal is situated, another 17 sq km of forest has been lost in the same period. In Kagaznagar Division, where a male tiger was electrocuted in 2012, 384 acres of tiger habitat has been lost to encroachments in the last one year. One of the richest teak and bamboo forests in the country, this is prime habitat for tigers that roam the contiguous terrain connecting the forests of Chandrapur with Gadchiroli in neighbouring Maharashtra, and is under tremendous pressure due to human encroachments, illegal wood felling, and rapid deforestation. The 'Andhra Pradesh State of Forests-2011' survey revealed that since 1988, the Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary has lost 63 sq km of prime forest.

Gujarat

A high-level Gujarat government document says that “a large number of claims” for land made by the state's tribals under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, have been found to be “not genuine”. This became clear after the tribals' land title claims were verified with the “use of four-layered superimposed digitised maps and satellite imagery along with GPS-based personal digital assistant (PDA) maps”. The “Tribal Sub-Plan: Annual Development Programme 2012-13”, brought out by the tribal development department, underlines that had the government not used the “accurate and transparent method of verification through geo-informatics technology, 90 per cent of additional land through false claims could have been unjustly rewarded.” Terming the use of the technology for

verifying tribals' claims as a “ground truthing exercise”, it suggests, only 10 per cent of claims were “genuine”.

According to the report, the government received 1.81 lakh “individual claims”, but state forest records indicated that, of these, “only 25,000 tribal families had been occupying forest land” in 2005, to be made rightful owners, as required by the FRA.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, the area diverted for development projects since 2005 (when FRA came into force) is about 7,000 hectares. As against this, forests diverted under FRA form about four lakh hectares. Illegal encroachments on forest land in the state have also been rising consistently from 2005-06, and this reflects in the encroachment cases recorded by the forest department, which increased from 41,489 in 2005-06 to 1.24 lakh in 2011-12.

Around 72,463 hectares of forest land in the state has been encroached upon causing forest fragmentation and escalating human-wildlife conflict. Worryingly, encroachments are also on the increase in important wildlife reserves such as the wildlife circles of Nagpur, Nasik, Mumbai and the Melghat tiger reserve.

According to reports from the forest department, encroachments on forest land have increased exponentially in all forests, including wildlife corridors, after the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006. “People who use a forest land for over three generations for agriculture activities and also dwell there have been provided the right to continue with their occupation on such land. Hoping to stake claim on this land, they continue to encroach on it. The forest department at times cannot do anything in such cases when the rights settlement committee is in the process of settling claims of a community over a patch of forest land,” said the official.

He added that the forest department undertakes regular checks and removes encroachments from forest areas routinely using its rights under the Maharashtra Land Revenue Code.

Voluntary Relocation Over Forest Rights

On 17th January 2014, Padmaiah Malekudiya, whose family had been living on about two acres of encroached forestland in the Bijnale enclosure, Mala Village of Karkala Taluk, Kudremukh, chose to renounce the rights he had acquired under the Forests Rights Act, 2006, in favour of a fresh start and a better

life outside, thanks to fair and just compensation from the government.

Through a landmark order dated 9th January 2014, the Deputy Commissioner of Udupi, MT Reju provided a compensation of Rs 29.3 lakh for Padmaiah's farm deep in the forest, which will now become a part of Kudremukh National Park. “I am happy to move out. These benefits far outweigh my Forest Rights”, Padmaiah told Niren Jain of the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation. In seeking resettlement, Padmaiah and his family exercised their constitutionally guaranteed freedom to move to wherever they wanted, willingly relinquishing their Forest Rights in order to gain from the better opportunities outside, such as access to employment, transportation, education, and electricity and safety of their crops and livestock from depredations by wildlife. Padmaiah sought help for his relocation from Wildlife Conservation Society-India Program and Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, and received the government cash compensation based on a full valuation of his assets, including the encroached land, from Sunil Kumar (MLA, Karkala), in the presence of Ramesh Kumar (DCF, Kudremukh Wildlife Division) and Shivaram Acharya (RFO, Karkala Range).

It is hoped that Padmaiah's decision will act as a precedent for hundreds of other forest dwellers marooned inside wildlife reserves who are eager to relocate, but are being thwarted by the tangled process of settlement of Forest Rights.

“Treat FRA land as revenue land”

In a move that would spell doom for forests, the central government's ministry of tribal affairs (MOTA) has directed all the states to record rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2005 at par with Revenue Code.

In a letter written to state principal secretaries, SM Sahai, director with MoTA, has said, that as per the revenue code and law, village maps and village records should also indicate the community land classified into various categories. As per the Forest Rights Rules, 2007, on completion of the process of settlement of rights and issue of titles as specified in these rules, the revenue and forest departments are supposed to prepare a final map of the forest land. The authorities concerned are required to incorporate the rights so vested in the revenue and forest records, as the case may be, within the specified period of record updating under the relevant state laws or within a period of three months, whichever is earlier.

The MoTA has said that FRA requires conversion of all forest villages, old habitations, unsurveyed villages and other villages in forest whether recorded, notified or not, into revenue villages. The states have been asked to take necessary action for such conversion as per guidelines issued by it.

Such a move will be disastrous for wildlife as converting forest land into revenue land will lead to serious compromises in the implementation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and will bring in drastic changes in land use, open the gates for development of infrastructural and industrial projects in sensitive and biodiversity-rich habitats while encouraging land diversion and sale.

Source: '3 top NGOs for CAG probe into Forest Rights Act implementation', [Vijay Pinjarkar](#), *TNN*, Apr 15, 2014; 'Why are FRA activists afraid of audit, ask greens', [Vijay Pinjarkar](#), *TNN*, Apr 16, 2014; 'Maharashtra loses much of its forest cover to encroachments, Neha Madaan', *TNN*, June 17, 2013; 'Forest Rights Act a bane or boon?', [S Harpal Singh](#), *The Hindu*, Adilabad, 27, April 2013; 'Majority tribal claims over land false', [Rajiv Shah](#), *Gandhinagar*, 9, May 2012; 'Tribal Family Prefers Voluntary Relocation Over Forest Rights', *WCS-India Press Release (DATE)*; "Forest Rights Act lands will be treated as revenue lands", [Vijay Pinjarkar](#), *TNN*, 21, April 2014, *Wildlife First*

NEWS FROM THE STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Tigress disperses into Adilabad

Evidence of a dispersing tigress near the Kawal Tiger Reserve has upped hopes for the revival of the species in the struggling reserve. At the same time, it has raised concerns about the safety of dispersing large cats in human dominated landscapes in such areas. The tiger was detected in the Nilwai forest in Adilabad district in September 2013. Initially the animal's presence was denied by local forest staff (presumably, to evade responsibility for its safety) but indirect evidences gathered by the Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society (HyTiCoS) confirmed its presence. After further tracking, eight camera traps were deployed in the region and the tigress was captured in pictures twice in the months of October and November (2013). The tigress appeared to be a healthy young animal and her stripe patterns did not match with any tigers in the adjoining tiger habitats of Tadoba, Pench, Tipeshwar and Nagzira in Maharashtra. It is suspected that she could have originated from the proposed Kannergaon Wildlife Sanctuary, the forests of Gadchiroli or even the Indravati Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh.

The tigress was monitored continuously and was last seen on 15th February. There are unconfirmed reports of her having crossed over into Pranahitha and occupying the Allapalli forest near a village called Watra. Two cases of livestock depredation were reported from there.

The region where the tigress is moving is reported to suffer from heavy poaching of wildlife and concerns have been raised about the future of the tigress. "In addition to protection, we have deployed additional manpower and created awareness through wall posters in the villages in the area about the need for protecting the tiger and punishment for poaching," said B Prabhakar, Mancherial DFO.

Kawal Tiger Reserve represents the southern end of the Central Indian Tiger Landscape. Such wide dispersal of tigers away from their natal habitats has been possible here because of the excellent forest connectivity within this landscape. This is one of the key factors enabling quick tiger revival upon the provision of protection in areas where they have been locally extinct or have remained in stressed, low populations. The lack of protection in the connecting habitats is a major concern for dispersing tigers.

Source: "Stray tiger caught on wildlife camera in Adilabad", [S Harpal Singh](#), *The Hindu*, 8, November 2013; *Inputs by Imran Siddiqui, HyTiCoS; TigerLinkinputs*

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Tigers of Dibang Valley

In good news coming in from Arunachal Pradesh, camera traps captured the first ever image of an adult tiger from the Dibang Valley Wildlife Sanctuary on 2nd January in a survey conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India, in collaboration with the NTCA and the state forest department. Ten pugmarks were also observed and scat samples were collected from in and around the sanctuary. All of the 24 forest guards, local people etc who were informally interviewed confirmed the presence of tigers in the Dibang Valley and reported either having had a direct sighting or observed evidences or livestock depredation incidents by the tigers. Preliminary assessment of prey suggest that the sanctuary holds a good diversity and abundance of prey like takin, wild pig, goral, musk deer, barking deer, Himalayan serow and mithun which can sustain a good population of tigers.

The survey was prompted by the rescue of three tiger cubs (one died, and the other two are currently in the Itanagar zoo) in December 2012 from a dry well in

Angrim Valley in this region. This rescue coupled with the virtually unknown status of tigers and their prey in the Dibang Valley District led the NTCA to commission a rapid assessment survey by the WII.

The areas surveyed included the Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary and some other valleys outside the sanctuary viz Mathun, AngePani, Malinye, Ahi and Emra. The methodology included sign surveys, camera trapping, village surveys as well as vehicle surveys to assess status of tigers, prey and habitat.

A tiger was camera trapped at an altitude of 1,765 m at the CheloPani camp area. The highest elevation surveyed was about 2065 m in the AngePani trek where tiger scat had been found. Preliminary results suggest that the Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary holds a sizable population of tigers.

The 2008 and 2011 NTCA-WII All India Tiger Estimates concentrated only in the Pakke and Namdapha tiger reserves. The 2008 survey pointed out the need to document other source populations in Arunachal Pradesh as these represent historical entry points to the Indian subcontinent and would have high conservation and genetic value.

The Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary covers an area of 4,149 sq km and is part of the Eastern Himalayan Biodiversity hotspot. It hosts a variety of fauna which, besides the tiger, includes snow leopard, clouded leopard, red panda, takin, serow, sun bear, black bear, tahr, and four species of primates among others.

The Idu Mishmi community appears to have long co-existed with tigers and they regard the tiger as their 'big brother'. The tigers in Dibang do not seem to face any threat from locals.

However, a Primate Survey in Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary point out hunting as a primary threat to wildlife in this region as hunting is culturally ingrained amongst many tribals in Arunachal Pradesh. This is particularly true of herbivores and other prey species. While hunting has traditionally been of the subsistence type, it is now turning commercial in nature. Reports indicate hunting of red panda, bears, clouded leopards, takin etc.

The Dibang sanctuary also suffers from an acute staff shortage. Though notified as a sanctuary, little effort has gone into wildlife management and conservation.

Future collaborative efforts between NTCA, WII and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh for long term research and monitoring of tigers, co-predators, prey and their habitats in Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent landscapes need to be taken up on priority.

Source: 'A rapid field survey of tigers and prey in Dibangvalley district, Arunachal Pradesh, technical Report', [GV Gopi, Qamar Qureshi and YV Jhala](#) (2014), NTCA-WII-GoAP TR-2014/001; Additional information from 'Primate Survey in Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh & its Conservation Perspectives', [Dilip Chetry, Rekha Medhi, Aaranyak; TigerLinkinputs](#)

ASSAM

Kaziranga highway to be elevated

The Government of Assam has proposed to build an elevated road over National Highway 37 (NH-37) that borders Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, separating it from the adjoining Karbi Anglong Hills. The highway has been a major concern for the reserve as heavy traffic on it prevents wild animals from having safe passage to the Karbi Anglong Hills outside the PA. This is especially so during the monsoons when Kaziranga—low lying as it is in the Bramhaputra valley—gets inundated with water and most mammals try and flee to the hills. These animals have no choice but to cross the busy highway and are extremely vulnerable due to the speeding vehicles.

The proposal was made in response to an order issued by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in November 2013. A case filed by Right to Information Act (RTI) activist Rohit Choudhury in the NGT in August 2013 pointed out that NH-37 had become a dangerous passage for animals crossing over from Kaziranga to Karbi Anglong. In data obtained via RTI, the government stated that vehicular accidents on the highway caused more than 250 animal deaths between 2003 and 2013. These include two tiger, six leopard and at least 132 hog deer deaths.

Curbs on traffic

The NTCA constituted a committee in December last year to review the proposal submitted by the Assam government, suggesting measures for wildlife conservation with reference to NH 37. Based on the directions of the NGT the Assam government had submitted a proposal suggesting measures to minimise impact of the highway on wildlife movement in the area. The NTCA constituted a committee in December last year to review the proposal. Six corridors were identified by the committee, including four identified earlier by the Assam government, and were placed before the NGT. On 20th March, the NGT ordered that no traffic would be permitted on these six sections of NH 37 between 5am and 7am and 4pm to 7pm everyday.

The corridors include Kanchanjuri-Burapahar (4km), East Haldibari-Bagori (2.82km), Borjuri-Panbari

(4.40km), Burapahar-DeosurNala (2.5km), Amguri East (300 metres), Amguri West (1km) and a canopy for gibbon crossing near Kukrakata.

The state government said it would fix cameras on all the six sections to ensure that the vehicles passing through these stretches do not exceed the prescribed speed limit of 40kmph and further ensure that no overloaded vehicles are permitted to ply on the said road. The government will ensure counting of traffic volume by maintaining proper records as to how many vehicles pass through that sector every day.

Source: "Flyovers for Kaziranga rhinos" Arnab Pratim Dutta, *Down to Earth*, 15, March 2014; "Traffic curbs on animal corridors - No traffic permitted on six sections of NH-37", RoopakGoswami, *The Telegraph*, 20, March 2014, Guwahati.

Letting down Manas

The blatant neglect and slow of death of Manas is evident even from its spectacular heritage forest rest house at Mathanguri. It offers a stunning view of River Beki and the forests across the river, Bhutan's Royal Manas Park. From the rest house itself an array of wildlife can be seen—wild buffaloes that wallow in the river, great Indian hornbills flying across the Beki, the occasional capped langur, and elephants.

Marring this pristine forest—and the view—is the constant drone of JCBs, excavators, and dumpers hard at work to change the course of the Beki river and divert its water to River Manas which has dried up. Boulder and sand extraction continues from dawn to dusk—disturbing wildlife, and in blatant violation of the Wildlife Protection Act. Shockingly, according to reports the work has been ongoing since the past four years. The Manas River has dried up since 2004, by some reports this could be because of hydel projects upstream. Reportedly, these are efforts to try and 'revive' the Manas so as to provide water to the villages downstream, and also an attempt to prevent Beki from changing its course as it pushes towards, and threatens to sweep away the Mathanguri Rest House.

Poaching

Seven rhinos have been poached in the park (there are currently 31 rhinos in Manas) in the last three years. Five were killed in 2013—the last on 31st December, when a female rhino was slaughtered in the Bansbari range of the park. She had been translocated from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 programme.

According to a park official, "at least 10 rounds of bullets were fired from the poachers' side." However, though they fired back, the poachers managed to

escape. In fact, virtually all rhinos in Manas are translocated, part of the state's ambitious Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) 2020, which was launched in 2008 to repopulate Manas with one-horned rhinos as the species was practically wiped out from the park by poachers during the height of Bodo insurgency in the 1990s. Under the project, rhinos from Kaziranga National Park and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary were translocated to Manas.

A tiger poaching case too has surfaced. On 20th September, the Forest Protection and Surveillance Unit, Bhutan, arrested three Indian nationals at Gelephu (Bhutan) with a tiger skin and bones. Photographs of the skin were sought by NTCA and they matched with camera-trapped images of a tiger that had been frequently observed along the Indo-Bhutanese border in Manas. The tiger was first photo-captured in Bhutan on 18th November 2010 and last at Bansbari range of Manas National Park in India on 27th November 2012.

Unfortunately, it is learnt that the offenders penalised under Bhutan's Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 1995 and Rules, 2006, have been let off lightly.

One key reason for the breakdown of protection is the staff situation in Manas. There is an acute shortage of staff and the existing staff is demotivated and demoralised with the lack of basic facilities and the return of insurgency. Currently, the Panbari range, part of the core critical habitat is out of the purview of the forest staff due to the presence of insurgents. There have been recent reports of a schoolteacher killed, plus the kidnaping of para military personnel from this range. Given the increasing challenges, there is a need to review the sanctioned staff strength. The tiger reserve also does not have an officer of the ACF level, which is crucial to provide leadership to the frontline staff.

Manas Tiger Reserve is contiguous with Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park, and in view of the recent poaching incidents it is important to have a better working relationship between both countries in terms of joint patrolling exercises, sharing information, etc. The Indo-Bhutan bilateral pact, which is languishing at the Centre since over a year, needs to be pushed through at the earliest.

Consolidating tiger habitat

Encroachment, especially in the Bhuyanpara range in the core/critical tiger habitat of Manas, has doubled to eight square km from four last year. Large grasslands have been converted to woodland especially in Panbari and Bansbari ranges. Such conversion of

grassland needs to be halted as this ecosystem is vital for rhinos as well as to support habitat specialist species like hispid hare, pygmy hog, Bengal florican, wild buffalo, etc. Carnivores like tigers are highly dependent on the grasslands too as these support their prey base.

