



RANTHAMBHORE FOUNDATION

TIGERLINK

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

NEWS

REVIVED VOL-5

DECEMBER-2009

Editorial

Hello! Good to be back again, albeit a bit late. In this issue, you will notice that Jairam Ramesh, the Minister of State for Environment and Forests (Independent Charge) finds repeated mention. Mainly because under the new minister (he took charge on May 29th), the MoEF has seen a flurry of action—after a rather sedentary, if not counter-productive decade. So how has the change been, and has it been good for wildlife, especially tigers? Cynical as I am—with reason of course!—we have had cause to celebrate. One big victory is that the 900 crore INO project—a Neutrino laboratory, that was to come just about three km from the core critical habitat of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, and bang on an elephant and tiger corridor has not been given the go-ahead. The other has been a resounding ‘No’ to the extremely destructive coal mines coming up in the buffer of Tadoba Tiger Reserve. It wasn’t easy—there was extreme pressure to give both of these the green signal—especially in the case of the former. Another major achievement was the unlocking of the CAMPA funds—you will read the details in this issue. It was satisfying to see the Minister take a proactive role in the Field Director meet in Sariska and equally proactively try to see a tiger! There have been many good ‘tiger’ initiatives—which the director has detailed in his note. Even so, I would put a voice of caution. For one, it’s a bit too early to judge—and while the intentions are in the right direction it will take time for these to translate into real change on the ground.

What remains a worry is that most states have not come upto par. Bluntly put, they have been dragging their feet—resisting some initiatives, refusing to cooperate with others—to the point of being confrontational. We need them on board, we simply cannot save tigers unless states cooperate. Political will at the state level is an imperative, for they ‘own’ the habitats, and by default the tigers! We must find ways to work together, for the tiger is our collective heritage...

There are some concerns that nag my mind. I may be opening a hornet’s nest—but here goes: It is this whole issue of relocation of tigers. Relocation has become a necessity given that we have allowed by our indifference, and gloss negligence, for tigers to go extinct in certain reserves. I feel euphoric too, seeing the tiger back in its sterile forest. Feeling hope where none remained—extinguished by the last tiger. But have we really thought it through? Does this decision have a long-term vision, had we weighed its cost-effectiveness? Or have we rushed into it willy-nilly propelled by political pressures, and maybe even a sense of guilt. It is not an easy exercise, requiring much effort, money—and is fraught with risk. I wonder if we are taking attention—and considerable funds—away from viable habitats with viable populations? Will Sariska

or a Panna ever have the ‘minimum breeding tigers’ that are essential to make the population viable? Of course, its counter is: do we close the chapter in a reserve where a tiger has gone extinct? Not a happy thought that...are there any clear answers?

At the risk of repetition, I would like to raise another point. It is high time we got our basics in order. Every time I enter a tiger reserve I am shocked by the condition of the field staff. With all the focus—and the hype—about tiger protection, their condition has remained unchanged since the inception of Project Tiger. Their plight has been well-documented—yet that unpaid, underpaid, and unsung foot soldier is our man on the front to save the tiger. One more reason we are losing the battle. Well, almost. It’s an emergency, urges the minister. Then why does the situation continue to be so grim? Check out the numbers of tigers killed this year—76 at last count. That’s about seven per cent of our wild tiger population.

And these are not the ‘real’ figure, those would be higher. The deaths that go unnoticed, unrecorded. Generations lost when the mother dies. Like in the forests around Tadoba, where five breeding tigresses went missing in the past year. They all had cubs. Some died, others are condemned to captivity. A generation of tigers lost to the forest forever.

“Sixteen of our reserves are in a very, very, very (the minister’s words) precarious position.”

Possibly, the Sariskas and Pannas of tomorrow. And the pressures, and the threats—they only increase...From a booming population—of both people, and cattle. From development projects. From the fact that India is growing, and wants to grow faster. Target GDP: Nine per cent per annum. And let’s not forget the ‘blood trade’—the booming skin and bone bazaar.

We (India) have a supply-precarious as it is.

And there is a demand—an ever increasing hunger for skins, bones, whiskers, penises. As the subsequent pages will tell you, the first ever attempt to talk with China on the subject at a ministerial level fell through. The latest word is that China is on the verge of reopening internal trade, which as we know, will be disastrous for our wild populations.

This journal will reach you at the dawn of the New Year. 2010. The Year of the Tiger. Wait, don’t celebrate. The year won’t be so special for the tiger, being the ‘Tiger Year’ will only serve to fuel the demand further in China, it is feared.

Yet, we still have a fighting chance—our only chance to save the tiger. It’s a monumental task but there is a window of hope.

For, whatever be the odds, **India wants to save her wild tigers...**

Prerna Singh Bindra

From the Executive Director's Desk

Dear Friends,

In the last three months the Ministry of Environment and Forests has taken a number of initiatives for tiger conservation in the country. One major initiative has been to implement a tripartite MoU with states linked to fund flow for effective implementation of tiger conservation. The Special Tiger Protection Force guidelines have also been revised to involve local communities like Van Gujjars in field protection. An assessment of India's tiger reserves indicates that 12 of them are in good condition, nine are in satisfactory condition, and 16 are in very precarious state. As a follow-up special crack teams were sent to tiger reserves affected by extremism and low population status of tiger and prey to assess the situation and provide recommendations. Given that the cooperation of the states is critical in conservation, a meeting of field directors was organised in July 2009. The aim was to understand the problems faced by tiger reserve directors and address their concerns. Chief Ministers of tiger states were also addressed by the MoS (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests on urgent issues viz implementation of the tripartite MoU, creation of Tiger Conservation Foundation, stepping up protection etc. Also, advisories have been issued for including non-governmental experts in the forthcoming tiger estimation which is expected to be published in October/November 2010 when the proposed Global Tiger Summit is to be held. A core committee of outside experts has been constituted for overseeing tiger estimation.

Most of the initiatives have been appreciated, but some states are clearly unhappy with the advisories, guidelines or directions that have been issued by NTCA. Some initiatives have also been resisted by some states.

This issue came up when there was a meeting to discuss the proposed amendments in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. One of the main objectives to amend the Act is to synchronise it with the Forest Right Act and also to make punishment for wildlife crime more stringent. A meeting was held to discuss the concerns and take on board the suggestions of the states. Madhya Pradesh was represented by its Chief Wildlife Warden and other senior officers of the Forest Department. They asked for curtailing all powers of NTCA so that no directive/advisory or guidelines are issued by Government of India through NTCA. This is perplexing when the NTCA has been authorised to do so by an Act of the Government of India. Does this imply that the Government of India, and thereby the NTCA should remain a silent spectator and only provide funds and reply parliament questions for

wrong actions or no action taken by a State? Funds carry with them a responsibility which certain states seem unwilling to take up. This is a dangerous trend and certainly not favourable for tiger conservation. It may be pointed out that all advisories issued by NTCA to different state governments are not taken lightly, but have the endorsement of the NTCA Board which comprises of persons collectively having more than 100 years of experience in tiger conservation.

Undoubtedly, many steps have been taken by different states but the protection mechanism is seriously inadequate and that's why tigers are dying. The vacancy position in the field has not improved. In spite of tripartite agreement the fund released by NTCA to different states is yet to reach field officers. Daily wagers in many reserves have not received their wages for last many months. If these primary requirements are not met by the states our expectations will end in fiasco.

It has been seen that anti-poaching and legal training occupy prime place in the agenda of Non Government Organisations. Anti-poaching training is a highly specialised job and perhaps even the police or any other agency is not fully competent to deal with the subject. Similarly legal training requires high level of competency. It remains a mystery, therefore, how NGOs have developed this capacity. What we do know is that each Forest Division is being imparted such training repeatedly every year.

Another issue concerns the World Bank, which has been trying for the last couple of years to influence tiger range countries in seeking intervention in tiger conservation. It is mainly because the President of World Bank Robert Zoellick has a keen interest in tigers, which may not necessarily be reflected in the World Bank policies. The Government of India has clearly stated that no World Bank support is needed for tiger conservation in project mode. This has been communicated to them by the highest office in the country. It has also been stated that their support in institutional capacity building and poverty alleviation outside forests will be acceptable. This is rooted in the concept of extending the tiger landscape to private lands falling outside tiger reserves and corridors. These, as we well know, have some impact on tiger conservation and can be viewed as potential area for getting World Bank support. However, this concept is in a rudimentary stage and further discussion will be needed at the level of the Ministry and those interested in tiger conservation outside the ministry particularly, keeping in view the impact of Forest Rights Act in such landscapes.

P.K. Sen

NATIONAL NEWS

New NTCA board constituted

The new NTCA board was constituted with effect from September 1, 2009 for a period of three years. Besides the official members, the new members include Maneka Gandhi (MP), Santosh Bagrodia (MP), Ullas Karanth, Brijendra Singh, Valmik Thapar, P K Sen, Aparajita Dutta, Urmilla Pingle, Prakash Amte and Samar Singh.

The first meeting was on October 6.

Some of the issues on which the members expressed concern was the **depleting tiger population, lack of effective protection and coordination between the centre and states. They also drew attention to the fact that funds for TRs still suffer from inordinate delays**—most states have not set up a Tiger Conservation Fund, which will do away with bureaucratic delays and ensure timely delivery, and accountability of funds.

One of the other outcomes of the meet was that the various guidelines issued by the NTCA (detailed in last issue of *Tiger Link*) i.e strictures on field intervention in core critical tiger habitat, restricting and phasing out tourism in core areas, handling of sick and injured tigers, post-mortem protocol were approved and mandated by the members.

The committee members were also appraised of the situation in some of the problem reserves where independent teams had been dispatched to assess the situation.

Committee for liasoning with states

Following a decision in the NTCA board meeting, expert committees have been constituted for liasoning with state authorities for strengthening tiger conservation. Another committee has also been formed to review the field practices in tiger reserves. This committee will review ongoing field practices, codify best practices and suggest recommendation for improvement.

India loses over 70 tigers in ten months

Statistics collated by the Wildlife Protection Society of India show that at least 76 tigers have died between January to mid-November this year. Of these, 27 were killed due to poaching. These include seizures of skins, bones, claws, skeletons etc by police and wildlife

authorities during this period. Some were victims of man-tiger conflict, poisoned in retaliation for cattle kills. The remaining reportedly died of a variety of reasons such as infighting, old age, accidents and disease.

Source: WPSI (See 'Wildlife Crime' for details)

Fresh tiger census in October

The new All India tiger census to be conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) began in October, 2009 after a gap of two years. As compared to the previous all India census, the scope of this one is bigger.

All forests in 17 tiger states will be surveyed by forest guards for tiger, other carnivores and prey. The census will rope in more than 80,000 field staff of the TRs, plus forest officers, researchers, NGOs, independent experts etc. Individual scientists and organisations have also been involved, and the selection process for the same is ongoing. New software will be used in basic field observations by forest guards in a digital format. WII will also prepare DNA profile of tigers which would help authorities in curbing tiger poaching.

The census will be conducted in three phases. In the first phase, tiger signs will be searched, data collection for which started in November. In the second phase, remote-sensing techniques will be used to be followed by photographing tigers by camera traps in the third phase. "We are starting training workshops for forest staff. **By May 2010, we hope to finish Phase I over central India, Terai, Northeast and Sundarbans. By the time of the Global Tiger Summit scheduled in November 2010, we will have the distribution, numbers and occupancy of tigers over major landscapes in these areas,**" says Yadavendra Jhala, from WII who is one of the scientists conducting the census. The challenge posed by difficult terrain of the Northeast forests and the mangroves in Sundarbans had limited the scope of the all India estimates in 2006. There was no census in Sundarbans, and in certain places like Buxa (West Bengal) and Palamau (Jharkhand) only Phase I was conducted. There was only a preliminary tiger count for the Eastern and Northeastern tiger reserves. This time, tiger populations from all tiger reserves with the possible exemption of some Naxalism-ridden areas like Indravati (Chhattisgarh), will be counted.

Source: PTI, June 9, 2009, Neha Sinha, *The Indian Express*, September 9, 2009,

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Problem reserves assessed

The National Tiger Conservation Authority appointed special teams to do a rapid appraisal of tiger reserves suffering due to militancy and left-wing extremism and having a low density of tigers. The reserves assessed include Valmiki (Bihar), Palamau (Jharkhand), Indravati (Chhattisgarh), Dampha (Mizoram), Namdapha (Arunachal Pradesh), Buxa (West Bengal), Nagarjunasagar (Andhra Pradesh) and Simlipal (Orissa).

Most of the teams have conducted their field visits to evaluate the status of tiger, co-predators and prey animals, protection efforts, administrative and ecological problems and managerial issues—and have appraised the NTCA board members of the situation. They also gave suggestions for restoring the area and eliciting local support to strengthen protection.

Here is a summary of their assessment of some of the TRs:

Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem

For 16 long years, between 1990 and 2006, the Nagarjunasagara-Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR) in Andhra Pradesh was in the grip of armed left-wing extremists. Administrative control of the Park crumbled and fear ruled. Today, thanks to the persistence of the AP Government and the efforts of an elite police force, ‘the Grayhounds’, the naxals have moved to other states and forest department personnel are finally able to move around the park to discharge their duties.

At 3,568 sq km, NSTR is India’s largest tiger reserve. With diligent protection, careful management and adequate resources it has the potential to also become one of India’s finest tiger reserves. **The team saw encouraging signs of tigers, leopards and wild dogs and was able to sight prey animals at several locations** in the reserve.

But NSTR has a number of problems too, most of which, fortunately, can be either resolved or mitigated with the right inputs. There is an urgent need for protection infrastructure to be rebuilt. Currently, **there are virtually no anti-poaching camps, patrolling vehicles or wireless network. The Reserve is also grossly understaffed.** Salaries of the local Chenchu ‘Tiger Trackers’ and ‘Protection Watchers’ have not been paid for over ten months. With no staff quarters or incentives, the Reserve is seen as a ‘punishment

posting’. The relocation of several villages in the Core/Critical area is pending and an estimated 4,00,000 cattle graze in the Reserve for several months in the year, exerting an enormous pressure on resources.

Shekar Dattatri, Praveen Bhargav and Ajay Desai formed the team that appraised the reserve

Simlipal Tiger Reserve

Assessment of Simlipal was done following an attack on the reserve by left-wing extremists in March 2009 (see the last issue of *Tiger Link*). The committee found that **park infrastructure including range and beat offices, anti-poaching camps and communication networks had been extensively damaged. Consequently protection had slackened and the threat of poaching and wood smuggling has increased.** The attack also further lowered the morale of an already demotivated staff though they are braving all odds to maintain their presence in the core area.

There are signs and reports of tiger activity in the core area, and to a lesser extent even in the buffer zone. The relationship of the forest staff with the local people is seriously impaired and needs special efforts. Relocation of four villages must be given priority. There is also an urgent need to scientifically evaluate tiger population and status of prey species.

Suresh Kumar Mishra, S P Yadav, Bivash Pandav, M D Madhusudan formed the team that appraised the park

Valmiki Tiger Reserve

The main **issues of concern in Valmiki relate to protection and habitat management.** Protection is mainly limited to curbing illicit tree felling. Infrastructure is also poor and there is no patrolling camp inside the reserve. The field level staff is unarmed and poorly oriented towards wildlife monitoring and protection. The good news is that the eastern portion of the reserve has replenished thanks to the ban and field-level enforcement on boulder mining in recent years. The prey population is also recovering, but is constrained, primarily because of the large scale conversion of grasslands into woodlands by the Bihar State Forest Development Corporation prior to the area being declared as tiger reserve. Rapid proliferation of weeds and unpalatable plant species and occurrence of rampant forest fires were identified as major ecological issues by the team.

Palamu Tiger Reserve

There is **no authentic report on tiger population** in Palamu; cubs have also not been reported in the recent years. Regular patrolling is not being done in most of the parts due to naxal activities inside the reserve, though the staff does go in for development works. **Staff strength is barely 50 per cent**, most of whom are also physically unfit. The eco-development committees are not functioning. Grasslands are poorly maintained and invasive weeds and plants are taking over palatable plant species.