The Ripu Chirang Sanctaury has been proposed and in fact declared by the BTC, who have forwarded the same for notification to the Chief Wildlife Warden, and awaits notification. This is a crucial tiger area, and will provide further buffer to Manas. The Wildlife Institute of India first proposed the area for inclusion in a sanctuary in 1988. It is also being degraded and encroached upon, so early action is vital.

Similarly, the extension of the Manas National Park (core area) as proposed by UNESCO World Heritage Site is pending at the state level since October last year. No right of any kind is conceded and there is no human habitation inside the proposed area of about 350 sq km.

Dual Management

Manas also has other administrative issues. Its buffer does not fall under the purview of the field director, it is critical that both core and buffer come under the field director's jurisdiction, and that DFOs/Deputy Directors have clearly demarcated responsibilities of core and buffer. A large part of Manas is also managed by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), which again adds to the ambiguity and complexity of managing the park. This gets further complicated as the entire area of Manas Tiger Reserve falls under the BTC, though 'wildlife' continues to be the jurisdiction of the Chief Wildlife Warden, who is responsible for implementing the Wildlife Protection Act. The BTC has taken various proactive measures to protect the park, and constant engagement with them is critical for their continued support. Under BTC, members of several community based organisations, patrol the park but they need to be further supported and strengthened.

Manas, one of the 'original' tiger reserves of 1973, has had a glorious history, having enjoyed good management and protection under exemplary leadership. In 1985 it was declared a World Heritage Site. Its downslide began soon after with armed insurgency, poaching, smuggling and political unrest. Forest *chowkis* were burnt, foresters were killed, and department elephants shot. All the park's rhinos were wiped out, elephants, tigers and other wildlife slaughtered ruthlessly. Reports indicate that illegal wildlife trade and timber smuggling helped finance

the movement.

Given the situation, in 1992 Manas was listed as a 'World Heritage Site in Danger'.

Manas overcame this terrible ordeal, recovering through tremendous efforts by the state, park management, staff, local communities and assisted by the Centre and NGOs. It was removed from the 'Danger' list after 19 years.

Manas again stands at the crossroads today. Its World Heritage Site status is up for review in June 2014 and stands the risk of being withdrawn. Conservationist Bibhab Talukdar who is the chairperson of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group, says that Manas has been ignored by politicians. "Manas has been witnessing many challenges like Kaziranga, but for conservation and protection purposes, Kaziranga always gets more priority and support. After the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council, Manas seems to be hanging between the two power centres — the state and the council. Both lack the strong willingness to assist each other to promote Manas," he told *The Telegraph*.

Manas is one of our finest tiger reserves and hosts a number of other critically endangered creatures including the Bengal florican, pygmy hog, golden langur, rhinos... and yet, Manas languishes, lacking the support and focus of an apathetic state which has failed to give this tiger reserve protection and priority.

Perna Bindra, with inputs from "Manas: A conservation road less travelled", Roopak Goswami, *The Telegraph*, 21, April 2014

BIHAR

Tigers thrive in Valmiki

The Phase IV intensive annual tiger monitoring using photographic capture-recapture camera trapping technology has good news from Valmiki Tiger Reserve. Once plagued by low tiger density, the reserve now has a healthy population of 22 known tigers.

This has been hailed as a marked improvement since previous years and better protection and management in future years is expected to improve this figure even more as the reserve lies in the Terai grasslands of the Himalayan foothills, considered amongst the richest tiger habitats, with maximum potential for sustaining high prey, and hence, tiger densities.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar expressed his happiness at the increasing numbers and added that the Government of Bihar will continue to support conservation programs in the state.

Source: "22 Tigers Reported From the Valmiki Tiger Reserve", WWF India, 8 February, 2014

CHHATTISGARH

First ever tiger captured on camera

For the first time, a tiger has been camera trapped in the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in March this year. This is a heartening development as very little field information is available in government records regarding the current status of wildlife in the Udanti-Sitanadi-Sunabeda landscape straddling the Orissa-Chhattisgarh border. Poor relations between the forest departments and communities of both states, and intense leftwing extremism have created a situation where field presence of forest staff is minimal and therefore little, if any, wildlife monitoring is carried out. The Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve was notified in 2009 while the adjoining Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary in Orissa remains a 'proposed' tiger reserve that is yet to be notified by the Orissa government. The region is a vital tiger habitat that is part of the tiger-rich Central Indian Tiger Landscape and sustains one of the last surviving populations of central Indian wild buffalo. It is also the former range of the hard ground barasingha that is now confined only to the Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. Udanti-Sitanadi is believed to be a tiger habitat with very poor tiger density. In fact, the existence of tigers in this reserve has even been questioned.

Field reports suggest that an exaggeratedly pessimistic notion may have arisen due to poor field presence of forest staff, leading to lack of information. However, information obtained from local villagers seems to suggest that tigers are sighted fairly regularly in this region and the presence of tigresses with cubs is also noted. Areas such as the Sunabeda plateau remain virtually inviolate due to intensely difficult terrain and therefore enjoy relative natural safety from heavy exploitation and poaching. For eight months in a year, i.e., throughout the punishing summer and heavy monsoons, most of the habitat except the lower foothills and forests near settlements remain impregnable even to locals. These factors have combined to keep the Udanti-Sitanadi-Sunabeda landscape relatively safe for tigers.

However, threats remain extremely high. Prey base poaching is routine, while cases of tiger poaching also appear to be not infrequent whenever (presumably) dispersing tigers appear in the lower, more accessible areas close to villages. Human-tiger conflict is also high in this region due to livestock depredation by

tigers and retaliatory poisoning of tigers cannot be ruled out. Few, if any, livestock kills are reported to the forest department and are hence unrecorded.

The government of Chhattisgarh and Orissa along with the NTCA need to work together in putting in place basic control and monitoring mechanisms by government machinery. Lessons on forest staff functioning in leftwing extremism affected areas can be adapted and emulated from areas such as Palamu Tiger Reserve, Jharkhand, where the park management continues to function despite heavy extremist activity.

Aditya Chandra Panda; inputs from *Dainik Bhaskar*, 17, April 2014, Raipur

JHARKHAND

Saranda betrayed... Again

In its meeting held in January, the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) gave Stage I clearance to Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) for diversion of about 636 hectares (ha) of forest land in Saranda—the heart of the Singhbhum Elephant Reserve—in contravention of its own directions issued in 2009 wherein it said that an Integrated Wildlife Management Plan (IWMP) is required by it for the approval of the expansion project.

Saranda is an important tiger habitat in the Chhotanagpur Plateau and is connected to two tiger reserves—Palamu in the north and Similipal to the south. In fact, tiger presence has been recorded within the SAIL mine at Gua, Saranda. This iron ore mine had been with SAIL since the 1940s. Its lease expired in 2009 and to renew the lease, forest clearance was sought from the MoEF. Along with the renewal, SAIL also told MoEF that it wanted to add another 275 ha to the existing mine lease. While the MoEF gave a temporary approval of one year to the 808 ha, it kept on hold the expansion and instead sought a Wildlife Management Plan (IWMP) from the steel behemoth.

In February 2011, Jairam Ramesh, then the Minister of Environment and Forests overturned the recommendation of his Forest Advisory Committee and gave SAIL the green signal for the Chiria iron ore mine in Saranda.

In 2012, the MoEF also allowed SAIL to begin expansion in 275 ha. The next year, SAIL told the MoEF that it wanted to expand more and add another 351 ha, taking the total expansion to 636 ha. In 2013, the FAC also recommended two proposals by Jindal group of companies, JSW Steel and Jindal Power and Steel, thus

allowing for clearing over 1,500 ha of forest for mining in Saranda.

Though in his tenure, Ramesh had dealt the first blow to Saranda, now as Rural Development minister, he opposed giving fresh mining leases particularly to private miners, and called the step to give more mines in Saranda "a huge setback and very retrograde".

Then in its 17th January meeting this year, the FAC cleared SAIL's original lease and the 636 ha of expansion for the coming 20 years even without the IWMP. As the minutes show, the SAIL project was cleared because of pressure from the Cabinet Committee on Investments (CCI). The project is purported to bring investments worth Rs 4,700 crore into the region.

According to reports, the IWMP proposes creating wildlife conservation zones in Saranda, and thereby puts a curb on mining. This has made the state government jittery. The final IWMP has also been diluted to allow for mining interests.

The initial draft, constituted by an expert committee, recommended declaring the undisturbed forest patches of Saranda—about 61,000 ha—as inviolate zone for wildlife conservation. The recommendation was approved by the Wildlife Institute of India, which suggested declaring the "virgin" Saranda forest as a Conservation Reserve under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. However, the proposed conservation reserve has been reduced to 53,800 ha in the final draft to allow further mining. The dilution will benefit mining biggies, including Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL), JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Essar Steel, Sesa Goa, Arcelor Mittal, Bhushan Steel and Electrosteel Ltd. "After discussions with the forest department it was observed that some areas under Saranda forest division have been further recommended by the state to the MoEF for grant of mining leases. Therefore, to avoid practical difficulty, it is proposed to exclude those areas from the proposal while declaring a conservation reserve," reads the final draft.

"If 7,200 ha of forest is deleted from the proposed conservation reserve, nothing will be left in Saranda for elephants. These forest compartments act as vital migratory corridors for elephants," says RK Singh, a conservationist. The Jharkhand government does not seem to be in a mood to approve even the diluted IWMP. "It is strategically delaying the plan so that all the proposed mining projects can obtain clearance from MoEF," says DS Srivastava, member of the State Board for Wildlife and Principal Investigator of the expert committee that prepared the IWMP.

The FAC is currently considering preliminary clearance to Arcelor-Mittal's mining project on 202 ha in Saranda. Predictably, the Arcelor-Mittal project has been kept out of the wildlife zone. *Down to Earth* reports that a list of applications of new mining leases sent by the district mining officer to the DFO, Saranda, in 2005 shows that the mining department had recommended leasing out another 45,000 ha of Saranda to 52 mining companies. If these proposals get through, almost two-thirds of Saranda would be under mining, with fatal consequences on wildlife.

In March, the MoEF put on hold all new proposals for forest diversion in Saranda, other than projects that are already before it, until the state government takes certain measures for sustainable mining practices and a comprehensive assessment of the impact of mining in the region. This was communicated in a letter dated 7th March, which also asked the state to submit details of the existing and proposed mines and commissioned a study on the water flow of rivers in Saranda. It, however, did not mention anything about the IWMP.

The ministry's next move would show whether it is buckling under pressure or adopting a different strategy for safeguarding Saranda's wildlife.

Source: "SAIL gets pristine forest to mine", Anupam Chakravarty, *Down to Earth*, 15, February 2014; "Saranda forest: new mining projects put on hold", Soundaram Ramanathan, *Down to Earth*, 2, April 2014; "Saranda for sale?", Kumar Sambhav S, *Down to Earth*, 30, April 2014; *TigerLink* inputs

An update from Palamu

The Palamu Tiger Reserve continues to remain beleaguered, with little attention paid by the state government towards serious shortcomings in its management. Several issues continue to plague the reserve though to its credit, the park management is holding forth despite extremely difficult odds.

Some major issues faced by the reserve are detailed below.

Staff shortage

The greatest challenge for the reserve management currently is a staff shortage of almost 90 per cent. The frontline staff comprises almost entirely of daily wagers employed as watchers.

Status of tigers

Presence of tigers in the reserve is poorly monitored as a combination of staff shortage, heavy insurgency and few resources permit only a limited portion of the reserve to be monitored for wildlife, particularly in and around the Betla and Chhipadohar ranges. At least

two tigers—a male and a female—were observed in this small but better protected zone which has a high concentration of wild prey, particularly cheetal and gaur. Prey base in the rest of the reserve has been virtually wiped out and sambar deer are on the verge of extinction in the reserve. As a result, the tigers in the reserve appear to be almost entirely dependent on cattle that graze within the reserve causing high human-tiger conflict due to livestock depredation. Despite the very low tiger density in the reserve, over 100 cattle kills are being reported annually as per the kill register maintained. Timely payment of compensation against livestock depredation has helped prevent retaliatory killing of tigers.

It is believed that the reserve may have more tigers in the unmonitored portions, especially adjoining the Chhattisgarh border. Tiger presence has also been reported from the adjoining Latehar forest division. Efforts are underway by the management to include portions of this division as part of the reserve. Tiger breeding has not been reported in several years. Limited camera trapping exercises have captured four to five tigers but have not shown any evidence of breeding. A recent survey in the Kutku range—threatened with submergence from the proposed Kutku dam—has shown tiger signs, and there are reports, though not confirmed, of a tigress with cubs. Areas like Garu East, Baresanr, etc have been reporting tiger presence frequently.

Village relocation

The reserve management is taking steps towards relocating the village of Kujrum from the core/critical tiger habitat of the reserve. It is learnt that the villagers have consented and are keen to undergo relocation and rehabilitation outside the reserve. With a human population of 1.5 lakh people and an equivalent number of heads of cattle overrunning the reserve, relocation of villages needs absolute focus of the reserve management and full support of the state. Unfortunately, while villagers are keen to relocate and the reserve management has identified land to resettle them outside, the state has failed to provide their support in making this materialise.

Insurgency & paramilitary operations

While the reserve management and field staff persist despite heavy leftwing extremism—primarily due to excellent community support—large tracts of Palamu continue to remain out of bounds for protection and wildlife monitoring activities and remain information black holes.

The presence of large number of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) cadres in the reserve is causing extreme disturbance, particularly during combing operations which often cause long spells of heavy gunfire, causing wildlife to flee the few safe havens available. There is at least one confirmed case of an elephant dying in crossfire in the reserve. The reserve management alleges that the bullets and shells recovered from the carcass were fired by the CRPF.

Also, the majority of forest infrastructure including rest houses has been taken over by the CRPF. Invariably, rest houses occupied by paramilitary forces have been destroyed by insurgents as soon as they are vacated. The picturesque and historical Maromar FRH has currently been taken over by CRPF and faces the threat of destruction as soon as it is vacated. Maromar has a unique place in tiger history, with the first ever tiger census in the world carried out here in 1932 by JW Nicholson, who based himself in the same rest house.

Allegations of illegal felling of firewood and even cases of wildlife poaching by CRPF jawans have also been received. In simple terms, the presence of the CRPF in the reserve has only served to exponentially increase the anthropogenic pressure already existing from local villagers. Additionally, it has become a liability to forest infrastructure and wildlife.

Habitat consolidation

The reserve management is working towards adding all available suitable tiger habitat around Palamu to the tiger reserve in order to protect them and streamline their management to focus on tiger conservation. Suitable areas of all adjoining divisions—Latehar, Garhwa, Gumla and Palamu North—are to be added to the reserve and GIS mapping of these regions is underway.

Currently, the core/critical tiger habitat of this tiger reserve is approximately 415 sq kms.

Tiger Conservation Foundation

After much delay, the Palamu Tiger Conservation Foundation was notified on 20th January 2014. This will help streamline fund flow. This has been a major bottleneck as the funds from the NTCA were held up by the state government for long periods and more often than not, released at the last moment at the end of the financial year. This handicapped the reserve management as crucial expenses such as payments to protection watchers, compensation for livestock depredation, etc remained unpaid for long stretches. The Palamu TCF shall provide the reserve

RANTHAMBHORE FOUNDATION

During the financial year 2013-14 the Ranthambhore Foundation carried out a carpet making training programme in Kundera village in two centres. Thirty women of the village have been fully trained. Out of these thirty women, ten work part-time at the centres and earn approximately Rs. 4000/- per month.

Irrigation facilities are provided by the Ranthambhore Foundation in the rehabilitated village of Girirajpura. As a result of extending irrigation facilities, the fields have yielded very

good crops of wheat and mustard.

The Ranthambhore Foundation is looking for donors so that the agriculture land of 46 cultivators in village Girirajpura can be fully developed.

The Ranthambhore Foundation's education and awareness programme continues with the support of WWF-India.

Details of the same are given below:

S. N.	Village	Details	Number	Schools	Participants			
					Boys	Girls	Teachers	Total
1	21	Ranthambhore Nature Camp	36	36	752	277	102	1131
2	10	Distribution of saplings	3967 plants	17	Students			1100
3	3	Cultural programme in village	3	3	Participant Audience Approximate			1700
4	14	Mobile Library	28	28	3082	795	107	3984
5	16	Teachers Meeting	1	22			33	33
6	21	Environmental Quiz	40	40	6195	1884	214	8293
7	21	Environmental Competition	2	40	Total Students			4610
8	21	National Park Visit (Educational Tour)	5	40	51	19	49	119
9	5	Environmental Awareness Rally	5	5	1035	445	42	1522
	19	Major Nature Camp	2	34	232	0	32	264
	24	Films show	24	24	Total Students			5154

The Artificial Insemination Programme with the support of WWF-India is running successfully in all the 40 villages.

Our new venture, a Sanitation Programme supported by Coutts Foundation has also started in full swing.

Awards and scholarships were given this year too, in the month of March, to schools and students for their excellence in conservation and awareness building activities. Details of the same are provided.

VILLAGE & SCHOOL AWARD DETAILS					
S.N.	Category	Name	Village	Prize	Amount
1	Village	EDC Ramnagar Rajwana	Ramnagar	1st	20000
2	Village	EDC Ramsinghpura	Ramsinghpura	2nd	15000
3	Village	EDC Senvati	Senvati	3rd	10000
4	School	Govt.Girls Sin.Sec.School Kundera	Kundera	1st	10000
5	School	Govt.Sec.School Endwa	Endwa	2nd	7500
6	School	Adarsh Bal Niketan Chaan	Chaan	3rd	5000

STUDENTS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD DETAILS					
S.N.	Category	Name	Village	Prize	Amount
1	Secondary	Rajendar Saini S/O Sh. Sambhu Dayal	Baharawanda	1st	750 per Month
2	Secondary	Abhisek Meen S/O Sh. Laxman Meena	Bhadlov	2nd	500 per Month
3	UPS	Harsita Sharma D/O Sh. Prakash Chand	Sherpur	1st	600 per Month
4	UPS	Nisha Jat D/O Sh. Babulal Jat	Kundera	2nd	400 per Month



Nature Camp organised by Ranthambhore Foundation supported by WWF India



Environmental Rally by students of different schools supported by WWF-India.