Manas Tiger Reserve

Manas suffered from civil unrest for a number of years. However, the protection mechanism is finally in place after 17 years, though the staff has little orientation towards wildlife monitoring. Local youth has also been deployed for protection of the area. Training, and up gradation of skills of both the staff, and the local people employed is a must. It is felt that the ongoing current reintroduction of rhinos has facilitated protection mechanism. In Manas, the **biggest issue that the team highlighted is the control of Field Directorate on the tiger reserve**. The total area of Manas Tiger Reserve is 2,837 sq. km. which includes two protected areas Barnadi WLS and Manas National Park besides over 15 reserved forests. Out of this, the Field Directorate has control over only the Manas National Park (covering about 500 sq. km.) and rest of the area is under the control of respective territorial DFOs. The administration of the reserve forest has been under the Bodo Territorial Council after their creation in 2003, following an agreement with the Government of India. The protected areas are controlled by the state government. Thus, there are **two caretakers of the tiger reserve (the state govt looks after Manas National Park and Barnadi WLS and BTC for the reserve forest areas)**.

Indravati Tiger Reserve, Chhattisgarh

Indravati has **been badly affected by naxal activities**. **There is no presence of forest staff inside** the tiger reserve—hence no protection or management. However, the appraisal team visited the fringe of the core area. Signs of prey and predator were found. *Samir Kumar Sinha, R K Singh, R Barman, D. S. Srivastava, R P Mishra formed the team that appraised these reserves.*

THE NAXAL DEBATE

One of the major problems confronting our country today is naxal insurgency. The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh has described it “as the biggest threat to internal security.” There is a lot of complexity attached to the issue, which is beyond the scope of this journal. What is of concern is that the base of left-wing extremism (naxalism) is our forests. That is where they live, train, operate from. **Our forests are, in other words, ‘nurseries for terror’.** **Many tiger reserves, once prime tiger country, have become the citadel of Naxals. Reportedly, timber and poaching was one means of sustaining the movement.**

Admittedly, there is no documentation to establish that naxals are endangering our wildlife, and the issue is open to debate. Indeed, there are some indications quite to the contrary. The recent Forest Survey of India report shows that **forest cover has increased, very marginally, in naxal-affected areas**. On the other hand, it has been established that naxals—and other extremists are being given ‘protection money’ by timber contractors in some regions. In some areas, they are instigating the clearing of forests to cultivate cannabis or marijuana. Adding to the complexity, is the fact that local goons and the mafia have taken advantage of the situation and are operating under the guise of naxals.

Amendments in Wildlife Protection Act to be tabled in parliament

One important initiative taken by the ministry is to amend the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. This is being done with a view to **synchronise it with the Forest Rights Act. The other important objective is to make punishment for wildlife crime more stringent** so as to act as deterrent and send a strong message to those who break the Wildlife Protection Act. The penalties, it has been suggested, should be treated on par with those who break the Foreign Exchange Act, Money Laundering Act or any such important legislation. The Amendments have been discussed with various experts, stakeholders and the states and will be available for public scrutiny on the MoEF website soon. It is expected that the amendments will be introduced in the budget session of 2010.

Source: <http://moef.nic.in/index.php>, PIB

NOTICE BOARD

New DG (Forests) appointed

Dr P J Dilip Kumar has taken over as Director-General, Forests and Special Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests in July 2009. He is a Karnataka cadre officer.

Eextension for NTCA official

NTCA member secretary Dr Rajesh Gopal got a further extension for two years. The post has been upgraded to the rank of Additional Director General.

Secretary General of GTF

The Executive Committee of Global Tiger Forum met in Kathmandu in October 2009. It was unanimously decided that the term of the present Secretary General will expire on December 31, 2009. The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh has written to the Chairman of Executive Committee of GTF (the Minister of Forest, Nepal) to this effect and suggested that till the new Secretary General's post is filled the GTC will function from the NTCA office.

India's forest cover increases

India has **added 3.13 million ha of forests in the decade between 1997 and 2007, at the rate of 0.3 million ha every year**, according to the latest Forest Survey of India report. This compares with Brazil losing 2.5 million ha a year and China gaining an annual 4 million ha, environment and forests minister Jairam Ramesh said while releasing the survey, titled State of Forest Report, 2009. The survey is conducted every two years. The 2009 survey found that **India's forest and tree cover neutralise over 11 per cent of its global warming gas emissions at 1994 levels**. It goes on to add that this is equivalent to offsetting 100 per cent emissions from all energy used in residential and transport sectors, or about 40 per cent of emissions from farms.

Conserving and increasing forest cover needs various incentives and India will lobby for it at the global climate talks in Copenhagen starting 7th December. "The world must acknowledge this in any deal at Copenhagen," said MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh.

Source: Padmaparna Ghosh, 'India's forest cover rose in 1997-2007, survey shows', *Mint*, November 30

Specialisation in forest Service

The idea for a separate Wildlife Service for management and protection of wildlife areas has been mooted since 1983, and been raised time to time in different platforms. However, it was rejected by forest officers who reason that forests and wildlife are inter-linked and therefore cannot be seen in isolation. The concept gathered momentum again in the last one year, but is still being debated. Moreover, even if accepted in totality, the process is expected to be long drawn. **Initially, therefore, the idea is to have wildlife specialisation within the forest service.**

On December 1, a meeting was convened under the chairmanship of DG (Forests), P J Dilip Kumar. For the first time, the idea of specialisation, particularly in wildlife has been accepted unanimously by the participants which included senior Indian Forest Service officers from the MoEF, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy and WII. It was agreed that IGNFA would immediately prepare a proposal to develop specialisation in wildlife for selected probationers of each batch. An amendment is proposed in the IFS Rules as well as in the Wildlife Protection Act that will make it obligatory to post only officers with specialised training in wildlife areas.

Most reserves lack conservation plan

Under the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 2006, it is mandatory for all tiger states to have a Tiger Conservation Plan, a Steering Committee headed by the Chief Minister, and buffer zones around each reserve. **But 80 per cent of TRs do not have a Tiger Conservation Plan, more than 50 per cent of states have formed neither the Steering Committee or the Tiger Conservation Foundation. Worse, in the last three years not one state has fully utilised funds released by the Centre.** The National Tiger Conservation Authority on its part, released funds worth over Rs 150 crore to the 17 tiger states last year.

The NTCA has been pumping the maximum amount of money into three states—Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Assam. Yet, MP has not created any buffer zone for its Critical Tiger Habitats. Rajasthan has no conservation plan, no Steering Committee, no funding mechanism and buffer zone. Neither does Assam, which

is currently seeing a fresh spate of poaching especially in Kaziranga, and Orang National Park.

Source: Juhi Choudhary, September 5, 2009, CNN-IBN

Captive breeding in problem reserves

In what can only be described as a last ditch attempt to prevent a Sariska-like situation in nearly a dozen tiger reserves across the country, the **NTCA has advised an in-situ build up of tiger population in eleven reserves. The note dated May 27, 2009 suggests that to save tigers from local extinction, tiger reserves must opt for active managerial intervention**, which essentially entails having “a founder population of two adult tigresses and one tiger in a large enclosure built in-situ within the reserve, to protect it from poaching and other decimating factors”. The letter details that the tigers must be translocated from the same habitat or from the same landscape, that the enclosure should contain natural prey base, and importantly, that this is to be a one-time intervention. The tigers should be radio-collared and released after the first generation of cubs reaches two years of age. The eleven reserves include Valmiki (Bihar), Palamu (Jharkhand), Manas (Assam), Nagarjunasagar (Andhra Pradesh), Namdapha (Arunachal Pradesh), Indravati (Chhattisgarh), Buxa (West Bengal), Kalakad Mundanthurai (Tamil Nadu), Dampa (Manipur), Sanjay-Dubri (Madhya Pradesh) and Simlipal (Orissa).

Source: Prerna Singh Bindra, *The Pioneer*, June 29

Comment: *This move has been criticised by scientists and biologists. One concern is that where would the in-situ population be sourced from an already depleted area? Experts also question whether this is optimum utilisation of resources and advice that such steps, if taken at all, should be site-specific. In certain areas, better and more stringent protection mechanisms would be sufficient. The other question that arises is whether natural prey in 200 hectare enclosure will be sufficient to cater to the need of three tigers.*

Cabinet approves MoU on tiger conservation

The cabinet approved an improved fund flow channel from the union government to the states and further to the tiger reserves to ensure effective tiger conservation on July 2. The decision, approving the implementation of the tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Environment and Forests, state

governments and the tiger reserve managements was taken in a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The tripartite MOU would ensure effective tiger conservation by laying out the respective responsibilities and reciprocal commitments linked to fund flows to foster management and protection in TRs.

All tiger states have signed the tripartite agreement.

Source: *Times News Service*, July 3, 2009

Barter tigers for lions

The Centre is proposing reintroduction of tigers in Gujarat. The **MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh suggested that the state should explore the possibility of reintroducing tigers**. Of course, this offer is based on the expectation that Gujarat might agree to exchange a few Asiatic lions in return to recreate a population in Kuno. Sources say that in a private meeting with the MoS (Env. & Forests), the Gujarat CM Narendra Modi was quite adamant about refusing to part with lions, which was when the first ‘unofficial’ offer to explore the possibility of relocating tigers in Gujarat was made. Desperate to hold on to its monopoly of being the last Asiatic lion habitat in the world, Gujarat has been refusing to share its ‘pride’ with Madhya Pradesh, or for that matter, any other state.

The Gujarat government, meanwhile, said it is not averse to the Minister’s suggestion. “Our government will certainly consider the proposal if the Centre sends it to us formally”, said state Forest Minister Mangubhai Patel.

Though Gujarat has historically had tigers, the last tiger was seen in 1997 in Banaskantha in south Gujarat, and was believed to be a transient tiger from Madhya Pradesh. This area currently has fairly good forests though the prey base is abysmal.

Source: August 4, 2009, on email, PTI

Jairam’s tiger talks in China fail

One of the issues in MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh’s agenda during his China visit in August this year was some plain talking on the demand for tiger bones in China, which is putting pressure on the wild tiger population in India. In a written statement to Chinese officials, the MoEF submitted that one of **India’s concerns was that demand for tiger and leopard skins and bones would go up in 2010, which is being celebrated as ‘The Year of the Tiger.’ India**

also asked China to enforce a tiger skin registration scheme and crack down on tiger trade through Nepal. Ramesh contended that China should restrict its tiger farms as this creates a demand for wild tiger products—mainly sourced from India—and has urged China to keep a domestic tiger-trade ban in place. The country's tiger farms may be touted as a 'tourist attraction' but investigations have established that they are used in Chinese traditional medicine, in wine and are on the menu.

India's efforts were thwarted. China retaliated that India was not doing enough to check consumption of shahtoosh shawls, woven from the wool of Tibetan antelope, which is illegally sourced from China. They also stressed that there is no link between Chinese tiger farms and Indian tiger poaching. On his return, Ramesh told reporters that "China is breeding tigers in captivity and operating tiger farms which stimulated demand. It also went against the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). There are about 4,000 tigers bred in captivity in China. We had discussions with China on this but without much success."

However, given the gravity of the situation, a high-level delegation from India is expected to visit China to pursue talks to further tiger conservation in the region.

Source: Reshma Patil, *The Hindustan Times*, Beijing, August 23, 2009, Neha Sinha, *The Indian Express*, C.K. Nayak, *Reuters*, September 17, 2009

CAMPA funds unlocked

The logjam over the CAMPA funds finally broke after the **Supreme Court gave an order to release 11,000 crores, accumulated over the past seven years** under the Compulsory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds. Under the interim arrangement, Centre will disburse ten per cent of the accumulated principal amount on yearly basis.

Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra will get 55 per cent of the share of the Rs 1,000-crore kitty that will be released every year to the states on pro-rata basis. The guidelines stipulate a three-tier structure involving a state-level CAMPA governing body under the chairmanship of the CM, a steering committee chaired by the Chief Secretary and an executive committee headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests.

The good news is that the **funds will not be used for compensatory afforestation as it was envisaged, but for wildlife protection, staff empowerment,**

restoration and regeneration of degraded forests and for meeting financial needs of protected areas, besides the tiger reserves. Ramesh stressed again in parliament that the money should be utilised for regeneration of forests and not for plantation purposes, which he described as a "big scam".

Announcing this plan, Ramesh said he would write to the Chief Ministers on the detailed guidelines regarding the use of the CAMPA funds. The National CAMPA Advisory Council under the chairmanship of the Environment and Forests Minister would be in place for monitoring, technical assistance and overall evaluation.

The Apex Court 'broke the seven-year-old barrier' on July 10 by ordering the release of Rs 1,000 crore of the total CAMPA funds paid as compensation by private and government agencies in the last seven years in lieu of diverting forest land for non-forest purposes. It was in October 2002 that the SC had issued directions for the creation of the compensatory afforestation fund.

Source: PIB, PTI, July 10, Sumana Narayan, *Down to Earth*, August 15, 2009

Comment: Most, if not all, proposals from states to the MoEF regarding utilisation of CAMPA funds are hackneyed afforestation proposals.

Ramesh to states: 'Let's save the tiger'

The all-India conference of tiger reserve directors held in Sariska on July 25-26 was a sincere effort to end the chasm between the Centre and States on the critical issue of tiger conservation, which largely stems from non-compliance of important initiatives by states. The meeting's objective was to **understand the problems faced by tiger reserve directors and address their concerns.**

Reiterating that his Government was committed to protecting tigers, the MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh said that the centre and states must work together in this endeavour, and that the centre will assist the state in all possible manner in the task of tiger conservation. The problems of each tiger reserve was discussed with the director and Chief Wildlife Warden, and help assured. Special focus was given to problems of the 16 poor-category reserves, with a promise of increased assistance in terms of funds and technical support. He also urged the states to sign the tripartite agreement to ensure accountability and efficient utilisation of funds. This was signed by the Rajasthan

government later in the day. Given the poor condition of the frontline staff across the reserves, the Minister announced that their field allowance would be doubled.

It was also announced that the WII will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the tiger reserves to be completed by March 2010. **Critical concerns like man-tiger conflict, forest fires, tiger and elephant mortality by trains and roads and setting up of a Special Tiger Protection Force also came up for discussion.**

Source: Prerna Singh Bindra, *The Pioneer*, July 27

Ministry's 'no' to INO

The government has **decided against locating an underground neutrino observatory at Singara in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve** given the devastation it would entail on this critical tiger and elephant corridor. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has suggested that the project, proposed by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), be moved to a site near the Suruliya falls in Theni district of Tamil Nadu instead. In a letter to Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Anil Kakodkar, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh said that the Ministry **cannot give a go-ahead to Singara since the proposed project site falls in the buffer zone of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and is in close proximity to the core/critical tiger habitats of Bandipur and Mudumalai Tiger reserves**, according to the report filed by Rajesh Gopal, member secretary, NTCA. It is **also an elephant corridor**, facilitating elephant movement from the Western Ghats to the Eastern Ghats and vice-versa. Besides, the construction phase of the project would involve transport of building material on the highway passing through the core area of the Bandipur/Mudumalai Tiger Reserves. The letter assures the DAE that the Ministry would facilitate necessary approvals for the alternative location. The report also notes that the area is already disturbed on account of severe biotic pressure due to human settlements and resorts.

Source: 'Ministry's 'no' to Neutrino Observatory project in Nilgiris' R. Ramachandran, *The Hindu*, November 21, 2009.

Minister admits 16 reserves in 'danger zone'

The MoS (Env. & Forests) **Jairam Ramesh admitted in Parliament that 16 tiger reserves were in 'danger**

zone' in response to questions raised by an opposition (BJP) MP, Rajiv Pratap Rudy on July 7 in Rajya Sabha or the Upper House. Rudy demanded to know the government's response to the depleting population of tigers, and their extinction in some reserves. In a debate that continued for over an hour, Ramesh first stressed the importance of tiger reserves, stating that they were vital to our water security, considering that 300-350 rivers emanated from them. He admitted that tigers had gone extinct in two tiger reserves—Sariska and Panna, and indeed **16 of the 36 reserves were danger zones, where tigers had vanished or were on the brink of vanishing, and needed urgent attention.** The reasons varied in different reserves—some suffered from ecological problems, others were plagued by naxalite issues.

Ramesh added that, "twelve reserves are in good condition, while the situation in the remaining nine is satisfactory but needs to improve."