Environmental Rally by students of different schools supported by WWF India.



Cultural program by students supported by WWF India



Nature Camp organised by Ranthambhore Foundation supported by WWF India



Teacher's Meeting at Sawai Madhopur



Park visit of the students organised by RF supported by WWF India

THE RBS 'EARTH HEROES' AWARDS 2013

New Delhi, 14 November 2013:

The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) announced the winners of the RBS 'Earth Heroes' Awards for 2013 on 15th November. Seven individuals/institutions from the field of wildlife conservation, who have demonstrated exemplary work on the ground, were chosen by an independent jury for the RBS Earth Heroes Award. The jury panel, comprising active wildlife enthusiasts, environmentalists, conservationists and officials reviewed nominations received from across the country.

All the winners were awarded citations and a cash prize each at the RBS 'Earth Heroes' Awards 2013 ceremony held on 15th November, 2013 at Delhi IT Park, Shastri Park, New Delhi.

The categories of the 2013 RBS 'Earth Heroes' Awards included

1. 'Earth Hero' Award (Felicitation)
2. 'Earth Guardian' Award
3. 'Protect the Tiger' Award
4. 'Inspire' Award
5. 'Green Warrior' Award

1. The RBS 'Earth Hero' Award was conferred upon JJ Dutta for his untiring effort to secure and nurture wildlife in Madhya Pradesh over many decades. The state has also been given a name 'Tiger State' due to his 34 years of dedicated and distinguished service in the field of forestry and wildlife management in Madhya Pradesh Forest Department.

2. The RBS 'Earth Guardian' Awards was presented jointly to Similipal Tiger Reserve and the Indian Coast Guard Region (West).

The efforts made by the management of Similipal to protect and conserve the

biodiversity of the region are highly commendable especially in the face of severe challenges and constraints following the left wing extremist attack that had demoralised the staff; limited support and inadequate infrastructure at the park.

The Indian Coast Guard's devotion to nation, nature and seafarers is noteworthy. They have put in efforts for conservation of marine wildlife and ecosystem, protection of coastal environment including sensitive mangroves, conservation of human life and property at sea and massive environmental campaign awareness building in coastal villages

3. The RBS 'Protect the Tiger' Award was conferred upon DV Girish for his contribution towards wildlife conservation and environmental protection over the past 20 years. Girish has emerged as an influential community leader and steward of the biologically rich and ecologically important Bhadra-Kudremukh landscape. Girish received a certificate of appreciation in 1998 from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in New York. He also has received Carl Zeiss award (2002) and 'Tiger Gold' award of the Conway Foundation (2004) for his contributions to tigers in Bhadra.

4. The RBS 'Inspire' Award was presented to Nirmal Kulkarni for his contribution towards nature conservation. Recognised by Carl Zeiss, EcoBest Ecologist and Karmaveer Awards, Nirmal was also a part of the team that worked on conserving the Bhimgad forests in Karnataka. Their efforts ultimately led to the creation of Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary.

5. The RBS 'Green Warrior' Awards was presented jointly to Jigmet Takpa, Indian Forest Service Officer in the Forest and Wildlife department of Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir and Jadav Payeng, Environmental Activist and

Forestry Worker, Jorhat, Assam.

Jigmet Takpa was awarded for his accomplishments in the field of biodiversity conservation, sustainable rural development and climate change mitigation. His involvement in the Greening Himalaya project was recorded by the Guinness Book of World Records. Jigmet Takpa has pioneered the idea of protecting the entire Trans-Himalayas under an umbrella conservation project titled 'Project Snow Leopard'.

Jadav Payeng, through his continuous effort over decades, succeeded in turning a sandbar of the river Brahmaputra in to a forest reserve by planting trees. The forest, called Molai forest after him is located near Kokilamukh of Jorhat, Assam, India, and encompasses an area of about 1,360 hectares.



The winners of the RBS Earth Heroes Awards 2013 with jury members



Shri. Ranjan Chatterjee (Honorable Member, National Green Tribunal) and Shri Bahar Dutt (Conservation Biologist; Environment Journalist) launched the RBS Foundation India movie "Supporting Enterprise"



Shri Brijesh Mehra, Interim Country Executive, RBS N.V acknowledging the work being done by the winners



Dr Ullas Karanth, Direct of Wildlife Conservation Society, India



The "RBS Earth Guardian" Award being presented to Similipal Tiger Reserve



Shri JJ Dutta receiving the "RBS Earth Hero" Scroll of honor



The "RBS Earth Guardian" Award being presented to the Indian Coast Guard



The "RBS Protect The Tiger" Award being presented to Shri DV Girish



The "RBS Inspire" Award being presented to Shri Nirmal Kulkarni



The winners of the RBS Earth Heroes Awards 2013



The "RBS Green Warrior" Award being presented to Shri Jadav Payeng



The "RBS Green Warrior" Award being presented to Shri Jigmet Takpa

management much required independence in receiving, raising and managing its own funds.

There is a tendency to 'write-off' reserves like Palamu as failures. But the reserve has potential for a complete revival and an excellent future. It is part of a 25,000 sq km tiger landscape containing several source sites such as Sanjay Tiger Reserve and, importantly, Bandhavgarh. Palamu is an integral part of the rich Central Indian Tiger Landscape and its forest contiguity with the landscape has remained intact over the years. Given correct management, strong protection, adequate inviolate habitat and importantly, support of the state government, there is no reason why tigers should not make a comeback in Palamu.

Aditya Chandra Panda

GOA

Mining ban lifted

The Supreme Court has lifted the ban on mining in Goa that it had imposed in 2011, with an upper limit of ore extraction to 20 million tonnes annually (as against the earlier 66 million tonnes).

Mining cannot be operationalised immediately because all the leases currently stand cancelled, and have to be granted afresh. Environmental clearances need to be obtained again, which involves public hearings, and may entail permissions from the NBWL, Forest Advisory Committee etc. The SC has also stated that no mining shall be allowed within a distance of one kilometer from the boundaries of Protected Areas. Mining leases whose renewals were not sought post 2007 are to be considered expired and mining in those areas shall be illegal, said the SC. That puts about 23 mining leases out of function.

In its judgment, the Green Bench, comprising Justices AK Patnaik, SS Nijjar and Ibrahim Kalifulla, said: "The panel [an expert committee] had suggested that for the time being, annual excavation of 20 million tonnes of iron ore may be permitted in Goa with adequate monitoring of its impact on different ecological and environmental parameters, which will also help the expert committee in its future appraisal." The SC also declared the dumps outside mining leases as illegal, and has that environmental clearances are needed to touch those dumps.

It directed the State Department of Mines and Geology and the State Pollution Control Board to monitor mining, in consultation with other statutory bodies. The Bench asked the State government to frame a

comprehensive scheme, in consultation with the Central Empowered Committee, and submit a report within six months.

The tiger habitats in the portion of the Western Ghats passing through Goa have been one of the worst victims of rampant iron ore mining in the state.

Source: "SC lifts Goa mining ban, but caps annual output", *The Hindu*, 21 April 2014 (Updated 23 April 2014), New Delhi, The period of giving leases for free is over', Joaquim Fernandes, *TNN* | Apr 23, 2014, Goa

KARNATAKA

Clampdown on temples in PAs

The Karnataka Forest Department has taken the bold step of removing four temples from the Bandipur Tiger Reserve. It has also prevented the illegal growth of such shrines in other PAs of the state. The Department is shifting four temples from Bandipur while two larger temples—those of Gopalswamy and Belladakuppe—shall be left out. In the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, it foiled attempts by a group of villagers to renovate and expand a temple next to the Jungle Lodges & Resorts property at Bheemeswari Fishing Camp. The renovation exercise was allegedly led by those with vested political interests. The villagers had built a cement platform near the temple which the Department destroyed. No construction in PAs is permitted without permission from the National Board for Wildlife.

Temples inside protected areas are becoming a constant and increasing source of disturbance to wildlife and habitats. Small wayside shrines have a tendency to grow into large structures visited by thousands of pilgrims, particularly on auspicious days. Visiting pilgrims arrive in hordes and attempts to contain them from littering, playing loudspeakers, camping, picnicking, etc are usually futile.

Source: "Forest dept foils villagers' attempts to renovate temple", Amit S Upadhye, *Deccan Chronicle*, 4 Nov, 2013; "Between Temples and Tigers", Jay Mazoomdaar, *Tehelka*, 9 November, 2013

KIOCL plans tourism in Kudremukh

Conservationists have slammed the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited's (KIOCL) plans to throw open its closed mining areas and residential quarters to tourism. The company has invited expression of interest for the proposal on its website dated April 7, 2014.

KIOCL, which, following a Supreme Court ban on mining around Kudremukh National Park, was expected to return the land to the state government

after expiry of the lease agreement, has failed to do so and now proposes to utilise the same for tourism activities, according to forest and environment department sources.

According to Praveen Bhargav, Managing trustee, Wildlife First, "This is a matter of serious concern as KIOCL is attempting to create rights over Government Land in the demised mining lease area within the limits of the Kudremukh National Park. This is in spite of the fact that the demised mining lease cannot be renewed. Further, the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 02-09-2013 has directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to file a report on the status of the winding up of the activities of KIOCL. As the petitioners in the case before the Apex Court, which led to this landmark judgment, we wish to point out that the non-implementation of all the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court has emboldened KIOCL to float such an EOI to sub-lease Government Land. This we believe is impermissible under law and the prevailing Orders of the Apex Court".

KIOCL was expected to return the land to the state government after expiry of lease agreement, but it hasn't done so.

Chief Secretary Kaushik Mukherjee said that they cannot comment, unless a credible proposal comes to them. KIOCL is a mining company with no tourism experience. The land which is being spoken about belongs to government and will be acquired."

Source: "Greens see red over KIOCL tourism plans", Bosky Khanna, *Deccan Herald*, 19, April 2014

Netravathi diversion threatens tigers

A river diversion project, purported to be a 'drinking water project' by the government is threatening to drown key forests inhabited by endangered species such as tigers, elephants and lion tailed macaques, as well as endemic reptiles, and birds such as the Ceylon frogmouth. The Yettinahole Project—or the 'Netravathi River Diversion Project'—is envisaged by the Karnataka government to divert the Yettinahole River, a tributary of River Netravathi, a key river of the Western Ghats towards the arid plains of Chitradurga. Conservationist Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation has said that the project threatens the very source of the Netravathi, the lifeline of the Dakshina Kannada district of the Western Ghats. The project has been widely criticised by local people and environmentalists as it will lead to an inter-basin transfer of river flow from west to east, causing irreparable damage to the sensitive ecosystem.

Yettinahole Diversion Project is being planned in the Western Ghats and Eastern Plains of Karnataka, by the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited (KNNL) purportedly as a drinking water supply scheme to supply 24 TMC of water to Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts. The scheme involves eight dams in the Western Ghat forests, 250 kms long canals, 80 and 50 kms long raising mains and a reservoir that will submerge 1,200 hectares of land and two villages. A closer look at the project report of the scheme indicates that of the 24 TMC to be diverted, assured drinking water to Kolar and Chikkaballapur is just 2.81 TMC! The rest is planned to be allocated for uses like river and tank rejuvenation, irrigation, industries, urban supply, etc.

The project has escaped appraisal by the Expert Appraisal Committee of the MoEF, claiming that it is a drinking water scheme (as per the EIA Notification 2006, Drinking Water Supply Schemes are exempt from Appraisal and Environmental Clearance process). An inspection of the project report indicates, however, that the project intends to provide irrigation to an area of over 29,000 hectares and produce 125-150 MW of electricity through hydropower generation. Any project seeking to irrigate over 10,000 hectares or produce more than 25 MW of electricity requires environmental clearance by the MoEF.

A number of individuals and organisations wrote to the Union Environment Minister, Secretary, Joint Secretary MoEF and Director, Impact Assessment, River Valley Projects Division of MoEF in September 2013 demanding a complete appraisal of Yettinahole Diversion Scheme. Signatories include K Ullas Karanth, former member of the Forest Advisory Committee, Praveen Bhargava former member, NBWL, TV Ramchandra from Indian Institute of Sciences, noted rainwater harvesting expert Vishwanath Srikantaiah and Niren Jain amongst others. While the signatories support long term and sustainable solutions to legitimate drinking water demands of drought affected regions in Karnataka, they have pointed out that following misleading claims by KNNL, the Project has escaped Environmental Impact Assessment, Environmental Management Plan, public hearing, environment clearance and monitoring. They said that the project will be disastrous for the last remaining biodiversity rich forests of the Western Ghats and in any case it is not the most optimum or the least cost solution for the water problem of Kolar and Chikkaballapur Districts.

These protests, including a massive movement against

the project by local communities had little impact as MEF M Veerappa Moily announced on 3rd March that this project is expected to be completed in five years.

Source: "Huge Impacts, but no assessment? Groups urge MoEF to correct its blunder on Yettinahole Diversion Project", South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Conservation India, 12, September 2013; "Yettinahole controversy: Storm in a docile stream", Mohit M Rao, *The Hindu*, 23, September 2013; "Amid protests, CM lays foundation for Yettinahole project at Chikkaballapur", *Daijiworld*, 3, March 2014

KERALA

The MoEF has virtually abandoned hundreds of families who had voluntarily offered to relinquish their ancestral land situated inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary to make place for wildlife.

Even as the Kerala High Court on 1st April ordered the central government to deposit the around Rs 67 crore needed to facilitate relocation of the 700 families 'trapped' inside Wayanad within two months, top MoEF official told TOI that the ministry does not have funds for the project and would file an appeal against the high court decision.

The unique Rs 80-crore project, if implemented, would have resulted in relocating around 800 families in 14 settlements in the first phase itself and could have added over 1,500 acres to the wildlife sanctuary.

"We don't have that kind of money to be allocated for a single relocation project. Though MoEF has accepted the proposal in principle, we had made it clear that the project will be implemented subject to availability of funds," S K Khanduri, inspector general of forests (wildlife), told *TOI* from New Delhi. He said the ministry was studying the order in detail and would file an appeal against the decision, if needed. "The total annual fund that MoEF has to maintain to protect the parks and sanctuaries in the entire country, including core wildlife protection activity, is around Rs 80 crore and as such it will be difficult to earmark such a huge amount for the Wayanad relocation project. Also, it was never intended that the funds would be provided at one go," he said, adding that the state and central governments would have to find out alternative funding mechanisms for the project.

A study conducted by Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) in 2009 had found that there were about 12,000 people belonging to 2,500 families residing within the WWS. Based on the report, the state government had submitted a Rs 80-crore proposal for the relocation of the most-affected 800 families in 14 settlements which was accepted and approved by the central government in 2011. But the government has

so far provided just Rs 13.3 crore for the project and only 107 families have been relocated.

The writ petition was filed by office-bearers of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary Farmers' Welfare Forum, under the aegis of the Wayanad Prakruthi Samrakshana Samithi on 3rd October 2012. It stated that they are "living in utter poverty without even the basic amenities to life such as hospitals, schools, grocery shops, markets etc." and that "due to the frequent attacks from the wild animals they are not able to cultivate their lands. They have said that, "any further delay in relocating the petitioners and residents of the tribal settlements in the core areas of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary will cause great injustice and irreparable injury to the petitioners and would amount to the violation of Article 21 of the Constitution".

Kuruchiad Raghavan, a farmer who had consented to give up around 22 acres inside the sanctuary said that farmers will be forced to launch agitations if the government fails to complete the process of rehabilitation in two months as directed by the high court.

Source: 'Ministry of environment and forests cold shoulders families who gave up land for green cause', KR Rajeev, *TNN*, Apr 29, 2014, Kozhikode

Pilgrim litter kills elephant in Periyar

An adult cow elephant was found dead in the Periyar Tiger Reserve with about two kgs of plastic waste in her bowels close to the Sabarimala temple which is visited by thousands of pilgrims each year. The plastic is believed to have been left behind by the two-month long pilgrimage that ended a month before the elephant's death.

A top official said huge piles of plastic waste, including polythene carry bags, aluminum foil papers and wrappers of packed food were found in its abdomen during post-mortem. "The carcass of the elephant was spotted during the routine field check on 2nd February. About two kg of plastic waste was found in its abdomen during post-mortem. It could not take any food at least for some weeks," said Sunil Babu, Deputy Director, Periyar Tiger Reserve.

Temples & Tigers

This incident raises two issues: that of religious sites and gatherings within our Protected Areas, and the fatal impact of litter, particularly plastic, on wildlife.

Many of our Protected Areas, including tiger reserves have places of worship within them and millions of

pilgrims trample over the last of our pristine forests every year. Laws don't permit such unrestricted access in reserves, but who is to stop, monitor or regulate the pious as they throng our forests and may lop firewood, cook, camp, litter, defecate—desecrating and disturbing prime wildlife habitats.

For example, an ancient Shiva temple at Srisailam within the Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve is visited by lakhs every year. This peaks during Maha Shivaratri and Ugaadi in the months of February and March causing heavy traffic on the road to Srisailam. The road cuts through prime tiger habitat and the presence of breeding tigresses has been documented close to it. Though traffic is banned between 9 pm to 6 am and speed breakers slow down vehicles, there is constant pressure to remove the speed breakers and ease the night traffic ban.