He agreed with Rudy's observation that **killing of tigers was rampant in India and smuggling of tiger skin was a flourishing trade**, next only to narcotics. The Minister especially asked Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where Sariska and Panna reserves are located, to take stern action against poachers. Ramesh said that poachers have been arrested in Panna, but no action has been taken against them. "I request the MP Government to prosecute them so that Panna can be a test case for other reserves where tiger population is dwindling."

He also asked the Bihar Government to at least depute a director in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (which had not had a director for nearly an year, as reported in the previous *Tiger Link*) to protect the national animal.

He informed that the Centre has initiated a programme to involve local communities in protecting tigers. The project will be first taken up in Corbett and will be replicated in other reserves if successful.

He added that the government had allocated **Rs 240 crores for 2009-2010 for Project Tiger**. BJP MP Chandan Mitra also raised the question of straying tigers and emphasised the need to address the issue of buffer zones and declining prey base which played a crucial role in man-tiger conflict. Mitra also stressed the need to regulate tourism traffic in tiger reserves.

Ramesh said that, "the main reasons for tiger decline include poaching, degradation of forest status outside

tiger reserves and protected areas due to human pressure, livestock pressure and ecologically unsustainable land-use,” Ramesh said.

Source: *The Pioneer*, July 7, 2009, <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/rsweb.asp>

No mining in Tadoba buffer

The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh has said that mines will not be allowed in the buffer zone of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra. **Ramesh has written to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan categorically stating that “no mining would be permitted within the tiger reserve. The leases which have been granted are required to be cancelled,” in a letter dated September 8, 2009.** Local people had also come out strongly against the mining which they fear will impact ground water level, contaminate soil, water sources, besides being detrimental to the tiger reserve. The projects have the strong backing of the Maharashtra government. The former forest minister of Maharashtra Babanrao Pachpute’s tactical support to the mining lobby was apparent when in a meeting of conservationists he said that, “measures will be taken to reduce impact,” indicating that they would go ahead with the mines.

During a meeting held on November 24, the Environmental Appraisal Committee of the ministry rejected the proposals on the grounds that the mines will destroy the rich forest cover in the area and will also affect the wildlife. Adani Power Limited had applied for environment clearance for mining at Lohara, while the Maharashtra Coal Company Limited had applied for mining near Agarzari. The latter had asked for nine compartments of the buffer to be deleted from the tiger reserve to accommodate their mines. The largest lease of 1,600 hectares had been awarded to Adani Enterprises for its open cast mining project in western Lohara village. The Rs.1200 crores project was aimed to be one of the biggest opencast coalmine in the country. The company had a lease of 40 years with an ultimate working depth of 350 metres. **According to reports, there are breeding tigresses in the area marked for mining.**

Tiger corridors are already blockaded due to extensive mining projects. There is also the fast growing city of Chandrapur. **Another tragedy is the upcoming Human river irrigation project, just three km from the core area. The project will drown parts of the**

buffer zone. “Tigers regularly use the narrow forest corridor from Palasgaon (Sirkada) to Shivni which will be submerged by the project,” points out Kishor Rithe of Satpuda Foundation. Supporting this is a study conducted by Tiger Research and Conservation Trust which has photographic evidence to show presence of tigers, leopards, sloth bears, wild dogs, rusty-spotted cats—all accorded the strictest protection under Indian law—in the submergence area. The project is just three km from Tadoba’s core zone. Yet, the Supreme Court cleared the dam in November 2008. However, Ramesh has asked the CM to “dispassionately review the project.” It is pointed out that the significance of the project has diminished, since a large number of small dams and irrigation projects have come up in the region since the Human dam was first conceived in 1983.

The dam, and other projects will only serve to worsen the man-animal conflict that besieges the region.

Source: www.sanctuaryasia.com, Vijay Pinjarkar, *Times News Service* July 29, 2009, Ashwin Aghor, DNA, October 20, 2009, Jaideep Hardikar, *Indiatogether*, March 15, 2009

MP favours NH-7 expansion

Madhya Pradesh continues to be in favour of the **expansion of NH-7 that runs along the periphery of the Pench Tiger Reserve** into a four-lane highway even though the Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court has categorically said ‘No’ to the project. The Minister of Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh is not in favour of the project cutting through the tiger corridor, and the NTCA has also strongly opposed the proposal, and suggested an alternate route. A lot is at stake: **the highway will cut through over nine km of critical tiger habitat. This corridor has been identified as the most vital link between Kanha, Pench and Satpura tiger reserves.** If this corridor is broken, then the future of tiger in central Indian highlands which has the largest tiger population in the country will lose its viability. Besides, the widening entails large-scale felling of trees—over 22,000 in the Maharashtra side alone.

Fast track court for wildlife crime cases

Wildlife Crime again came up for discussion in the Parliament on August 4, when the MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh replied to some questions regarding the

functioning of his Ministry in the Rajya Sabha. Questioned by nominated member Chandan Mitra as to whether the Ministry would set up fast-track courts to try cases of wildlife crime, Ramesh said, "I will bring in a comprehensive Bill to protect wildlife in the winter session of Parliament."

The Minister did not agree with the members that budgetary allocation for his Ministry was insufficient to meet the onerous challenge and said that this was the best Budget for the Ministry in last 25 years and a separate Rs 500-crore assistance to the states as part of the stimulus package for regeneration of forests across the country. In addition there is a separate allocation of Rs 100 crore for the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and also a respectable amount to the Botanical and Zoological Survey of India.

Source: New Delhi, 5 Aug 2009, *The Pioneer*

Comment: *While quantitatively, the budget allocation for wildlife is more than in previous years, it includes relocation of villages from core critical tiger habitats. It may be noted that the relocation package is an enhanced one now and therefore forms a considerable percentage of the budget. For instance the allocation for Project Tiger in 2008-2009 was 157 crores and in the 2009-10 it is 240.13 crores. However of the later, 114 crores have been allocated for relocation-104 crores to Ranthambhore and 10 crores to Achanakmar in Chhattisgarh. In fact, if this amount is deleted from the total budget than the amount for protection and other activities may well be about the same as the previous years.*

IDs for tiger's !

Tigers in reserves across the country will soon have their own 'identity cards' specifying their profile, a step that will enable authorities to keep track of their movement and thus help in tiger conservation.

"We have issued an advisory to all the 17-tiger range states to keep an 'ID card' specifying the details of each tiger in their sanctuaries," Rajesh Gopal, member secretary National Tiger Conservation Authority, said.

The 'identity card' will have a photograph of the tiger and possibly, its skin print, its radio collar records with regular update of its behaviour."

Maintaining such an ID of each tiger will help the officials particularly forest guards keep a track and monitor particular tigers in their jurisdiction. "The idea is to strengthen tiger conservation at the ground level," Gopal explained.

Source: Archana Jyoti, PTI, October 8, 2009

World Tiger Summit in 2010

About 200 experts from across the world are expected to participate in the World Tiger Summit to be held in 2010 in Ranthambhore. The conference will aim at working towards strengthening and expansion of tiger habitat across 13 countries, including India, Indonesia, Thailand, China and Russia.

The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh said that the results of the new tiger census, based on the new methodology would be released during the summit.

Source: New Delhi, August 10, 2009, *PTI*

Year of the Tiger to kick off on V-Day

To draw international attention to tiger conservation and protection, **India will launch the Year of the Tiger on Valentine's Day next year from Corbett Tiger Reserve**, MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh announced.

India's offer in this regard was accepted at a meeting held at the prestigious Smithsonian Institute, which was attended by other agencies including the World Bank.

Source: Washington D C, 03, October 2009, Lalit K Jha, *PTI*

'Radio collaring to continue'

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau raised concerns with the MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh that the radio collaring of tigers in Panna Tiger Reserve had "compromised the overall security of the reserve." The WCCB director Rina Mitra said that the information emitted by the radio collars may possibly have been misused. Leading conservationists and scientists protested strongly and refuted reports that blamed radio-collaring for the death of tigers in Panna. The Bombay Natural History Society stated that that **radio-collaring is a well-known, time-tested technique used globally for over four decades. Thousands of animals including big cats have been successfully fitted with radio collars without causing any harm to them.**

Later, MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh clarified that reports in the media that "radio collaring was killing Panna tigers was the opinion of an individual" that had been put up for consideration. He stressed that radio collaring was a necessary conservation tool practiced the world over and India was going to continue using it.