Allwin Jesudasan and Rajkamal Goswami write in *Down to Earth* about an 11 days festival celebrated in July-August at the Lord Sorimuthu Iyyanar temple in the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu. Though deep religious sentiment drives the faithful, a survey by the authors revealed other motives as well—76 per cent of the people interviewed said they took part in other recreational activities like boating in the dam reservoir during their camping days. For many low-income families from the hot, dryland villages bordering KMTR, a visit to the festival was a cheap and viable alternative to expensive hill stations. As pilgrims camp around the temple for 11 long days, a huge slum-like atmosphere replaces the otherwise clean and green forest. Chemicals in soaps and detergents used by the pilgrims, polythene, garbage, human excreta and slaughter waste resulting from the sacrifice of thousands of animals, ranging from sheep to goats to hens, add to the pollution. Numerous petty traders from the plains set up temporary stalls and sell articles like bangles, snacks and toys etc.

During festival time, a 400 per cent increase in traffic is registered as against normal weekdays, with a 600 per cent increase in roadkills. Fewer mammals were also encountered within 10 km of the temple, due to the disturbance. More than 75 per cent of the campers used fuel wood for cooking.

The environmental damage caused due to large pilgrimages is a serious issue and this particular empirical evidence of the annual environmental and ecological damage represents just the tip of the iceberg. Examples abound at Sabarimala in Periyar, Belladukuppai in Bandipur and Ganesh temple inside Ranthambore. The KMTR experience also shows it

might be presumptuous to view 'religious pilgrimages' in or beyond forest areas as solely 'religious' and 'pilgrimage'.

Source: "Plastic waste from Sabarimala devotees kills wild elephant in Kerala forest" PTI, *The Indian Express*, February 3, 2014, Prerna Singh Bindra, *The Pioneer*, 'Invasion of tiger reserve', *Down to Earth*, Allwin Jesudasan, Rajkamal Goswami; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru

Move to make tribal land salable

The State Cabinet of Kerala decided at a meeting on 17th November 2013 to amend laws in order to permit transfer of land titles by settlers on forest land. As per the proposed amendment, those who have encroached forest land prior to 1st January, 1977, will now be able to sell their land. Conservationists have warned that this would be a disastrous move that will not only encourage further encroachment but will feed the state's land mafia that has long been eyeing forest land. The move will drastically alter land use patterns in the region. While the settlers were permitted title deeds exclusively for agriculture as a livelihood option, the land mafia—benefactors of the decision—will now be able to purchase these properties and develop them commercially causing heavy damage to the ecology of the region.

Conservationists are accusing the government of abetting law breakers who illegally settled on forest land, and are preparing to legally challenge the decision.

Source: "Transfer of titles will help land mafia, warn ecologists", K.S. Sudhi, *The Hindu*, 18 November, 2013

MADHYA PRADESH

Cabinet finalises Ken-Betwa river link

The Madhya Pradesh cabinet has cleared the long proposed Ken-Betwa river-linking project that is expected to submerge over 45 sq kms of core/critical tiger habitat of the Panna Tiger Reserve. The Ken-Betwa Project envisages a 73.80 m high Daudhan dam across River Ken, about 2.5 km upstream of the Gangau Weir in Madhya Pradesh. Two powerhouses, one at the foot of the dam and other at the end of a two km long tunnel, are also proposed. The project shall link the Ken and Betwa rivers by a 231.45-km concrete-lined canal to divert 1020 MCM of water.

Ecologists have warned that water from the Ken is already stored at the Gangau Weir. The additional storage of the Daudhan Dam shall leave the Ken totally dry downstream. Due to high potential evapo-transpiration in the area, more reservoirs and more

irrigation systems shall lead to more loss of water. As a result, the accumulated flow in the Ganga River further downstream shall also go down.

It is learnt that the project has been approved without any environmental impact analysis.

The Ken River is home to the critically endangered gharial and mugger crocodile. It is one of the sixteen perennial rivers of Madhya Pradesh and is the lifeline of Panna Tiger Reserve. When the Gangau Dam comes up, the reservoir will not only submerge significant parts of Panna, it will also make approach of the wildlife to the only perennial water source impossible due to the silt that gets deposited on the periphery of the reservoir. Moreover, the Ken Gharial Sanctuary, located downstream of the proposed river linking project, is also likely to be affected due to stoppage of freshwater flow in the river. The reservoir is also feared to permanently change the dry habitat tracts in the region, altering them enough to make them uninhabitable by endangered dry-habitat species such as caracal, chousinga, wolf and chinkara.

The then environment minister Jairam Ramesh criticised this project commenting that it would be disastrous to interlink these rivers, and the project would never get approval from his ministry. He added that the forest land of Madhya Pradesh would suffer as out of the 8,650 hectares likely to get submerged, 6,400 hectare is forest land and 2,171 hectare is cultivable land. He also called the interlinking of rivers a human-ecological-economic disaster. "It is easy to do interlinking on paper. Interlinking of rivers has limited basin value, but large scale interlinking would be a disaster," he said.

The Rs 5.6 lakh crore (at 2002 prices) river-linking project plans to connect 37 rivers across India through 31 links with 9,000 km of canals and has met with severe criticism from environmentalists given the ecological and social costs. Environmentalists say the project has been envisaged without considering or scientifically analyzing environment impacts.

Sources: "Ken Betwa Link: Why it won't click - Analysis of the Ken Betwa River Link Proposal", Himanshu Thakkar and Bipin Chandra Chaturvedi, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (<http://sandrp.in/riverlinking/knbtwalink.pdf>); "Jairam says 'no' to Ken-Betwa river link project", Mahim Pratap Singh, *The Hindu*, April 17, 2011, "Environment minister criticises Ken-Betwa river link project", DNA, 9 December, 2009, "Cabinet set to OK inter-linking of Ken-Betwa rivers today" Vishwa Mohan & Dipak Kumar Dash, *TNN*, Jan 2, 2014, "The making of a disaster", M Inamul Haque, *The Daily Star*, Jan 28, 2014; *TigerLink* inputs

Madhav not ready to receive tigers

An NTCA constituted committee has recommended

that the Madhav National Park is not currently ready for re-introduction of tigers and the status must be assessed scientifically by the end of the year 2015. The team noted that there was an urgent need to improve prey abundance and boost habitat condition by relocating villages from the national park. It also stressed the need to control grazing, better protection through improved patrolling, creating patrolling camps etc.

The committee with PK Sen, Member NTCA Technical Committee, Qamar Qureshi, WIL, and HS Negi, IGF NTCA as members was constituted vide O.M. No. 1-10/2011-NTCA on 10th March 2014.

Madhav was once the hunting reserve of the Maharaja of Gwalior and known to have a good number of tigers historically. However, the last resident tiger was reported in the 1970's. There have only been stray reports of tigers since then—including one trapped between the safari fence and Sakhya lake wall, which was 'rescued' and shifted to the Van Vihar zoo.

The team said that it is unlikely that six tigers were present in the area as reported by CCMB, Hyderabad during 2010-11. Since 2011 there has been no report of tigers in this area.

It also recommended that a detailed abundance estimation needs to be done in the winter of 2014 to assess the status of prey and the carrying capacity for tigers.

The 375.233 sq km park has immense biotic pressure with no less than six villages within. Fifteen villages have been identified for relocation of which nine have been relocated. Five of the current remaining villages sit within the crucial link connecting the old National Park, and newer extensions. A majority of these families have opted to relocate.

Though the staff situation of the park appeared to be adequate, vacant posts need to be filled on an urgent basis. The committee also remarked on the condition of the patrolling camps, which need to be repaired, or constructed anew. Poaching was seen to be an issue of concern, and targeted patrolling was advised.

It was also recommended to identify a well-thought out Eco Sensitive Zone around the park to control negative impact on the NP in terms of disturbance.

A TigerLink report

CM's picnic creates ruckus in sanctuary

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has received criticism for ignoring norms and visiting the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary in a large motorcade with eight

diesel SUVs and two buses.

Visitors to wildlife sanctuaries and other ecologically sensitive areas are expected to follow established ethics and principles to minimise their footprint on the habitat. Politicians visiting protected areas can cause disturbance to wildlife habitat as security and other entourage usually accompany them. At the same time, visits by decision makers and political leaders can also win support for wildlife.

In this case, one wishes that the CM had shown some interest in Ratapani beyond a visit, and speeded up notifying Ratapani as a tiger reserve, a matter that has been pending in the offices of his government since long. Ratapani has been given “in principle” approval for notification as a tiger reserve under Project Tiger by the NTCA. It is a sensitive tiger habitat close to the urban sprawl of state capital Bhopal and suffers high disturbance. The Bhopal-Nagpur highway passes right through it and heavy traffic on it is a major concern for the reserve.

Source: “Shivraj Singh Chouhan's 'fun' trip hits rough weather”, *TNN*, Dec 26, 2013; *TigerLink* inputs

Touchwood: Panna thrives, tigers disperse

Panna's date with tiger conservation success continues—thanks to excellent leadership at the field level, meticulous monitoring, effective protection and carefully managed relationship with local communities. While a re-introduced tigress, ‘T-5’, hand raised in Kanha Tiger Reserve before being released in the wild at Panna has successfully bred and given birth to two cubs, another tiger, P-212, born in Panna to domiciled parents reintroduced from elsewhere has retraced a once-lost corridor connecting Panna, Bandhavgarh and Sanjay tiger reserves. On 29th March, the dispersing young male tiger reached Sanjay Tiger Reserve from his natal habitat in Panna. This news is particularly significant as it proves that Panna is not entirely isolated as was once believed.

In 2009, when Panna's original tiger population went extinct due to poaching, one of the reasons for artificially reintroducing tigers there from Kanha, Pench and Bandhavgarh was that Panna was believed to be an island with little chance of natural tiger resurgence by immigration from nearby landscapes. Following the reintroduction of tigers, Panna's ‘new’ tigers bred and have grown to number around 30 individuals in a period of less than five years. One of these tigers, a young male born to the reintroduced tigers, has now dispersed out of his ‘source’ habitat.

Radio collaring has enabled the reserve management to trace the journey of P-212 on its way from Panna towards Bandhavgarh and then, as it abruptly changed course, towards Sanjay Tiger Reserve in the Kaimur landscape in Madhya Pradesh. The tiger passed through broken forest corridors, human settlements, farmland, etc without entering into conflict.

Sanjay Tiger Reserve is connected through forest landscapes with tiger habitats of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand such as Guru Ghasidas National Park and Palamu Tiger Reserve, respectively. The dispersal of P-212 proves that wildlife corridors in these parts of Central India are still functional and must be protected to ensure the sustenance of larger Central/East-Central Indian meta-population of tigers.

The forest staff of Panna Tiger Reserve, Sanjay Tiger Reserve and adjoining territorial division staff did a tremendous job by keeping track of the tiger at all hours of day and night using radio signals, elephants and men on the ground. Though there was constant monitoring of the tiger, it was done in an unobtrusive manner. It was due to these efforts that no incident of conflict between humans and the dispersing tiger arose. Following the tiger without interfering with or influencing its movement, not only saved the life of the tiger, but provided crucial information on corridors and connectivity from Panna to adjoining landscapes.

Source: “Success of tiger reintroduction at Panna Tiger Reserve”, *TNN*, Apr 6, 2014; “Officials keep watch as Panna tiger takes lost route”, Milind Ghatwai, *The Indian Express*, 10, March 2014, Bhopal; *TigerLink* inputs

Note: It is learnt that P-122 has been badly injured after being attacked by a resident tiger of Sanjay Tiger Reserve when he reached there. This is part of a wild tiger's life.

Election duty endangers tigers

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has alleged that two tigers nearly got killed by a mob of villagers in the Chaurai village near Pench Tiger Reserve in November as frontline staff—meant, among other things, to control human-wildlife conflict situations—were diverted towards election duty. The concerned forest officer had, in September, refused to spare staff for election duty since their absence could have put the lives of tigers at risk. The District Collector had responded, however, by serving a show cause notice seeking an explanation.

This wasn't a one-off incident in Madhya Pradesh. Forest staff around the country, including field directors of tiger reserves have been sent off for

months on election duty despite a standing order of the Election Commission of India which clearly states that vehicles and staff of Wildlife Sanctuaries and, National Parks cannot be requisitioned for election duty. Taking cognizance of the extremely low manpower deployed to

protect our national parks and sanctuaries and being aware that any absence from field duty would attract poachers and timber smugglers, the Election Commission of India had issued a directive no. 437/6/98-PLN-III dated 30th January, 1998, giving specific directions that vehicles and staff of parks and sanctuaries should not be requisitioned for election duty. Subsequently, this directive has been reiterated repeatedly. However, this order has been flouted routinely across the country and the last assembly polls saw authorities and staff of Periyar, Palamu, Pench and other tiger reserves allotted election duty.

Source: ‘With forest staff on poll duty, villagers attack tigers’, P Naveen, *TNN*, 25 November, 2013; *TigerLink* inputs

MAHARASHTRA

Tadoba ESZ approved

The MoEF has approved the proposal for an Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around the Tadoba- Andhari Tiger Reserve. The ESZ will cover an area of about 1,347 sq km, which is more than double the area of the reserve (625 sq km). About half of this ESZ area is constituted of reserve forests. The physical boundary of the Tadoba ESZ will be made up of the Chandrapur and Nagpur forest circles in the north and the railway line between Gondia and Chanda Fort in the south. It will share a boundary with Chandrapur and Brahmapuri division in the east, and Irai dam and its backwaters in the west.

Apart from the entire notified buffer zone of Tadoba, the additional area that forms the corridor to Umred forest region and another patch that goes towards Chaprala Wildlife has also been included in the ESZ.

Source: ‘Environment Min okays ESZ around Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve’, *The Pioneer*, 7 February, 2014

STPF for Melghat

Following incidents of tiger poaching in the Melghat Tiger Reserve, the Maharashtra Forest Department had in February sent a proposal to the NTCA for the constitution of a Special Tiger Protection Force in the reserve.

Source: ‘Stung by tiger poaching, Special Tiger Protection Force proposed for Melghat’, *TNN*, 26 February, 2014

Villages relocated from Tadoba

Eight months after 200 families were relocated from Navegaon (not to be confused with the sanctuary by the same name) village in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, the village of Jamni, with 222 families, has also opted for relocating outside the protected area in favour of a better life with more opportunities.

This comes as an immense relief for the reserve that faces high intensities of human-tiger conflict. Following the relocation of Jamni, only three other villages remain in the reserve—Kolsa, Palasgaon and Rantalodhi. Of these, Palasgaon and Rantalodhi have already given consent for relocation to the reserve management. Rantalodhi gave its consent through sarpanch Kailash Kumre at a meeting held on 11th November. This had been a problem village for the reserve management as it was believed to be naxal affected and had been extremely hostile towards the park management and closed to the topic of relocation. However, observing the prosperity relocation has brought to their erstwhile neighbouring villages, Rantalodhi decided in favour of relocation.

Jamni has been shifted to a new location which has a huge township with houses made with concrete slab structures and tar roads with streetlights. Beneficiaries got freedom to construct houses as per their requirement and design under the Rs 10 lakh per family relocation package that is offered to those choosing to relocate outside protected areas.

Maharashtra has set a target of relocating 21 villages from six PAs in the state. It may be recalled that the Principle Secretary (Forests) has written to the MoEF requesting Rs 217 crores from the principle off CAMPA funds for their relocation. Currently, the state is using its own funds under CAMPA to pursue relocation efforts. “The state has put relocation of villages on fast track. Last year, it released Rs 54 crore under various schemes for the purpose and this year Rs 28 crore has been released. Priority is being given to villages inside reserves,” said Chief Wildlife Warden SWH Naqvi. However, this effort must be supplemented and supported by the centre.

Source: “Finally, Jamni makes way for Tadoba tigers”, Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, Mar 4, 2014; ‘Rantalodhi in Tadoba ready for rehabilitation’, Mazhar Ali, *TNN*, 7, November 2013; *TigerLink* inputs; “Maharashtra needs more than Rs 900 crore to free forests for tigers”, Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, 9, September 2013

Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve notified

The Navegaon and Nagzira wildlife sanctuaries in

eastern Maharashtra have together been notified as the Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve in November 2013. The reserve spans 655 sq kms and comprises New Nagzira, Koka and Navegaon wildlife sanctuaries as well as the area of the Navegaon National Park. This is the fifth tiger reserve in the state and India's 45th.

The state government excluded the 17.6 hectare Nagzira administrative and tourism complex in compartment numbers 97 and 125 of Nagzira sanctuary as well as 251.46 hectares of protected forest in the Koka wildlife sanctuary from the core area. The small (100 sq km) Koka wildlife sanctuary has 39 villages within one kilometer of the reserve boundary exerting immense grazing pressure.

Navegaon and Nagzira are two contiguous protected areas and are a very important tiger habitat in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. These forests represent habitat contiguity between the northern and southern halves of the Central Indian tiger landscape. To the southeast, Navegaon-Nagzira's tiger landscape extends all the way to Bastar (Indravati Tiger Reserve) in the Dandakarnya region at the Chhattisgarh-Orissa-Andhra Pradesh tri-junction.

Source: 'Grazing poses biggest threat to Navegaon-Nagzira tiger reserve' Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, 6 December, 2013; Govt notifies Navegaon-Nagzira as 5th tiger reserve', *TNN*, 13 December, 2013; "National Tiger Conservation Authority approved fifth tiger reserve in Maharashtra", Jagran Josh, November 30, 2013; *TigerLink* inputs

Illegal quarrying near Tipeswar

Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary is facing threats from illegal stone quarrying barely 1.5 kms from its boundaries. No such activity is supposed to take place within 10 kms of the boundary of a PA without the consent of the NBWL. According to the forest range officer, Tipeswar, UD Chavhan, four stones quarries have been operating near Kopamandvi beat adjoining Tipeswar since 1988 and 2007. "These mines in Patanbori fall within 1.5km from the sanctuary boundary near Yedlapur side causing environment degradation, besides threat to tigers, who have re-colonised Tipeswar recently. There are five tigers in the sanctuary," said Chavhan.

The quarries have been operating in violation of the Environment Protection Act, 1986. Efforts by forest officials to coordinate with district administration in curbing the quarrying has reportedly failed.

Source: "In a first, sambars to be shifted and reintroduced", Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, Nov 7, 2013; "Mines pose threat to Tipeswar sanctuary", Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, Nov 28, 2013

ORISSA

Khadias relocated from Similipal

Two settlements in the Similipal Tiger Reserve, one comprising 22 families at Upper Barhakamuda and another comprising ten families at Bahagarh, have been relocated from the reserve's core/critical tiger habitat under the voluntary relocation and rehabilitation scheme offered to all families dwelling in protected areas. They now lead a new life in the Asankudar village in Thakurmunda tehsil. The families belong to the Khadia tribe and earned their livelihood by gathering honey, resin and other non-timber forest produce within the reserve's best wildlife habitat.

While the relocation of the Khadias is a welcome move, the park management must now focus its efforts on relocating three large villages—Kabatghai, Jamuna Garh and Bakua—that remain in the core/critical tiger habitat. These villages have encroached large valleys, converted them into farmland and exert immense biotic pressure on the reserve.

Source: '32 Families from Core Area of Tiger Reserve Relocated', *The New Indian Express*, 9 December, 2013; *TigerLink* inputs

Satkosia: Nobody's tiger reserve

Last year conservationists and media rang alarm bells about the Satkosia Tiger Reserve being under imminent threat of local tiger extinction (See 'Satkosia: Another Sariska?', *TigerLink*, November 2013). Following these reports, the NTCA sent an appraisal committee headed by then NBWL member AJT Johnsingh to the reserve. While the committee's report is yet to be made public, it is learnt from reliable sources that the committee acknowledged the crisis of the reserve's tiger population. It prescribed a series of corrective measures including relocation of villages such as Raigoda, protection of prey base, and working towards preparing the reserve for receiving artificially reintroduced tigresses if required, as the reserve has not seen any signs of tiger breeding in years. The issue of the reserve not having a dedicated field director is also said to have been raised. Most of these issues—except possible reintroduction of tigresses—have been repeatedly stressed upon the state forest department in the past, including by the last Management Effectiveness Evaluation committee. The committee also advised there lease of a dispersing tiger captured in Bhubaneswar in Satkosia. This tiger unfortunately continues to languish in the Bhubaneswar zoo.

Despite this, the reserve continues to remain a stepchild for the State Government. Not only has the state failed to take any concrete action based on the NTCA's advise, it has actually taken regressive steps that will only further jeopardise the future of tigers and that of the reserve itself.

Discarding tigerland

Shockingly, the state has moved a proposal to reduce the area of the reserve by at least 159 sq kms by denotifying the parts of the reserve inhabited by villages. The proposal was passed at a meeting of the State Board for Wildlife. This blatantly populist and politically motivated move effected in the eve of assembly elections will cost the reserve dearly. As it is, the reserve has well over 100 villages inside it and suffers from tremendous anthropogenic pressure. Very little undisturbed habitat exists within the reserve and this has been one of the reasons for failure of tiger breeding. Almost every available valley in the reserve has been taken over by cultivation and a large number of livestock grazes in it. Consequently, no large meadows are available to wild herbivores that constitute prey base for tigers. Poaching, illegal timber felling and other illegal activities remain a serious threat to the reserve and emanate from the villages existing in and around the reserve.

Any such denotification will have to go through the rigour of getting approval from the NTCA, NBWL and the Supreme Court. Even so, the intent and priorities of the state government have become more than apparent with this move to slash Satkosia's tiger habitat.

No room for tigers

Villages inside the core/critical tiger habitat, fed up with constant loss of crops due to raiding by elephants and wild ungulates, have almost given up farming. Due to the subsequent loss of livelihood and denied benefits such as healthcare, access to roads, markets, etc., they have been petitioning since long to be relocated. Key among these has been the Raigoda village that sits in the middle of the best, least disturbed tiger habitat in the core area of the reserve. Petitions by the village, appeals by conservationists and advisories by the NTCA have fallen on deaf ears as the state and reserve management remain inexplicably unwilling to take any steps in this regard.

Protected Area without protectors

By the time this issue of *TigerLink* reaches readers, Satkosia Tiger Reserve will be functioning without a single range officer to guard it. All the range officers in

the reserve have either retired or been transferred, with the Raigoda ranger being the last one holding fort and due for retirement by the end of April. The Satkosia Wildlife Division—forming the majority of the reserve—has five ranges. With the absence of a dedicated field director (the RCCF, Angul, holds additional charge as Field Director, Satkosia), the reserve is left with just a newly appointed DFO and insufficient frontline staff. Two sanctioned posts of Assistant Conservator of Forests are vacant. Even the posts of frontline staff lie vacant, there are seventeen foresters instead of the sanctioned 25 and 49 forest guards against the required 60.

This sort of neglect towards the reserve has been the rule, rather than the exception, in the five years since Satkosia's notification as a tiger reserve. The result has been that the excellent protection measures enstated by previous managements that had broken the backbones of the timber and wildlife mafia is now failing rapidly once again. Poachers are becoming active and ungulate poaching has also increased.

The situation is such that the Field Director Pandav Behera wrote to the then Chief Wildlife Warden, JD Sharma, in November 2013 saying that Satkosia does not want the wild tiger—believed to have originated here—that had strayed into Bhubaneswar. He cited that the reserve did not want to risk the task "in absence of required manpower and other such infrastructure". He also conceded to the questionable status of tigers in the reserve by stating: "From the reports of Mahanadi Wildlife Division and Satkosia Wildlife Division, not enough pug marks have yet been detected. The scat collection by the DFOs is almost nil."

Recent reports from the field have shown a ray of hope in the form of a tigress whose evidences are being found. Fears that Satkosia was left with a single male tiger have thus been slightly reduced and now at least one male and one female tiger seem to be surviving in the reserve. Unless the state government goes all out to ensure that the reserve is made hospitable to its tigers, there is little hope for Satkosia.

Source: Aditya Chandra Panda; inputs from "Is Odisha Government dismantling Satkosia Tiger Reserve?", Siba Mohanty, *The New Indian Express*, 5, December 2013, Bhubaneswar; "Satkosia doesn't want its tiger back", Siba Mohanty, *The New Indian Express*, 30, November 2013, Bhubaneswar; "Not enough officials to man Satkosia Tiger Reserve", *The New Indian Express*, 24, April 2014, Angul

TAMIL NADU

Home Guards for conflict mitigation

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department has taken a

laudable initiative of training its Home Guard cadres to handle human-wildlife conflict in the Valparai region, which is affected by human-elephant conflict. The region is in the vicinity of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve.

The fortnight-long training programme for 30 home guards began on 24th November and covered safety measures needed to mitigate situations of human-wildlife conflict. It particularly focused on handling mobs who often go out of control, killing the wild animal/s involved or hindering the efforts of Forest and other enforcement agencies trying to control the situation. It also included preventive measures such as storing rice and salt at PDS shops in a manner that does not attract elephants, not leaving babies unattended as it left them vulnerable to leopards and avoiding crackers that frighten and disorient wild animals making them enter human habitation.

Rajiv K Srivastava, Field Director, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, said that the initiative was aimed at capacity-building among stakeholders to take swift action during an exigency. The Superintendent of Police, Coimbatore Rural, was also part of the programme.

Source: "Forest Dept. ties up with Home Guards to fight man-animal conflict", *The Hindu*, November 25, 2013

UTTARAKHAND

Pilibhit-Nandhaur corridor under ESZ

In a meeting held in October by Conservator of Forests, Western Circle, Vivek Pandey, and attended by Director, Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary, Pankaj Kumar, Member, State Board for Wildlife, Prerna Singh Bindra, and other forest officials, it was decided that the Kilpura-Khatima corridor connecting Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary with the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve shall be included within Nandhaur's Eco-Sensitive Zone. This decision shall play a crucial role in preserving the fragile connectivity with these two vital parts of the Terai Arc Tiger Landscape.

The proposal for the ESZ has been forwarded to the state government for approval.

A *TigerLink* report

UTTAR PRADESH

Cabinet approves Pilibhit TR

The Uttar Pradesh cabinet has taken an affirmative decision to notify the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, proposed to be carved out of about 1200 sq kms of reserve forest that received "in principle" approval from the NTCA in 2008. As an initial step Pilibhit was notified as a

sanctuary on 28th February 2014.

The notification of Pilibhit as a tiger reserve will play a decisive role in safeguarding the Terai Arc tiger landscape. The reserve forms a very important link between Rajaji-Corbett-Dudhwa-Katarniaghat-Suhelwa reserves in the Terai-Arc landscape. The reserve with a total area of 73,024.98 hectares will include the forest ranges of Mala, Mahof, Barahi, Deoria and Haripur which will be protected as consolidated habitat. The core area will cover 60,279.80 hectares and the remaining 12,745.18 hectares will be notified as buffer. The Kishanganj Wildlife Sanctuary which forms a part of the adjoining Dudhwa Tiger Reserve will form the connecting link between the two tiger reserves of the state.

As per the All India Tiger Estimate, 2010, Pilibhit holds an estimated population of 35 to 40 tigers. The notification of the tiger reserve will help narrow management focus onto tiger and wildlife conservation in the region instead of commercial timber culture and will bring in central funds and expertise for the same. Pilibhit has been chronically affected by human-tiger conflict and its management as a tiger reserve will help mitigate this.

"This is great news for the tiger. The adjoining Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand has also been proposed as another tiger reserve. Together they will form a compact block of over 1,200 sq km of protected tiger habitat", said Prerna Singh Bindra, former Member, National Board for Wildlife, who has been working with the State forest department on this issue. "Further, Pilibhit is also contiguous to Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in Nepal. This will greatly help consolidate the Shivlik-Gangetic plains tiger landscape. Other endangered wildlife like hispid hare, Bengal florican, swamp deer, rusty-spotted cat among other species will also benefit greatly," she added.

After its due notification the protection mechanisms will get a boost with funding and technical support from Project Tiger.

Source: "Pilibhit Set To Get Its Own Pride", *The Pioneer*, 01 March 2014, New Delhi; "Forest dept finalises plans for Pilibhit tiger reserve", Neha Shukla, *TNN*, January 17, 2014; *TigerLink* inputs

NTCA funds Amangarh

The NTCA has sanctioned a fund of Rs 24 lakhs for the Amangarh Tiger Reserve, notified as a buffer to Corbett Tiger Reserve in adjoining Uttarakhand, for its management as per guidelines prescribed for tiger reserves. The 80 sq km Amangarh reserve lies in the

Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh and is affected by high human-tiger conflict. The funds will go into training and equipping the local forest staff.

Source: "Centre releases fund for Amangarh tiger reserve, Neha Shukla, *TNN*, Jan 15, 2014

WEST BENGAL

Camera trap Buxa tigers: NTCA

Worried about the status of tigers in the Buxa Tiger Reserve, the NTCA has asked the reserve management to carry out an extensive camera trap analysis of the reserve under the guidance of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). A scat analysis report suggesting the presence of 19 tigers has received much criticism for being 'bloated' as the reserve management has failed to provide any photographic evidence of tigers. Located in the Dooars landscape of north Bengal, Buxa represents some of the richest tiger habitat in the easternmost frontiers of the Terai at the foothills of the Himalayas.

Source: "Where have all the Buxa tigers gone?" Krishnendu Mukherjee *TNN*, Nov 3, 2013

New PA in Sundarbans

A new wildlife sanctuary has been notified, constituting 550 sq kms of tiger habitat, adjoining the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve. The West Sundarban Wildlife Sanctuary is estimated to have about 10-12 tigers.

The notification of the new sanctuary will help in better protection and management of tigers and their habitat. It is an effort that will greatly strengthen the long term protection of the larger Sundarbans habitat.

Source: "Release of Sundarbans tigress put off", Krishnendu Mukherjee, *TNN*, December 11, 2013, "India plans new sanctuary in Sundarbans to boost tiger numbers", AFP, *Mint*, 28 November, 2013

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Website maps deforestation in realtime

A new website called Global Forest Watch (www.globalforestwatch.org) provides the first near-real-time look at the planet's forests using a combination of satellite data and user-generated reports. It is hoped that Global Forest Watch will help local governments and companies combat deforestation and save protected areas. The site is designed to be easy to use and understand, showing separate maps of forest loss and gain over the present

and past fourteen years, as well as maps of global tree cover, protected regions, effects of conservation efforts and more. Visitors to the site can view a map of the world for an idea of the big picture, or zoom in to see what's happening in their own backyards. Global Forest Watch's most valuable feature, its developers say, is that it can be updated with new information every month, detecting "changes in forest cover in near-real-time."

Using this as a tool, researchers revealed on 14th November through a study that some 2.3 million square kilometers of forest was lost between 2000 and 2012. Forest loss was highest in the tropics. Outside the tropics, Russia is losing upwards of 3.6 million hectares of forest every year, an area that is only partially offset by forest recovery. Even the United States experienced significant forest clearing between 2000 and 2012, amounting to a net loss of 12.6 million hectares.

The power of the map lies in its granularity which comes from its 30 meter resolution and consistency in defining forest cover. For example, while Brazil's sharp fall in forest loss since 2004 is widely known, the drop has been outpaced by surging deforestation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Paraguay, Bolivia, Zambia, and Angola. Counter intuitively, Indonesia experienced a jump in deforestation after it established a moratorium on granting new concessions in primary forest areas and peatlands.

Source: "Powered by Google, high resolution forest map reveals massive deforestation worldwide", Rhett A Butler, Mongabay, 14, November 2013, Google creates 'near-real-time' deforestation tracking tool, Salvador Rodriguez, LA Times, 20, February 2014; New Web App Uses Google Maps to Track Deforestation as it Happens, by Julie M Rodriguez, Inhabit, 24, February 2014

WildLeaks launched

A group of organisations fighting wildlife crime have come together to launch WildLeaks, the first global, secure online whistleblower platform dedicated to wildlife and forest crime. WildLeaks, in collaboration with the Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights, has implemented a secure platform in order to allow sources to submit sensitive information anonymously and securely.

Andrea Crosta, Project Leader of WildLeaks and Co-Founder of Elephant Action League said "Our first priority is to facilitate the identification of criminals and corrupt officials behind the poaching and trafficking of endangered species such as ivory, rhino horn, tigers, big cats, apes, pangolins and birds, as well as forest products. We also put a lot of effort into

protecting the people who chose to send us information, not only by providing a state-of-the-art secure system but also by managing and using the information in the correct way.”

WildLeaks is a not-for-profit collaborative project funded by the California based Elephant Action League (EAL) and managed by a small group of experienced individuals, including directors of environmental NGOs, environmental lawyers, accredited journalists, security professionals and ex-law enforcement officers.

WildLeaks also enjoys the collaboration of the Environmental Investigation Agency in London (EIA UK) and of 100Reporters, a US-based award-winning investigative journalists network working with whistleblowers and citizen watchdogs to expose corruption and heighten public accountability.

Source: “WildLeaks launched - the WikiLeaks for wildlife”, *The Ecologist*, 7th February 2014

3rd March is ‘World Wildlife Day’

On 20th December 2013, the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly announced 3rd March, the day of the adoption of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as World Wildlife Day, to celebrate and raise awareness of the world’s wild fauna and flora.

In its resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed the intrinsic value of wildlife and its various contributions, including ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic, to sustainable development and human well-being, and recognised the important role of CITES in ensuring that international trade does not threaten the species’ survival.

Source: “UN General Assembly proclaims 3 March as World Wildlife Day”, UN News Centre, 23 December, 2013

BANGLADESH

Massive coal plant threatens Sundarbans

On 22nd October, Bangladeshi and Indian officials were supposed to hold a ceremony laying the foundation stone for the Rampal power plant, a massive new coal-fired plant that will sit on the edge of—a mere 14 km—the Sundarbans, the world’s largest mangrove forest. However, the ceremony was abruptly cancelled. It was announced, instead, that the project had already been inaugurated in early October

by the countries’ heads of state via a less-ornate Skype call. While the governments say the change was made because of busy schedules, activists contend the sudden scuttling of the ceremony was more likely due to rising pressure against the coal plant, including a five-day march in September that attracted thousands.

“The march started from the capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka with nearly 5,000 participants but ended up at [near the Sundarbans] with over 20,000 people gathering after five days,” Mowdud Rahman an engineer with Southeast Asia Renewable Energy People’s Assembly (SEAREPA) told *Mongabay*.

Opponents contend that the 1,320 megawatt project could devastate the Sundarbans, Bangladesh’s largest forest and the nation’s last stronghold of the tiger. They argue that toxic pollution, water diversion to the plant, and heavy coal barge traffic could leave the Sundarbans an increasingly degraded ecosystem, threatening the livelihoods of half a million people who depend directly on the great mangrove forest. “No sane person in the world would agree to this project,” activist, Kallol Mustafa, told *Time* magazine.