Source: PTI, July 30, 2009

NEWS FROM THE STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH

Memorial for late Andhra CM in tiger habitat opposed

Andhra Pradesh wants to build the largest memorial of its kind in the memory of the late Dr YSR Reddy who was killed in a helicopter crash on September 3. The memorial park is proposed to be built at a cost of Rs **315 crores on 1,412 hectares of forest land in Nallamala forest. This falls within the buffer of the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve**—though the notification as per guidelines of NTCA is still awaited. A memorial stupa will be built at the entrance to the proposed project while a 4.5-km trekking path will be built upto Pavuralagutta, the exact site of the crash, according to the state Information Minister J Geeta Reddy. A Nature Interpretation Study Centre would also be set up at the site at a cost of Rs 50 lakh and also a breeding centre for peacocks, elephants and other animals.

Source: PTI, February 25, 2009

Comment: With due respect to the departed soul, one wonders what the late Dr YSR Reddy would have thought of this infringement in prime tiger habitat? And what exactly does a 'breeding centre' for peacocks and elephants mean?

Two biosphere reserves proposed for Andhra Pradesh

The MoEF has proposed the creation of two biosphere reserves in Andhra Pradesh. One of these will be in the Chintapalle area in Visakhapatnam district while the second one has been proposed in the Seshachalam hills spread over Chittoor and Kadapa districts.

Source: Santosh Patnaik, June 9, 2009, 'NGO hails biosphere reserve plan in agency', *The Hindu*.

ASSAM

Assam tightens wildlife protection law

The State Assembly passed the Wildlife (Protection) (Assam Amendment) Bill-2009 on July 15, incorporating more stringent provisions to check wildlife crime, including life term for poaching. The Act has made first-time poaching a punishable offence

by imprisonment from seven to ten years in place of the earlier three to seven years. For a second offence, the quantum of punishment will extend from ten years to life imprisonment.

Source: www.indianjungles.com, July 16, 2009

More compensation for death on duty

In a move to motivate and support staff involved in forest and wildlife protection in Assam, the state government announced that it would give Rs. 3 lakhs to the family of any forest department employee who dies on duty. The incentive will be in addition to the normal benefits given to government employees.

Source: PTI

The killing fields of Kaziranga

The spate of poaching in Kaziranga continues. **Twelve tigers have died in Kaziranga since last November—in one year Kaziranga has lost 15 per cent of its tigers. The rhino toll has risen to six this year.**

On October 7, the carcass of a tigress was found in the Kohra range of the national park. Preliminary investigations revealed the tiger was suspected to be poisoned. A rhino carcass, with its horn missing was also found floating in a water body in the Bagori range on the same day.

This comes close in the heels of the triple tragedy of September 19, when a rhino was shot dead in the Burapahar forest range and a tiger was killed, allegedly in a retaliatory attack by residents at Mohpara, outside the Kohra range. On the same day in Karbi Anglong, a tusker was killed by poachers, who chopped off its trunk and tusks. Three poachers involved in the rhino killing were later arrested in the adjoining Nagaon district.

The forest department also exchanged fire with poachers on September 8, and again on October 16.

Poachers are also targeting herbivores and their methods are deadly. An alert was sounded in Kaziranga when six heads of cattle were found dead—preliminary investigation showed that they were grazing on poisoned grass at Bagmari, on the fringes of the sanctuary. It is feared that the poachers might have been targeting rhinos who frequent that area.

Source: Uttam Saikia, Hon Wildlife Warden, Naresh Mitra, *The Times of India*, October 2009

Note: As we go to press, news has come in of poaching of three rhinos within one week (December 13 - 20th) in Kaziranga National Park.

Conflict hits Kaziranga

Most would remember the gruesome incident of a tiger shot dead near Jakhalabandha, just west of Kaziranga National Park on March 23, 2009, after it was declared a man-eater. This tragedy highlighted conflict which is increasingly becoming acute in the region. According to official sources tigers have killed more than 108 cows in 2008 and the compensation received in lieu paltry amount. The compensation received for a cow is Rs 2,500, while the market price is more than Rs 8,000. There are over 200 villages around the park. Also, rhinos and tiger stray into the villages, accentuating the conflict.

Most instances of tiger poisoning are on the sand islands of Brahmaputra, stretching from Kaziranga's northern boundary to Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and Orang National Park. "When tigers kill cattle, villagers often lace the carcasses with poison knowing well that tigers are in the habit of returning to their kills. There are instances of poachers paying cattle owners to poison the carcass. They then skin the animal and take away the body parts," informed Feroz Ahmed, project investigator of Aaranyak's project on tigers at Orang National Park.

Source: Amarjyoti Borah, Down to Earth

Comment: *Kaziranga has long served as an example of one of our best protected parks. Though always targeted by poachers largely for rhino horn, the staff has done a remarkable job of controlling poaching at great risk to themselves. However, poaching has come back with a vengeance, one cause cited being the lack of effective leadership. What is worrying is that poachers are now targeting tigers as well. As is well known, Kaziranga has amongst the highest density of tigers at 16/100 km. Also, the line between poaching and retaliatory killings is blurred. This is true not just of Kaziranga, but most parks. There is a high possibility of the big cats being poisoned once they stray outside protected areas as poachers capitalise on the grievances of the villagers to kill tigers.*

Assam yet to form Kaziranga Tiger Foundation

In spite of all the problems, the Assam government has not yet formed the Kaziranga Tiger Foundation, thus depriving the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve of direct flow of funds from the NTCA. The reserve also hasn't

prepared its Tiger Conservation Plan. The state is required to set up the foundation in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding it signed with the NTCA.

Due to the delay in funds, the raising of a dedicated Tiger Protection Force, procurement of weapons and ammunition, setting up of anti-poaching camps and undertaking other protection and conservation work has also suffered.

Source: 'Kaziranga tiger reserve deprived of direct flow of Central funds', *The Hindu*, June 10, 2009

Orang in trouble, too

Orang's population of tigers has reduced from its previous count of 19 to about seven tigers. Poaching in Orang is of increasing concern—six rhinos have been poached so far in Orang this year. No less than 23 rhinos have been lost to poaching since 2001 in this 78.82 sq km national park. A poacher named Hamruj Ali and his accomplice were gunned down by forest guards in an encounter on September 19. Ali, suspected to be involved in the killing of at least five rhinos in Orang, had been released on bail only about 10 days back. Orang is also troubled by human-tiger conflict. **Since 1990, 15 people have been killed by tigers around the Orang National Park.** Further, as many as 33 incidences of livestock lifting cases are also recorded around the park since 1993.

Such high level of conflict has taken a heavy toll of tiger as the local community has become hostile towards the animal. About 14 tigers have been killed in retaliation since 2000.

Source: Naresh Mitra, TNN, *The Telegraph*, September 19

Seven tigers camera trapped in Orang

The Guwahati-based NGO Aaranyak carried out camera trapping operation in Orang from May 25 to June 14, 2008. During the 20 days of camera trapping they used camera traps at 27 locations. During the 540 trap-nights, 20 photographs of seven individual tigers were obtained—though supporting data indicates the numbers could be a little higher.

Besides tigers, the camera also trapped rhino, hog deer, wild boar, porcupine, large Indian civet, small Indian civet, palm civet, fishing cat, jungle cat and leopard cat.

Source: Aaranyak

Orang tiger dies

An adult male tiger, found critically ill in Orang National Park succumbed to its illness. It was sighted by a forest department patrol team in the southern part of the park between Singbati and Nichlamari camps on August 18. Veterinarians from the IFAW-WTI run Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC), based near Kaziranga National Park, were called in to treat the animal.

Dr Prasanta Boro, IFAW-WTI veterinarian, said, “When we reached the site, the condition of the tiger was critical. It was in lateral recumbency, and showed symptoms of nervine disorder such as shallow breathing and seizures. The tongue was hanging out and eyes were open and glazed over...”

Desperate attempts to save the animal failed and it died on 19th August.