However, the Bangladeshi government has responded vociferously to allegations that the coal plant will harm the Sundarbans. “[The Rampal coal plant] will not have any negative impact on the environment. Sundarbans is our safeguard [against natural disasters] and no power plant will be set up jeopardising the Sundarbans,” declared Bangladesh’s Power Secretary Monowar Islam. The government has dubbed those opposed to the plant as employing “propaganda.”

First conceived in 2010, the project is a partnership between the Bangladesh Power Development Board and India’s state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), which will share fifty-fifty ownership of the plant as well as the electricity it produces, although the NTPC is only fronting 15 percent of the cost.

According to the government, the coal plant will suck up 9,150 cubic meters of water from the river every hour and run it through a desalination plant. Since mangroves depend on a mix of fresh and salt water the fear is that water levels in the Passur river will not just run low, but also that the blend of fresh-and-salt water could be disrupted, dooming the mangroves.

“The power plant’s proposed location is on the bank of Passur River, which is one of the only two rivers that bring fresh water to the Sundarbans,” explains Abdullah Abu Diyan a local environmentalist and

guide. “Any change in Passur’s quality might be extremely harmful for the entire ecosystem.” Furthermore, water dumped back into Passur River will be up 20 to 25 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the river water, threatening aquatic species. Coal-fired power plants also spread a toxic menagerie of chemicals into both the air and water, including arsenic, mercury, lead, nickel, and radium. The Rampal coal plant will also require around 4.72 million tons of coal every year to burn which will mean approximately a ship a day carrying coal through wildlife-rich waters. Coal spilling off the barges may lead to possible water contamination, while the ships will also cause daily noise pollution possibly putting species at risk, including dolphins. Just last year, Bangladesh set aside three new areas of the Sundarbans as Wildlife Reserves for the dolphins.

In January 2013, the Bangladeshi government released a 676-page Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Rampal coal plant. Instead of alleviating concerns, the EIA raised new issues. For example, the EIA argues that the possibility of acid rain from the Rampal coal plant is “very low” due to mitigation methods and the type of coal burned. “Acid rain is such a dangerous hazard [that] before deciding to establish a coal based power plant near Sundarbans, one needs to be ensured that there is zero possibilities of these kinds of hazards,” notes Rahmun.

Some scientists have also blasted the government’s EIA for downplaying threats and spreading misinformation. The government assessment treats the Sundarbans as a “residential and rural area” and not an “ecologically critical area.” That designation change allows the government to impose lower thresholds for pollutants.

Furthermore, critics say the government had already tacitly approved the coal plant before the EIA was even written or submitted to the Environment Ministry for approval. In 2010 the government had already obtained 1,834 hectares of land for the project, an acquisition that has already pushed many locals off their ancestral land.

Around 80 percent of the Sundarbans forest lies within Bangladesh, while the rest is in the Indian state of Bengal. The Sundarbans—both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Ramsar Site—covers an area of 10,000 square kilometers. It is the last remaining habitat of Bengal tiger in Bangladesh and is home to a wealth of species including endangered ones such as the Gangetic river dolphin.

Irrawaddy dolphin etc. Ironically, Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina, who is the force behind this project in a Climate Summit in 2009 stated that “Now is the time to show a common wisdom and make the right decisions for a greener and more habitable world. Future generations will judge us for the choices we make today.”

Source: “Bangladesh plans massive coal plant in world’s biggest mangrove forest”, Jeremy Hance, *Mongabay*, November 11, 2013

BHUTAN

Camera traps to be set up nationwide

Bhutan shall be carrying out its first nation-wide survey of wild tigers using the capture-recapture camera trap method. The Department of Forest and Park Services is undertaking the survey to understand the population, density, distribution and habitat status of tigers in Bhutan. Chief Forestry Officer (CFO) with Thrumshingla National Park, Ugyen Namgyal, said about 1,500 cameras will be used for the survey.

A formal launch of the survey on 21st February saw about 60 villagers of Rekhe village attending the program, where they were educated on the significance of tigers in the ecosystem, and also briefed about the cameras.

According to the CFO, the department has divided the survey into three regions: east, central and south. The survey will start in the southern region from the royal Manas National Park in Sarpang. While the survey in the east will be carried out from Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary, Chukha will be the starting point for the central region. The cameras will be stationed for three months in one region, and a monitoring team is to collect and observe the findings twice every month.

Namgyal commented that the exercise would be a challenge, given the tough terrain, in some cases, it would take about a week just to reach the camera stations.

Bhutan is currently believed to have about 115 to 150 wild tigers.

Source: “Camera traps for tigers to be set up nationwide”, Tshering Wangdi, *Kuensel Online*, February 26, 2014

CHINA

Tigers slaughtered in show of stature

Twenty tigers were slaughtered and eaten for the entertainment of businessmen and officials in China. Zhanjiang police raided a residential building in Leizhou on 14th March and found 16 people slaughtering a tiger, police said on their official

microblog. Sixteen members of a gang believed to have slaughtered a number of tigers over the years have been arrested in Zhanjiang, southern Guangdong, revealing a secret trade that has supplied blood sport, traditional remedies and exotic delicacies to wealthy customers and local officials, the Nanfang Daily reports. Video footage of a killing two-years-ago showed a tiger trapped in an iron cage, being prodded in its mouth with an electrified iron mass and passing out after being electrocuted for more than 10 seconds, the paper said.

Local officials and prominent businesspeople gathered to watch the tigers being killed to show off their social stature, it said.

Police seized the carcass of the tiger, believed to have originated in Vietnam and shipped alive to China. Assorted tiger derivatives meant to be sold in the black market and a cache of weapons used to capture the big cats, including knives, bullets and stun guns were also seized.

According to the report, watching tigers being killed, then cooked and eaten had become popular among wealthy businessmen and government officials in Leizhou and Zhanjiang. The report said private businessmen would often pay for the officials to attend such events which served up 'exotic' banquets with tiger meat and tiger-bone wine.

This is the third such case reported by local police, the others being in 2007 and 2010. It is estimated as many as 20 tigers were slaughtered and sold at local markets in that time. The report said the criminal syndicates already have buyers for the meat or bones lined up before they smuggle the tigers from Vietnam. The gang would procure live tigers from Vietnam, and as tigers in the wild in Vietnam are very rare it is believed that most of these are brought in from tiger farms, which indulge in this illegal trade.

Trade in tiger parts was banned nationwide in 1993, although by all accounts the demand, and the trade, continues unabated.

Source: "Arrested gang believed to have slaughtered more than 10 wild tigers", He Huifeng, South China Morning Post, 26 March, 2014, "Tigers slaughtered in show of social stature for Guangdong businessmen", *The Guardian*, 27 March, 2014

Dead tiger found in an SUV

Two suspected poachers have been caught with a dead Siberian tiger in the back of their SUV. The tiger's carcass was found shoved inside a plastic bag when police in the Lucheng district of Wenzhou, eastern

Zhejiang province became suspicious after spotting two men loading what looked like a body in a bag into the back of a white Toyota on 8th January. Experts believe that the 150kg tiger was not poached from the wild and the animal reportedly had no obvious wounds on its body. Officials are now investigating whether the tiger has a computer chip that would link it to a tiger farm, which are known to indulge in such illegal trade.

Source: "Dead Siberian tiger found in the back of poachers' SUV", Christine Fleming, MSN News, 10 January, 2014

INDONESIA

New road fatal for Sumatran tiger

From Russia to India to Indonesia, to the UK and US – people can't get enough of tigers. We name our sports teams after them, sing songs about their eye and refer to anyone (or anything) fierce as a "tiger", whether it's a particularly sexy person or a particularly robust economy.

Ah, but there's the rub. No matter how much we might like tigers, economies trump them every time. We'll click millions of times on videos of Sumatran tiger cubs learning how to swim at the National Zoo in Washington, DC because of the dopamine hit their innate cuteness provides, but as a species, we're not really that interested in their survival.

A birth at a zoo is considered a conservation success. But what then is a 51 km (31 miles) road through the Harapan Rainforest, a crucial area of remaining habitat for the Sumatran Tiger? Progress, I suppose? Well, at least we have the swimming cubs in Washington!

And it's not just tigers. It never is. The Harapan Rainforest is one of those pesky biodiversity hotspots that keep getting in the way of big companies tearing up the Earth in order to get at some dirty fuel and make a few bucks for a few years before bugging off in search of new plunder.

Here's what a spokesman for the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has to say about Harapan (via the Observer): It is so rich in wildlife that it can be described as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Animals found in the forest include the Sumatran tigers, elephants, otters, porcupines, bears and turtles. Over 300 species of birds breed there including hornbills, eagles, storks, parrots, kingfishers and rare pheasants. The rafflesia flower – the world's biggest – blooms on the forest floor, and a huge variety of insects can be found too.

This forest is particularly important for the Sumatran tiger population. Such fragmentation will increase the incidence of inbreeding and may even cause the extinction of tigers and other wide ranging species.

The planned 51 km and 50 meter (165 foot) wide road is for transporting coal from five mines in south Sumatra to the Lalanriver in Jambi province. Not only will the road necessitate the clearing of 154 hectares of the Harapan Rainforest, it will fragment it and provide better access to illegal loggers and hunters. So it's basically a "win-win" for all kinds of groups that profit from environmental destruction. The road, which would enable 850 truckloads of coal a day to be exported more easily to power stations across south-east Asia, would spilt the Harapan rainforest into two physically separate concessions, allowing hunters and illegal loggers access to the forest, while restricting wildlife movement.

Conservationists believe that the road would compromise the Harapan rainforest irreparably and unjustly and is entirely unnecessary. They say that alternative routes for coal transport are available which use existing wide roads. These alternative routes would be no greater distance than the route of the proposed new road.

The Harapan rainforest is licensed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with the backing of the British government, the Co-op bank, the EU and bird lovers around the world. Harapan is a flagship conservation project of the Indonesian government which gave its first ecosystem restoration licences to RSPB and its conservation partners in 2007. The government is hoping to designate two million hectares by 2020.

Source: "New road could mean extinction for Sumatran tiger", Graham Land, Asian Correspondent, Nov 11, 2013; "Critically endangered species in Sumatra on the road to extinction", John Vidal, *The Guardian*, 9 November, 2013

Fatwa Issued Against Wildlife Trafficking

Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body has issued a *fatwa*, or edict, against illegal wildlife trafficking. This unprecedented step by the Indonesian Council of Ulama, in the country with the world's largest Muslim population, declared illegal hunting or illegal trading of endangered species to *beharam* (forbidden).

The *fatwa* itself is call to action, requiring Indonesia's 200 million Muslims to take an active role in protecting and conserving endangered species, including tigers, rhinos, elephants, and orangutans. Invoking passages from the Koran, the *fatwa* is believed to be the first of



Courtesy: Rohan Chakravarty

its kind in the world. "This *fatwa* is issued to give an explanation, as well as guidance, to all Muslims in Indonesia on the sharia law perspective on issues related to animal conservation," said Hayu Prabowo, chair of the Council of Ulama's environment and natural resources body.

The *fatwa* supplements existing Indonesian law. "People can escape government regulation," Hayu said, "but they cannot escape the word of God."

zSource: "First Ever Fatwa Issued Against Wildlife Trafficking", Bryan Christy, *National Geographic*, March 4, 2014

Endangered tiger killed in Sumatra

A young Sumatran tiger was shot and killed by a coffee farmer in Jambi Province. The farmer reported that the tiger, a four to six month old female, had been in his coffee plantation since 28th January and that he was unable to return to the village—instead, he was forced to spend the night in a makeshift hut with his wife and small child. The farmer claims that the following day as he tried to leave the hut, the tiger chased him and he shot it in self defense.

Source: "Endangered tiger killed in Sumatra", Loren Bell, Mongabay, February 1, 2014

Police nab illegal wildlife traffickers

Police in Indonesia's Aceh province have arrested two wildlife trafficking suspects, allegedly the force behind

a number of tiger poaching rings, operating in the forests of northern Sumatra. The arrests followed a month-long investigation and an undercover sting operation in which police seized several illegal animal parts. Posing as potential buyers, undercover police caught the suspects with stuffed Sumatran tigers and other illegal contraband including a clouded leopard, two golden cats and a sun bear skin.

The suspects were arrested on 3rd January and are believed to be linked to a network of rare animal traders in Aceh's Gayo Highlands and a known tiger kingpin in Medan. If found guilty, they face up to five years in prison and a fine of Rp 100 million (\$8,200).

Police believe the suspects acquired the rare animals from poachers in and around Central Aceh. The area has a reputation as a center for the illegal wildlife trade, fueled by high demand for stuffed endangered animals throughout Aceh. Despite its reputation as a poaching hub, arrests and prosecutions for wildlife crimes in the province are rare.

Source: "Indonesia police nab illegal wildlife traffickers in sting operation", Diana Parker, *Mongabay*, January 12, 2014

NEPAL

Rail & Roads through Chitwan: fallout in India

When Nepal's Finance Minister Shankar Koirala presented the annual budget last July, he highlighted "projects of national pride" that he said would be the "lifeline for the economy". These included two major transport projects, both of which threaten the Chitwan National Park, in the South of Nepal, bordering India: the East-West Electric Railway and the Tarai Hulaki Highway.

The proposed routes of the two projects both cut through the Park, threatening decades of conservation efforts that have protected tiger and rhinoceros populations. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Chitwan is also a vital economic resource for local communities. Last year the park admitted over 1,50,000 tourists who brought in nearly \$2 million in entry fees alone.

The East-West Electric Railway

"What will remain of the National Park when we have trains passing across the protected areas?" rues the Chief Warden of Chitwan National Park, Kamal Jung Kunwar.

A feasibility study prepared in 2010 for the East-West Railway first took the tracks along the foot of the Someswor Hills near the famous Tiger Tops Resort in

Meghauli. But that region is an important corridor for wildlife migration and the National Park authorities objected to it. Instead, it was proposed that the railway alignment follow a northern route along the existing Hetauda-Bharatpur East-West Highway, which skirts the north side of the Park along the East Rapti river, a tributary of the Narayani.

An analysis by the Department of Railways evaluates two possible routes for the new railway, but each cuts through the park, according to an article in *The Nepali Times*. However, other solutions exist. One would be for the new railway to skirt the park entirely, following an already existing highway that runs east to west. But this option wasn't included in the report, supposedly because it would be a longer route—adding just 30 km. It appears that cutting the park in two is preferable. Concerns about the project are now growing. Hemanta Mishra, conservationist and an architect of the Chitwan National Park says, "A railway line and a road through Chitwan without a comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment would undo 40 years of investment by the government, private sector, and the local community."

Agrees chief warden Kunwar, "If we cut the national park into pieces with road and rail, it will impact and disturb crucial breeding habitats and ultimately lead to a decline of tigers and rhino populations." This route will also destroy the link between the Chitwan and India's Valmiki Tiger Reserve, which currently form a huge area of contiguous wildlife habitat.

Director General of the Department of Railways Rajeswor Man Singh, however, insists that it's too early to say with certainty if the railway will go through the Park. "We still haven't prepared a final report and we will recommend the contractor to take all precautions to make sure the national park is not disturbed."

But, five kilometres of railway track has been commissioned westward from Simara to the southeast of the Park—effectively commencing construction along a southern alignment. The Department of Railways is also requisitioning land along the proposed route, and five border links to Indian railways.

Tarai Hulaki Highway

The proposed Tarai Hulaki Highway—also known as the 'Postal Road'—on the southern boundary of the Chitwan National Park, and the feeder roads will criss-cross the sanctuary in eight locations. "Upgrading the feeder roads around Chitwan and Narayani River will cut through the National Park", says Chief Warden

Kamal Jung Kunwar. He added that, "The government is trying to circumvent the Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environment Assessment despite our constant reminders."

The Hulaki Road network is an India-assisted project launched in 2006 and entails upgrading old postal and feeder roads, totaling over 1,450 km across the Terai. It will be built by an Indian construction company, GR Gravar Joint Venture. Almost two thirds of the cost is to be paid by the Indian Government.

Project chief Bijendra Bade Shrestha insists that the proposed route of the feeder roads in Chitwan National Park can be changed based on an Environment Impact Assessment. Shrestha claims that his office has asked the Park to conduct the study. But Kunwar says he has received no such request. It all looks like a case of 'build now, argue about it later, once the damage has already been done.'

The environmental logic of the case is absolutely clear. Any major new transport infrastructure should be directed towards existing transport corridors where damage has already been done, and additional damage will therefore have a minimal impact. That means the route preferred by the Department of Railways due to its shorter alignment and lower cost carries huge environmental costs, and will seriously fragment the contiguous wildlife habitat that extends from Chitwan over the international border into India's Valmiki Tiger Reserve.

The effect will be all the more serious in combination with the Hulaki Highway and its planned network of feeder roads. Taken together the two threaten to open a new 'development corridor' in the heart of one of Asia's richest wildlife refuges.

Source: Bhrikuti Rai and Sunir Pandey, *The Ecologist*, 12, February 2014, Chitwan; "Proposed rail and road projects could devastate Nepal's tigers and rhinos", Jeremy Hance, *Mongabay*, 6, February 2014

RUSSIA

Tiger population rises

The population of the Amur tigers in the Khabarovsk Region National Park has reached ten, approximately three times more than it was three-years-ago, when the "North Tiger" project was first implemented, the Amur branch of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) of Russia reports. The increase in the number of the Amur tigers is a great success of the Khabarovsk Region National Park's staff. Deputy Director for protecting the territory of the Anyuysky National Park, Stepan Kirillin said that they are strictly protecting

and monitoring tigers and have also started a sustained programme to increase the population of wild ungulates. Penalties for killing rare species was also increased.

Source: "Population of Amur tigers in Khabarovsk's National Park rises three times since last year", Natalia Kovalenko, *The Voice of Russia*, March 14, 2014.

Tiger shot dead

Inspectors from a nature reserve in Russia's Far East found the body of an Amur tiger that appears to have been shot by poachers and left near a highway, the park said in a statement. Except for a bullet hole below the right shoulder blade, no other wounds were found on the tiger. The adult male tiger was discovered on 21st November last year in Leopard Land park bordering China. Police opened an investigation into illegal hunting, an offense that is punishable by up to two years in prison.

The World Wildlife Fund said earlier this year that at least 19 Amur tigers had been killed by poachers in Russia since 2012.

Source: "Amur Tiger Shot Dead in Far East Reserve", *The Moscow Times*, 22, November 2013

Russian teams trained in Panna

In a bid to boost tiger conservation efforts globally, the International Fund for Animal Welfare-Wildlife Trust of India in collaboration with the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) hosted a two-member team of Russian forest officers in India under the 'Tiger Watch Programme' from 24th February till 4th March 2014. Since 2005, 14 Russian forest officials have visited India so far under the programme which has concentrated on giving the officers training on tiger conservation. Officials are oriented on basic management practices of monitoring tigers in one of the more high density ranges of the country.

Source: "Russian team being trained in Panna to boost tiger conservation", Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, Mar 2, 2014

THAILAND

Tiger cubs in plastic boxes smuggled

Police have arrested two men suspected of smuggling tiger cubs and hundreds of other animals in Thailand. They were discovered in the back of a truck in the north-east of the country, reportedly heading to neighbouring Laos.

Source: "Tiger cubs in plastic boxes smuggled as delicacies", *BBC*, 21 February 2014

UNITED STATES

Million-dollar reward against wildlife crime

The United States announced on 12th November a million dollar reward for information to help dismantle one of Asia's largest wildlife-trafficking syndicates. In what officials said was the first time such a reward had been offered, the State Department said it was targeting a syndicate based in Laos, the impoverished and authoritarian Southeast Asian country whose government, investigators say, has been uncooperative in stopping a thriving trade of African ivory, rhino horns, tiger bones and endangered animals harvested by the thousands from Asian jungles.

In a statement, Secretary of State John Kerry said the syndicate, the Xaysavang Network, "facilitates the killing of endangered elephants, rhinos and other species for products such as ivory." The network, he said, spans South Africa, Mozambique, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and China. Investigators say the syndicate is headed by a Laotian businessman, Vixay Keosavang, who was the subject of an article in *The New York Times* in March.

Source: "US Offers Reward In Wildlife-Trade Fight", Thomas Fuller, NY Times, November 13, 2013

VIETNAM

Man caught cooking tiger bones

Police in the north central province of Ha Tinh caught a man cooking tiger bones to make traditional medicine at his home in early November, TuoiTre (Youth) newspaper reported. Based on tips from villagers, local police identified and raided the suspect Nguyen Khanh Thuyet's house and caught him red-handed cooking two pots of tiger bones in the kitchen. The police also found a tiger skin, tiger claws and a chamois head in the fridge.

Thuyet confessed to the crime and faces an administrative fine for trading wild animal parts.

Source: "Vietnam man caught cooking tiger bones", *Thanhnie News*, November 8, 2013

WILDLIFE CRIME

Sansar Chand dead

Notorious wildlife trader Sansar Chand died of cancer on 18th March in a hospital in Jaipur due to lung cancer and related ailments. He had been taken to Alwar from Delhi in connection with a case related to the killing of

tigers in Sariska Tiger Reserve and was shifted to Jaipur when he developed some health complications. He was 60.

Sansar Chand was the face of wildlife crime in India—the CBI estimates that through his network, he controlled over 50 per cent of the wildlife trade in India, and the scale of his involvement can be judged from the fact that in 2006, under interrogation by the CBI, Chand admitted to selling 470 tiger skins and 2,130 leopard skins to just four clients in Nepal and Tibet. He was believed to have been the main culprit in the extinction of tigers in Sariska. Chand joined the wildlife trade before turning 13, it is believed that he had been initiated by his grandfather Pannalal into what was the family 'business'. Their house was raided when he was 16 and recovered skin of a tiger, 567 lizards, 85 otters and a red panda. He was convicted but released under probation since he was a juvenile. It was a time when poachers were generally let off with small fines. He had learnt how to set iron traps for tigers and leopards from Bawaria hunters—one of 200-odd nomadic tribes in India—of Ludhiana and Samalkha areas who visited the family.

One of the four children Sansar Chand had with Rani, whom he married in 1978, Akash, also joined the trade. In 2003, he divorced Rani and married Nirmala George, with whom he had two children, though Rani continued to help him in the trade. In January 2003, the police in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, nabbed him with two leopard pelts from a train. Until then, Sansar Chand was never caught in possession of any contraband, a key condition for prosecution under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. In the summer of 2004, he was convicted. Soon, he skipped bail and remained 'wanted'. In October 2004, when the Rajasthan Police arrested Rani and Akash, they also seized seven diaries and a mobile SIM card. These allegedly contained contact details of wildlife inspectors in Delhi, a senior local politician and the usual suspects: dealers and poachers. Records were found of sale of skins worth Rs 1.38 crore.

On 29th June 2005, the Delhi Police finally got hold of him near his longtime den in Sadar Bazar. It is believed that he continued to manage his business even from jail through his family and associates.

Source: "Wriggling Out Of The Skin", Jay Mazoomdaar, *Tehelka*, 27, July 2013, Issue 30 Volume 10; "Sansar Chand is India's deadliest poacher. Here is how he has escaped legal traps for 40 years", by Raman Kirpal, *Tehelka*, 7, August 2010

Tiger claws seized

Forest officials have caught two people trying to sell

tiger claws at Masinagudi, adjoining Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. A team headed by Masinagudy Range Officer L Sundarraj tracked the culprits, hailing from Moyar, on 20th November.

Source: "Tiger claws seized; two held", *The Hindu*, 21, November 2013, Ooty

Tiger skins seized

Police in Sangli (Maharashtra) have seized two tiger skins in the third week of March from seven persons who are allegedly part of a racket dealing in tiger skin. They were arrested. Although the source of the skins is still not known, the incident has brought to focus a threat to the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.

Source: "Seven arrested in Sangli with suspected tiger skins", Samrat Phadnis, *TNN*, 18, March 2014

Wanted poacher arrested

One of the most wanted tiger skin traders in India, Ranjeet Singh Bawaria, has finally been caught by the Maharashtra forest department officials. He was arrested from Golukonda village in Vizianagaram district of neighbouring Andhra Pradesh on 15th December. The Andhra Pradesh Police assisted the Maharashtra Forest Department officials in the operation. Five other associates have also been arrested during the raid.

Ranjitsingh is a notorious trader and poacher who specialised in the trade of tiger skins. He is linked to another notorious tiger skin trader Sansar Chand, who died recently.

Source: "India's most wanted tiger skin trader Ranjitsingh Bawaria arrested", *CNN-IBN*, 16, December 2013, Hyderabad

Poachers arrested with tiger parts

On 15th December Uttar Pradesh police arrested 11 persons from a place near Badigarh Rehar police station in Bijnor district on charges of poaching. They were found in possession of two tiger skins and bones. The gang had killed two tigers that had apparently strayed out of neighbouring Corbett Tiger Reserve a few days before. The poachers had installed several traps in and around the reserve.

The killing of the two tigers as 2013 drew to a close served as a reminder of how difficult the past year has been for the country's tiger population. At least 42 tigers have been killed by poachers across the country in 2013. This is the highest number of poaching cases recorded in a year since 2005. Worryingly, most of the big cats were killed in and around Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Source: "Tiger poaching spirals, Uttarakhand registers maximum cases", Kumar Sambhav S, *Down to Earth*, 20, December 2013

Poachers from MP in BRT sanctuary

In an intensified search and manhunt launched by the police in the backdrop of reports of poachers from Madhya Pradesh sneaking into tiger habitats in Karnataka, Kollegal Police on 28th December arrested a gang of nine tribals who were moving suspiciously in the Gundal project forest area, part of the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary, and recovered various tiger parts from them. Police and forest staff found 15 tiger claws, two molar teeth and Rs two lakh cash inside a tent they were put up in. Police also recovered two motorcycles bearing MP registration numbers and two mobile phones from them. Chamarajnagar SP P Rajendra Prasad said that these tribals had pitched their tents near Hanur town and were camping there for many days in the guise of selling plastic utensils and other consumer goods.

Source: "Karnataka police nab tiger poachers", MB Maramkal, *TNN*, 29, December 2013, Chamarajanagar

Police officer caught poaching

Forest department staff arrested the Deputy Superintendent of Police of the Mysore CID wing, TK Dharmesh and five others for poaching deer in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve at midnight on 30th January. Twenty-five cartridges of ammunition, a jeep, a battery-operated modern rifle and a double-barrel gun were seized from the arrested. They had entered the Omkar range of the reserve around midnight and shot a spotted deer. On hearing the gunshot, forest staff confronted the jeep-borne poachers on a jungle trail.

Source: "DySP, five others arrested for poaching deer in Bandipur", *Deccan Herald*, 31, January 2014

Tiger poisoned in NSTR

Five persons were arrested on 31st January for allegedly killing a tiger in the Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve near Mannanur in Mahabubnagar district. Police also recovered its claws from them. They had poisoned the carcass of a cow that the tiger had killed. The tiger died about two kilometres from the carcass after it fed on the poisoned meat. The incident took place on 16th January.

Source: "Five held for killing tiger", *The Hindu*, 1, February 2014

OFFICIALLY RECORDED TIGER MORTALITIES, NOVEMBER 2013-APRIL 2014

S. NO.	DATE	LOCATION	STATE	CAUSE OF DEATH
1	1 Nov 2013	Ramnagar Territorial Division (Near Corbett Tiger Reserve)	Uttarakhand	Not known
2	9 Nov 2013	Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Not known
3	12 Nov 2013	Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Not known
4	21 Nov 2013	South Wayanad Forest Division	Kerala	Not known
5	26 Nov 2013	Barhi Range, Pilibhit Forest Division	Uttar Pradesh	Poisoned by locals
6	1 Dec 2013	Kohora Range, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve	Assam	Not known
7	19 Dec 2013	Bandipur Tiger Reserve	Karnataka	Not known
8	22 Dec 2013	Aampokhra Range, Terai West Forest Division (Near Corbett Tiger Reserve)	Uttarakhand	Snared to death
9	28 Dec 2013	HD Kote Range, Mysore Forest Division	Karnataka	Not known
10	1 Jan 2014	Compt No. 271, Raipur Range, Melghat Tiger Reserve	Maharashtra	Not known
11	21 Jan 2014	North Nilgiri Forest Division, Near Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve	Tamil Nadu	Not known
12	23 Jan 2014	Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve	Andhra Pradesh	Not known (Later found to be poisoned)
13	23 Jan 2014	Ooty	Tamil Nadu	Shot by Police after being declared 'maneater'
14	24 Jan 2014	Mudumalai Tiger Reserve	Tamil Nadu	Infighting
15	25 Jan 2014	Ulandi Range, Anamalai Tiger Reserve	Tamil Nadu	Not known
16	31 Jan 2014	Kanha Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Not known
17	8 Feb 2014	Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Not known
18	9 Feb 2014	Kanha Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Not known (3-4 month old cub)
19	16 Feb 2014	Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve	Tamil Nadu	Not known
20	20 Feb 2014	Burapahar Range, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve	Assam	Not known
21	10 Mar 2014	Madanpur Range, Valmiki Tiger Reserve	Bihar	Not known
22	11 Mar 2014	Kisli Range, Kanha Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Infighting
23	17 Mar 2014	Anamalai Tiger Reserve	Tamil Nadu	Not known
24	19 Mar 2014	Bheroni Camp, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve	Assam	Not known
25	21 Mar 2014	Compt No. N-1, East Gadapu Beat, Pipal Padav Range	Uttarakhand	Not known
26	25 Mar 2014	Mora Gyati, Banshar Range, Manas Tiger Reserve	Assam	Not known
27	9 Apr 2014	Nagarhole Tiger Reserve	Karnataka	Not known
28	15 Apr 2014	Gebua, Terai West Forest Division	Uttarakhand	Not known
29	15 Apr 2014	Valmiki Tiger Reserve	Bihar	Not known
30	18 Apr 2014	Chethalyath Range, South Wayanad Forest Division	Kerala	Not known
31	19 Apr 2014	Orang National Park	Assam	Not known

Source: National Tiger Conservation Authority/TRAFFIC-India(www.tigernet.nic.in)

OFFICIAL STATISTICS OF SEIZURE OF TIGER PARTS, NOVEMBER 2013-APRIL 2014

S. NO.	DATE	LOCATION	STATE	SEIZURE INFO
1	15 Dec 2013	Near Badigarh Rehar Police Station	Uttar Pradesh	Tiger skin, skeleton seized, 12 arrested by Police, Forest Dept.
2	13 Mar 2014	Sangli District (Near Sahyadri TR)	Maharashtra	Tiger skin seized, one arrested
3	17 Mar 2014	Sangli District (Near Sahyadri TR)	Maharashtra	Tiger skins

Source: National Tiger Conservation Authority/TRAFFIC-India(www.tigernet.nic.in)

TIGER MORTALITY STATISTICS, NOVEMBER 2013- APRIL 2014

STATE	SKIN & BONE	POACHED	FOUND DEAD	SHOT BY FD/POLICE OR KILLED BY VILLAGERS	INFIGHTING	FIGHT WITH OTHER ANIMALS	TOTAL
ANDHRA PRADESH		1					1
ASSAM			1		4		5
BIHAR			2				2
KARNATAKA	15 claws, 2 canines	1	2				4
KERALA			1		1		2
MADHYA PRADESH			3		3		6
MAHARASHTRA	2 skins		1				3
TAMIL NADU	12 claws		3	1	1	1	7
UTTAR PRADESH	2 skins, 2 skeletons, fat +Flesh	1					4
UTTARAKHAND		2			2		4
Total Tiger Deaths	7	5	13	1	11	1	38

Poaching & Seizure	12
Found Dead	13
Shot by FD/Police or killed by villagers	1
Infighting	11
Fight with other animals	1
TOTAL	38

Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI)

Crackdown on traders continues

A tiger skin trader, Kalla alias Wakil alias Hawa Singh, wanted in cases of trafficking skins from Maharashtra, has been arrested in Najibabad in Uttar Pradesh on 4th November. His arrest was a result of the interrogation of Sarju Bagdi—a major tiger skin trader arrested earlier in 2013. Kalla was arrested by a joint team of Uttarakhand Forest Department and Uttar Pradesh Police.

Based on Sarju's statement, the forest department registered a preliminary offence report in Ranala from where Kalla is stated to have procured one skin.

Another poacher in the network, Dalbir, was arrested on 21st November by the WCCB from Panipat district of Haryana. He was the 26th criminal dealing with tiger poaching and trading who has been arrested in a major crackdown by several state forest departments led by Maharashtra throughout the latter half of 2013.

Source: "Another tiger skin trader Kalla nabbed from Uttarakhand", Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, 5, November 2013; "Another tiger poacher held in Haryana", Vijay Pinjarkar, *TNN*, 22, November 2013

SCIENCE & RESEARCH

Tales of a dispersing tigress

A recent study published in *Tropical Conservation Science* has revealed fascinating levels of tolerance and adaptation in tigers as they inhabit and persist in human dominated landscapes while dispersing in search of suitable habitat. The study shows that tigers can exist without being detected by people and go to extreme extents to avoid conflict in order to achieve safe passage over hundreds of kilometres.

The study, led by large carnivore biologist Vidya Athreya tracked a wild tigress fitted with a satellite collar as she dispersed in the Vidarbha region of the Central Indian Tiger Landscape. The tigress had been rescued from a water duct she had fallen into in the Nagpur district of Maharashtra by forest department staff on 12th October 2011 and was released on 27th November 2011 in a forest near her site of capture.

It was observed that she remained in the same forest for almost a month until 25th December and then started moving eastwards into a human dominated landscape. Human density in the district averages 409 people per sq km and village density here averages 5.3 villages per sq km. In the immediate area of the tigress' vicinity, human density was still as high as 200 people per sq km. The landscape she now inhabited was a mix of forests, agricultural fields, villages, schools, roads,

etc. The home range of the tigress in such a challenging landscape encompassed a massive 431 sq kms. She avoided human detection by being almost entirely nocturnal and resting in foliage and shade by day. The scientists tracking her found that she often rested very close to places where humans were active by day—sometimes as close as 100 metres—but no untoward incidents ever occurred. She was subsisting largely on a diet of wild pig, though she also killed cattle and even scavenged.

The scientists lost track of her after her collar ran out of battery and stopped functioning, but she was photographed a year later in April 2013 just 40 kms from her site of release, indicating that she was still inhabiting the same region.

The area is in the vicinity of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, Pench Tiger Reserve and Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve, all of which are source sites from which tigers can potentially disperse into the rest of the landscape.

During the study, the tigress demonstrated the ability of her species to cross human habitation, agricultural fields, roads and railway lines in their search for safe habitat when moving from one PA to another. However, the authors warn that "The presence of large felids outside PAs implies that conflict is imminent" and that activities such as mining, construction of canals and deforestation cause fragmentation of forests and increase human-tiger conflict. Yet, studies such as these show that in areas where large carnivores are forced to use human dominated landscapes to disperse, conflict remains minimal particularly if precautions and safeguards are taken by people.