Source: August 20, 2009, Wildlife Trust of India

Hydroelectric projects threat to Kaziranga

The Ranganadi Hydro Electric Project (RHEP) and the Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Project may pose serious threat to Kaziranga in addition to destroying the habitat of the endangered Gangetic dolphins in the Subansiri river. This was published in a recent research paper which explains that the practice of frequent flushing and sluicing sediment and debris by the projects will create a natural sediment dam at the confluence of the Ranganadi and Subansiri rivers with the Brahmaputra. This may compel the Brahmaputra to change its morphology for maintaining the river’s continuum process, resulting in more inundation and erosion which in turn could pose a threat to the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve.

The research project is part of a major Union Grants Commission (UGC) project on the pre-impact assessment of the Lower Subansiri Hydel Project on its downstream areas.

Source: ‘Hydroelectric projects may pose threat to KNP’, *The Assam Tribune*, June 12

BIHAR

Valmiki gets new director

After a gap of **about 11 months, the state government finally appointed a field director** in Valmiki Tiger Reserve in August. It may be noted here that the MoEF Jairam Ramesh wrote to the Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in July this year urging him to appoint a field

director and expedite the process of signing tripartite MoU with the Centre to avail funds. The state signed the MoU with the central government in September first week.

Comment: *During the last financial year Valmiki couldn’t utilise the central grants due to non-signing of tripartite MoU.*

Cubs sighted in Valmiki TR

A tigress has been sighted with two cubs in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in the first week of August by the villagers and the personnel of the Seema Suraksha Bal, a paramilitary force posted in the reserve. At least eight cubs have been born in the reserve since 2005.

While this was good reason to celebrate, an official of the reserve cautions that the state must act fast to strengthen the future of the tiger in Bihar’s only habitat. **The state has failed to notify the core critical area of the reserve** despite the fact that the NTCA has already issued a directive to this effect. In fact, Bihar remains the only state not to have notified the core critical habitat.

A proposal for notifying an area of 900 sq km as the core critical area of the reserve has been gathering dust.

It is proposed that Bhikna Thori be included in the core critical area to put an effective check on mining that is rampant here. This also serves as an important corridor that links three protected areas—Royal Chitwan National Park, Parsa Wildlife Sanctuary of Nepal and Valmiki.

However, sources say that vested interests were trying to block this so that mining activities go unchecked in Bhikna Tori.

Bihar’s Minister of Environment and Forests Ramji Rishideo said no decision has been taken as yet regarding the area to be notified as the core critical area. While refusing to give any timeframe for the notification, he added that the matter is under consideration.

Source: Sanjeev Kumar Verma, *Times News Network*, September 2, 2009

Indo-Nepal land dispute threatens Valmiki

Susta in Valmiki Tiger Reserve is under territorial dispute between India and Nepal, which has made the area virtually out of the control of the forest department. Illegal settlers have established themselves there and patrolling and monitoring is minimal. Timber and cane smuggling consequently continues with impunity.

Poaching is also of grave concern in the adjoining Madanpur range, where a tiger was killed last year. Samir Kumar Sinha of Wildlife Trust of India says the area has been a soft target for wildlife poachers and the situation could get worse if the dispute with Nepal is not sorted out soon.

The 880 sq. km. Valmiki reserve has 13 tigers, according to a census conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in 2006.

Source: Sanjeeb Baruah, August 5, IANS

CHHATTISGARH

There are reports that poachers have killed a tiger and a leopard in the area bordering Indravati Tiger Reserve recently. The park which is located in the naxal stronghold of Dantewada, is mostly avoided by the government officials for the fear of being targeted.

A team of forest officials got intelligence information about the skins being smuggled into Maharashtra by crossing over the Indravati river and laid a trap along the possible route to nab the smugglers who were reported to be moving from village to village in Gadchiroli. Sources said that the leopard skin was being offered for sale but there is no confirmation about the tiger skin. Attempts to catch the suspected poachers failed.

Source: Times News Service, December 12, 2009

GOA

Forester Face FIR for pinning poachers

The tiger poaching case in Goa has taken an ugly turn with the state police filing an FIR against three forest officials—Assistant Conservator of Forests Anil Shetgaonkar, and Range Forest Officers Paresh Parab and Tulshidas Wadkar for wrongful confinement and causing grievous hurt to tiger poaching accused Suryakant Majik. The forest department said that it will fully back its officers who have been booked for doing their duty and that the issue would be taken up with the Home Ministry soon.

Majik, who is employed with the Home Guard department, had been arrested after a forest department probe indicated his alleged involvement in the poaching of a tiger in the Mhadei wildlife sanctuary early this year.

Source: August 29, 2009

***Comment:** The attempt to vilify the officers involved is part of the larger issue of continuing to deny the presence of tigers in Mhadei (and adjoining forests), which is being proposed as a tiger reserve. Vested mining interests supported by a strong political lobby are not in favour of the sanctuary being declared a tiger reserve. Another issue of concern is that though a wildlife sanctuary declared in 1999, Mhadei is still manned by territorial staff.*

Declare Mhadei critical tiger habitat

Conservationists have reiterated their earlier demand to **declare Mhadei sanctuary as critical tiger habitat**. Though the state has long been denying the presence of tigers in Goa, the fact is well-established, mainly by the killing of a tiger in the area (see above). There has been subsequent news, too, of cattle kills, pugmarks in Mhadei and Chorla Ghats. Researchers assert that these are not transient—as claimed by the government—but resident tigers as signs are noticed throughout the year. Tiger sightings have been on the rise for a long time now and these have been reported to various agencies including the Goa and Karnataka forest departments.

Source: Rajendra Kerkar, Mhadei Bacaho Abhiyan, TNN

Goa for slashing buffer zones

Allegedly under pressure from the mining lobby, the Goa government has submitted a report to the central government **recommending drastic reduction of eco-fragile zones near wildlife sanctuaries**. According to officials, the gist of the report, which is pending with the central government for approval, is that the area and extent of eco-sensitive zones will be decided on a case-to-case basis. After conducting field inspections the report has recommended that the entire buffer zone along the Netravali and Bhagwan Mahavir wildlife sanctuaries, which are located along the state's eastern border, shared with Karnataka, be reduced to "zero metres".

The issue of mining in and around wildlife sanctuaries rocked the recently concluded monsoon session of the state assembly. The draft mineral policy tabled by the state government also **advocates mining in 'close vicinity' of wildlife sanctuaries**.

Source: India Abroad News Service, August 30, 2009

Tigers in mining area in Konkan

There are reports of tiger sightings in the forest of the Cavrem and Maina village in Quepem taluka in Goa. Locals claim to having sighted tigers, there is news of cattle kills and also the body of a partially-eaten gaur has been reported in the Devapan Dongor forests in the region. The forest department is currently investigating the reports and does not rule out the presence of the tiger. Quepem adjoins Cotigao sanctuary that has connectivity with Anshi-Dandeli tiger Reserve in Maharashtra.

But the forests of Quepem are getting devastated as mining has felled and pillaged whole tracts of prime forests and hills.

There is a similar story in Sindhudurg, in Kalane, a village bordering Goa. A tiger has been spotted in Kalane and the villages around. There are reports of cattle kills, pugmarks have been traced and many people claim to have seen the tiger. A senior forest official says on condition of anonymity, “there are at least three tigers in the Dodamar forests near Kalane.” But this area has been devastated by mining too—and the villagers live in the hope that the national animal might help prevent the mine—which is destroying their crops, soil, water sources and health.

Source: www.mandgoa.blogspot.com, Purna Bindra/Tehelka

JHARKHAND

Tiger DNA tested in Palamu

Palamu has the distinction of being the first in the country to conduct a DNA analysis of tiger scat. The reserve has long been dismissed as a ‘problem’ reserve, given the naxal situation and the administrative and protection issues arising out of it. Few believe that there are any tigers left in the region. Well, here’s the good news—the analysis revealed the presence of tigers. **A total of 96 scats were collected from 40 per cent of the reserve and sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad. The CCMB informed “16 out of the 34 samples indicated the presence of DNA specific to tiger.** Though this does not necessarily mean that there are 16 tigers—to arrive at an estimate a more detailed study must be carried out in the next few months. Experts say that some very good tiger areas from the core have not been included in the analysis, and therefore in all probability the number of tigers will be higher than that indicated. It is essential to do a more exhaustive study to establish estimates and strengthen protection.