However, the ability of tigers to disperse through human dominated landscapes does not, in any way, justify the loss of natural forest corridors, fragmentation of forested landscapes and the loss of habitat linkages.

Very few studies on tigers have been carried out outside Protected Areas. Studies such as these are crucial to understand tiger dispersal and behaviour in vast tracts of forests and other, less suitable but 'tiger permeable' landscapes that exist outside the PA network which these large carnivores use to disperse between suitable habitats or to inhabit when they have 'spilled out' of their natal habitats. These studies will go a long way in helping shape our understanding of human-tiger conflict and in our endeavour to keep tiger landscapes intact and safe from fragmentation.

Source: "Movement and activity pattern of a collared tigress in human-

dominated landscape in central India", Vidya Athreya, R Navyal, Girish A Punjabi, John DC Linnell, Morten Odden, S Khetarpal and K Ullas Karanth, *Tropical Conservation Science*, Vol 7 (1): 75-86, 2014

AWARDS

Sanctuary Wildlife Awards 2013

The 14th Sanctuary Wildlife Awards were presented on 6th December 2013 at Mumbai.

The 'Lifetime Service Award' was given to Mrs Anne Wright, amongst India's pioneering wildlife conservationist. She was a Founder Trustee, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India and had been appointed as a Member of the Tiger Task Force for Project Tiger in 1970 by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She remained a Member of the Indian Board for Wildlife for almost two decades.

'Wildlife Service' awards were given to five conservationists working at the grassroots to protect our wildlife and wildlife habitats. These include Sarbaranjan Mondal who works towards reducing human-tiger conflict in the Sunderbans with Society for Heritage & Ecological Researches (SHER); Keshav Kumar, Joint Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation and initiator of the CID Wildlife Crime Cell; Maheswar Basumatary who works with the Wildlife Trust of India in protecting the wildlife of India's frontier regions in Nepal; TS Subramaniya Raja, Secretary, Wildlife Association of Rajapalayam for Nature, who played a role in preventing the Srivilliputtur Wildlife Sanctuary from being bisected by a road and DFO of Chikaldhara Jitendra S Ramgaokar with his team Vishal Bansod and Vishal Mali who cracked down on tiger poaching leading to the arrest of over 20 poachers in the East Melghat Division in June 2013, including traders from Delhi.

'Young Naturalist Awards' were given to Meghraj Saini, a BSc student at Sawai Madhopur who works with local communities around the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve. Two other winners under the category include Rahul Kumar and Riddhima Yadav. Rahul, a college student in Mumbai, works to create awareness about protection of Gangetic dolphins. Riddhima is a student of St Stephen's College, Delhi, and campaigns with young people, drawing them into conservation.

The 'Green Teacher Award' was given to GD Muratkar, a professor at the Arts, Science & Commerce College in Chikaldhara, who works to protect and conserve grassland habitats of the state. A second Green Teacher Award went to MN Shadakshari, Principal, Model English High School, Chikmagalur, who has

guided thousands of students to take the path of natural history and wildlife conservation.

Other awards given were the 'Wind Under the Wings Award' that went to Kolkata-based Krishnendu Mukherjee of *The Times of India*, who extensively covers wildlife issues in eastern India and a 'Special Tiger Award' to Azhar Sheikh who facilitated the relocation and rehabilitation of Ramdegi village from the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. The Gir National Park was given the 'Best Protected Area Award' for 2013.

Source: *Sanctuary Asia*

Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Awards 2014

The prestigious Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Awards for the year 2014 were given at the India Habitat Centre on 25th April.

The awardees this year are:

1. Sridhar D Bhat, who, as Assistant Professor, Wildlife Management, at the College of Forestry, Sirsi, has inspired and educated students in wildlife for two decades. Mentored by him, 25 of his former students are now Indian Forest Service officers while over 43 serve in Forestry Departments of Karnataka and other states, many others have ventured into conservation, wildlife research and teaching.
2. Bivash Pandav, Associate Professor & HOD Endangered Species Management, Wildlife Institute of India. He started his career in marine turtle research along the coast of Orissa in 1994, and was involved in long-term research and monitoring to gauge the health of the turtle population. In 2003, he began a long-term monitoring programme for tiger and prey populations in Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand, following voluntary relocation of human settlements.
3. KS Gopi Sundar, Director, Program Sarus Scape, International Crane Foundation & Scientist, Cranes & Wetlands Programme, Nature Conservation Foundation, has been involved with developing long-term monitoring and wetland restoration programs in the sarus-inhabited farmed landscapes of South Asia.
4. Jigmet Dadul, Senior Programme Manager, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, Ladakh. He has worked with communities in Ladakh to minimise conflict with wild predators by reducing livestock losses through re-design of livestock enclosures and developed environmentally and culturally sound homestay programmes along popular trekking routes.
5. Shashank Dalvi, Research Associate, Centre for

Wildlife Studies, Bangalore, is currently working on a National Science Foundation funded research project to study patterns of biodiversity across plantation landscapes in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. His landmark contribution has been the recent effort in collaboration Ms. Bano Haralu and Ramki Sreenivasan (Conservation India), which led to stopping of mass slaughter of migrating Amur falcons in Nagaland.

MEDIA & BOOKS

TIGER FIRE

Valmik Thapar

Aleph Rs 2995/-

Let me state upfront that there is an inherent bias to have a tiger aficionado review a book that celebrates this magnificent big cat. That said, the fact of yet another tiger book—at last count over 20—from the world's best known tiger conservationist did make me wonder, what can the author offer that is new, or pushes the envelope to justify its considerable price?

Spectacular as tigers are—or more precisely, because they are, I find them to be a difficult muse. How does one, for instance, encapsulate a tiger—in all its magnificence and mystery, in words or even pictures? One cannot, but I must admit, *Tiger Fire* delivers. It is an extraordinary assemblage of anecdotes, reports, writings, art and photography on the tiger down the ages—from Mughal Emperors Babur, Jahangir and Akbar—who detail the methods of tiger hunting including one which entails “getting on the back of a male buffalo and making it attack the tiger”. There are, expectedly, accounts of tiger hunts by the sahebs, and equally, there is prose on “Hindustan's splendid forests” or pithy commentary on the English penchant for the tiger hunt, “Tygers used to be very common, but since the English have frequented the country, are scarce, and in comparison, very shy.” There are remarkable natural history notes—including tussles of tigers with crocodile, python, elephant, wild boar—and the unusual case of the tiger partial to hunting bears. Of particular interest are anecdotal accounts on tiger behaviour like the one which establishes curiosity in tigers, or the experience of one Richard Hilton whose boots the tiger sniffed, and disdained. Incidentally, both lived to tell the tale, and the tiger “mooched off into the jungle” after this extraordinary event! Fascinating, too, is a historical record that defines the tigers range as well over 14,000 feet above mean sea level—particularly

considering the great hullabaloo recently of the ‘discovery’ of tigers over 10,000 feet in Bhutan.

Moving onto more contemporary times, there are accounts by naturalists, conservationists, scientists, and the best known authorities on the tiger. Thapar also draws from his own repertoire of books, including *The Secret Life of Tigers*.

There is a narrative of a fiercely protective tigress attacking a huge tusker to protect her young—and an almost unbelievable story from Ranthambhore of a male tiger being daddy—bringing up, and shielding his young, followed by another of the ‘babysitter’, a young sub-adult male who tended to his younger siblings when the mother went hunting. It is stories such as these which will especially appeal to those not wedded to the tiger, the lay reader who is bound to be intrigued by these largely unknown, and engaging facets of the tiger.

Like all of Thapar's books, this one too, is a labour of love, written with passion and heart, and no mean effort. The author has researched, one imagines, just about everything written on the tiger in India, and presented us—in a very aesthetic manner—choice pickings.

Tiger Fire is akin to a library, with distinctive five sections or ‘books’ which cover the tiger's origins, writing between the 16th century to the current times, Thapar's works, spectacular images from India's top wildlife photographers. The final section, ‘Last Tigers’ focuses on the animal's precarious future, bringing in a grim tone on what is essentially a glorious celebration of this big cat. Thapar delves in meticulous detail the local extinction in Sariska and Panna and the government's consistent denial of the crisis which led to this situation. The one snag here is the glossing over of what one perceives as a key threat to the tiger today—loss and fragmentation of habitat, increasing anthropogenic pressures and the consequent escalating human-wildlife conflict. Also, while there can be no two opinions on the immense contribution of the seven people singled out as ‘tigerwallahs’, it fails to be inclusive of other unsung heroes fighting for the tiger.

That apart, *Tiger Fire* is a one stop shop on all things tiger. A definite must-have for those who care for, or interested in the tiger—and a hook to those not yet initiated.

Reading the book was a fascinating, almost humbling experience. Even for one who devours literature on this big cat—*Tiger Fire* offered something new. It renewed my acquaintance, left me a little more

smitten, even more intrigued. And therein lies the beauty of this beast, who retains its mystery and its magic—which are well reflected in *Tiger Fire*. Prerna Singh Bindra, *India Today*

THE TIGERS OF TABOO VALLEY

Ranjit Lal,

Red Turtle, Rs295.

Books are a great way to bring nature closer to children. But such books are rare. Ranjit Lal has been a prolific nature writer and has penned many books, including the delightful 'The Small Tigers Of Shergarh'. From the author comes another fictional account Tigers of Taboo Valley. The book is meant for kids, but like his other works, can be enjoyed by all!

In *Tigers of Taboo Valley*, male tigers compete to become the alpha-male, tigresses gossip with each other, a poacher has a resilient death wish, a wildlife photographer is determined to make a family of tigers famous, and a prickle of porcupines are engaged in a grand terrorist plan to annihilate tigers in the Sherkila National Park. The plot thickens when (spoiler alert) tigress Raat-ki-Rani is killed by a poacher. The alpha-male of the national park, Rana Shaan-Bahadur, steps up to the task of raising his cubs, an aberration of tiger behaviour. What ensues is outrage from a society of tigers who disapprove of Shaan-Bahadur's defiance of tiger custom.

Lal also talks about tiger and forest conversation—with his characteristic dry wit. But most of all, he makes a larger allegorical commentary on human society and patriarchy. When Shaan-Bahadur sees his cubs Masti, Hasti, Phasti and Zafraan try to make it on their own after their mother's death, it stirs something in him and he decides to raise them.

“Things like getting the youngest tigress to teach her siblings to hunt was a deliberate dig at all these preconceived notions we have about who is capable of doing what,” said Lal. The author was inspired to write this book when he read about an actual incident that took place in Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan, where a tiger ‘raised’ cubs after their mother was died.

Besides the sobering check on reality with references to the problems of poaching and the reminders of the precarious status of the species, the book is a hugely enjoyable read. Lal's effortless writing and humorous take on the animals' cunning plans endears the characters to readers right from the start, and young

readers may find themselves rooting for at least one of the many teams in their complicated plans to double-cross one another.

In the book, Shaan-Bahadur is always coming up with strategies, along with jackal Naradmuni, to increase his media presence. In fact, the Naradmuni is Shaan-Bahadur's personal assistant and press secretary, and spends most of his time trying to locate the photographer Ayesha so that the alpha-tiger can be photographed. The big cat's obsession with being photographed, according to Lal, is a dig on the increasing obsession of photographing tigers and gaining popularity on social media. It speaks of the increased media frenzy and sensationalism around tiger tourism.

Asawari Ghatage, *Time Out*, April 11

JUNGLE TRESS OF CENTRAL INDIA

By Pradip Krishen

Published by Penguin India

Price: Rs. 1,499

I thought Pradip Krishen's *Trees of Delhi* would be a hard act to follow, but he has outdone himself with *Jungle Trees of Central India*. The book is brilliant in its presentation and scientific in its outlook. All this while choosing to creatively front the entire manuscript using the most frequently used local names of trees, which he expertly supplements with botanical nomenclatures and pithy personal descriptions.

Every once in a while a book comes about that opens windows to the natural world in ways that are both eye-opening and easy to follow. This is just such a book.

Dedicated to “all the people who live in and depend on the forests,” the author introduces us to his manuscript with as direct a statement as you could ask for: “I like trees. Especially wild ones.” He goes on to add: “I feel a deep empathy in their company. I touch them and delight in their tints and perfumes... I don't expect you, dear Reader, to feel the same way I do about trees. But I hope that if you wanted to, this book could help you arrive at a vantage point similar to mine without the effort it took me to get here.”

Refusing to be bound by the dictates of botanists who argue about what exactly constitutes ‘a tree’ Krishen disarmingly writes: “I have relied on my own instinctive sense of whether or not a plant seems tree-

like... No footrules and measuring tapes. No rigid criteria... I am not a scientist by training or aptitude. I have felt free, of course, to ferret and delve into the right botanic literature. This book owes everything to generations of botanists, foresters and wildlife-wallahs who have paved the patch for what we now know – or think we know.”

It comes together very well. It’s an attractive book that is profusely illustrated. The navigation tips at the very beginning of the book are interestingly written... and they actually do help you get more out of this mammoth labour of love. It’s also a very credible book that marries conventional taxonomy with colloquial name-references.

Apart from the very intuitive arrangement of information and the easy to understand, but very reliable texts, the quality and impact of *Jungle Trees* is greatly enhanced by Kadambari Misra’s design. She has managed to organise text and visuals such that each page intuitively guides the reader to salient information, not an easy task when dealing with a bewildering variety of descriptions including barks, leaves and fruits of different sizes, colours and textures.

At 400 pages it does add weight to my already heavy backpack, but it will surely be with me when I next visit the Kanha, Satpura, Bandhavgarh, Melghat, Pench, or Nagzira Tiger Reserves.

Bittu Sahgal, *Sanctuary Asia*

Note: The book—a spectacular piece of work—on the Jungle Trees of Central India is very useful for the tiger landscape of Central India. Highly recommended.

Of ‘marauding’ media & the tiger ‘menace’

Scanning through wildlife news in Indian newspapers, a disturbing theme repeats itself – conflict. Words frequently used include, ‘menace’, ‘threat’ and ‘fear’. These are repeated so often that every time someone mentions a wild animal, we assume some form of “conflict” or “threat”. Headlines are written to grab eyeballs, and most often we are influenced and affected by them subconsciously.

Whether it is elephants, leopards, sloth bears or tigers – man-animal interface is most often reported in a certain fashion. The headlines are invariably provocative – menace, threat, fear, attack and death! On an average, if you scan through eight newspapers every day, you are likely to chance upon at least three or four ‘conflict’ news items, taking the number to an

alarming 20-25 a week. Reports often read: “man injured”, “crops destroyed”, “fear of attack”, “cattle killed”, or “man killed”. While animal mortality due to electrocution, arson, mob frenzy, or poaching is also mentioned, the reporting here is quite muted and underplayed.

While the news of a man disfigured by a bear is reported with empathy for the victim (Tumkur, November 2012), a bland or neutral stance is adopted when an elephant is almost split into half due to electrocution (Nagarahole, 2012).

Such titles often lead to distortion of public opinion. In a survey by this writer, 20 acquaintances were asked to state the first word that came to mind at the mention of an animal. It turned out that a majority of them associated elephants with ‘menace’, leopards and tigers with ‘attack’ and identified bears with ‘mauling’.

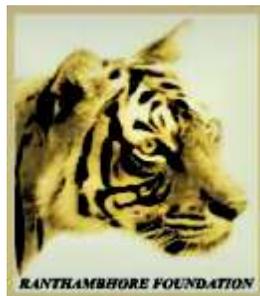
Shedding light on this particular trend, Dr. Ullas Karanth, Director of Wildlife Conservation Society –India, talks about what is left unspoken ‘between the lines’. “In 99.9 percent of these cases (with the exception of deliberate stalking and predation on humans by big cats), it’s never an aggressive attack by the animal. The animal gets cornered, surrounded by people (big cats) or faces an abrupt encounter at short range because of its poor senses (elephants, bear) and then attacks out of fear. The tone of most of these reports suggests that the animal sought out and attacked humans. This comes from media ignorance and portrays to the readers an impression that wild animals deliberately search and attack people, leading to all sorts of demands for capture, and hysteria etc.”

Given the influence wielded by the media and its ability to drive change, it should take its responsibility in reporting ‘conflict’ in a responsible way.

Ganashree Kedlaya, *Conservation India*

Conservation wish list for the new government

- 🐾 Strengthen and not dilute the processes of environment, forest and wildlife regulations and clearances (as envisaged in some manifestos) while at the same time making them transparent, accountable and time bound, keeping in mind the period required to understand impacts of proposed projects on environment and biodiversity.
- 🐾 Recognise the gravity and scale of wildlife crime and the illegal wildlife trade, and empower institutions to tackle and combat the same.
- 🐾 Conserve protected areas and consolidate crucial wildlife habitats. Notification of Critical Wildlife Habitats: as per February 2011 guidelines.
- 🐾 Conservation of existing old-growth forests rather than emphasis on ‘greening India’ and recognition of the fact that conserving forests is key to tackle climate change and global warming.
- 🐾 Use of CAMPA funds for consolidation of wildlife habitats, including for voluntary relocation from core critical tiger habitats and other important wildlife habitats.
- 🐾 Protecting vital tiger and wildlife corridors as eco-sensitive zones.
- 🐾 Protecting ecosystems: Both grasslands and wetlands are amongst our most threatened ecosystems, and we need a National Wetlands Policy and a National Grassland Policy outlining a robust conservation framework for both, as well as their sustainable use for livelihoods.



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