KARNATAKA

Death by stress and starvation

A young tigress caught in a private resort near Nagarhole National Park died on July 3 after she was released in Bhadra Tiger Reserve. She is said to have succumbed to fatigue and starvation aggravated by stress.

This tigress had settled in a plantation close to the park since the past few months. Nagarhole boasts a saturation density of tigers—10-15 animals per 100 sq km—leading to frequent territorial battles, which may have forced the tigress out. She largely lived on a livestock diet. She had to dodge angry, armed villagers on many occasions and there was no warranty that she would be able to feed on her hard-earned kills as the carcasses were often snatched away by angry villagers.

On June 28, she was surrounded by a mob and was tranquilised. The local forest staff had little infrastructure or skill to handle such a situation—not even a veterinarian on call. Under mounting public pressure, they did not have much of a choice either. The range officer did his best to sedate the tigress and secure her in a cage. Since the tigress had never attacked people, it was suggested that she be radio-collared and released near the capture site. But fearing mob fury and future dispersal from Nagarhole, the forest department decided to take her to Bhadra. She was released on late afternoon of June 30. A decision was taken not to radio-collar her, since they did not want to risk another tranquilisation in her weakened state

Four days later, the tigress was found dead, apparently due to starvation.

Source: ‘Captured tiger dies in Bhadra, TNN, July 4; ‘From Nagarhole to Bhadra’ Jay Mazoomdar, *The Indian Express*, August 20, 2009

Karnataka for better ties with Goa

In a bid to resolve matters related to wildlife crime following the controversial killing of a tiger in Goa in February 2009, **Karnataka has approached the NTCA proposing better interstate coordination.**

Goa’s major wildlife sanctuaries— Mhadei, Bhagwan Mahavir, Mollem National Park, Neturlim and Cotigao—form a contiguous corridor for wildlife in the Western Ghats with Karnataka’s adjoining Anshi-Dandeli Tiger Reserve. Tigers from Anshi and Dandeli

are known to stray into Goa. It is felt that better coordination between the states will strengthen protection.

Source: Paul Fernandes, July 8, 2009, *Times News Network*

Only elephants to ferry tourists in PAs

The Karnataka State Government has decided to implement the M K Appiah committee report on the operations of private tour operators in protected areas. It has been decided to **phase out movement of private vehicles inside protected areas in the next three years**—only vehicles of the state forest department will be used. Elephants will also be used to ferry tourists.

The Government had appointed the committee early in 2008, to study and advise it on formulating a policy on tourism in national parks and sanctuaries.

Source: P M Raghunandan, *Deccan Herald*

Night traffic ban for road through Bandipur

In a major victory, the ban on night traffic on National Highway (NH) 212 and NH 67 that cut through Bandipur Tiger Reserve was deemed to continue by the High Court of Karnataka. The decision to divert traffic through NH 212 and NH 67 from 9 pm to 6 am was announced in June this year. There was strong opposition, including from the Kerala government. It was argued that the closure would cause great inconvenience to several transport companies, traders—and it did not take long for the road closure to become a political issue, with local leaders jumping in the fray. Bowing to political pressure the order was withdrawn three days later.

Considering the grave threat to tigers, elephants, leopards and other wild animals a Bangalore-based petitioner appealed to the High Court to continue with the night ban—which has been granted. The decision by the High Court is lauded by conservationists as a very important step in saving the ecologically important area for tigers and Asiatic elephants. Apart from large mammals several smaller, endangered wildlife are regularly killed due to high speed driving by truckers and other vehicles. However, the court has asked the petitioner and respondents to come out with details as to how this problem is mitigated in other protected areas in India and in other parts of the world.

Source: VR Jayaraj, *The Pioneer*, July 9, 2009

Road to cut through Nagarhole

On the other hand, there is bad news regarding the Mysore-Mananthavadi road. The Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of the Karnataka State Highway Improvement Project (KSHIP) has decided to **go ahead with the road through the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve disregarding the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee constituted by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court.**

A 10-km stretch of the Mysore-Mananthavadi Road (State Highway 17 D) was initially proposed through the southern side of the national park. But the CEC constituted monitoring committee suggested diversion of the original alignment between Dammanakatte and Udburu to avoid the national park limits.

While the diversion suggested will increase the distance by just three km, it will benefit nearly 25,000 people who live in villages along the route. In contrast, the original alignment of the road through the national park does not benefit villages and would devastate wildlife.

The original alignment of the road passing through the forests will abet illegal activities by timber, sand smugglers, poachers and also encourage livestock smuggling from Karnataka to Kerala. Even the district administration is in favour of the diversion, and Mysore Deputy Commissioner P. Manivannan has strongly recommended the realignment.

But the PIU has stated that it conducted a feasibility study through Scott Wilson Ltd., U.K., and “found the alternative route not feasible and economically unviable”. Officials in the Forest Department are questioning how a mere three km extension, which will benefit 25,000 people, can be unviable.

Source: ‘Road to cut through Nagarhole’, R Krishna Kumar, November 28, 2009, *The Hindu*

MADHYA PRADESH

MP govt admits that tigers extinct in Panna

The Madhya Pradesh government admitted in the State Assembly that no tiger was found in the Panna Tiger Reserve during a survey conducted in May 2009 by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). This was stated by the MP minister of state for forests Rajendra Shukla, in a written reply to a calling attention motion on the issue of dwindling tiger population in the state moved by the

opposition Congress party. The minister also said that the State government was examining a report submitted by the Special Investigating Team set up by the Centre which said that poaching was the main reason for the falling tiger population in Panna. The MP government has formed a six-member committee to look into the matter. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan also transferred the field directors of Panna, Kanha and Bandhavgarh national parks in June this year. Reports indicated that protection was weakening in Kanha, long considered India's best managed parks.

The Minister said that the state government agreed with the concern expressed by members and pointed out that all efforts would be made for protection of tigers and other wildlife.

Source: Bhopal, 13, July 2009, PTI

Comment: *Since 2005, MP has been denying that there was a problem in Panna and that tigers were being poached, even though there were repeated warnings from researchers, scientists and the Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court. Even when Panna was down to the last tiger, the MP government insisted to the contrary. The Special Investigation Team Report which stated that there were no tigers in Panna since January 2009, and also held the forest department collectively responsible was rubbished by the state.*

Pench tiger shifted to Panna

A male tiger was translocated to Panna from Pench Tiger Reserve to join the two tigresses shifted there from Kanha and Bandhavgarh earlier in the year. The three-and-a-half-year-old male was taken by road to Panna, a distance of more than 400 km and released into a one-hectare enclosure on 27th morning.

MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh gave the nod to the proposal to translocate the tiger with an aim to repopulate the endangered species in Panna National Park where two tigresses from Bandhavgarh and Kanha reserves were shifted in March. The Minister asked the state government to strictly adhere the tiger relocation protocol framed by the NTCA while executing the project. It may be remembered that the state had flouted relocation guidelines laid down by IUCN and the NTCA last time, and had been condemned by conservationists and tiger experts. They were also concerned about protection issues in Panna.

Source: Milind Ghatwai, 'Panna gets male tiger from Pench', *The Indian Express*, November 8, 2009

Note: *As we go to press, news is that the tiger has strayed about 200 km away from Panna. Last heard it was in a degraded forest adjoining Lalitpur a village in Uttar Pradesh raising concerns about a potential conflict situation. At a recent workshop organised in Delhi by Wildlife Institute of India it was suggested that the tiger should be sedated and brought back into Panna before there is any conflict with humans. This was contradicted by some experts and vets of WII who expressed apprehension of the adverse affect of frequent sedation. The NTCA has written to the MP government that the tiger be sedated and brought back to Panna—and also suggested that his enclosure be littered with the scat and urine of a tigress to assure the male of the presence of a possible mate—to lure him to stay put, and not stray to uncertain pastures!*

No tiger in Sanjay Tiger Reserve

Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve in MP is feared to be following the same fate as Panna with a top official saying that **no tiger was sighted in the sanctuary between October 2008 and May 2009**, according to C K Patil, who was posted as Field Director of Sanjay Tiger Reserve during the same period. According to an official census carried out by the state in 2004, the tiger reserve spread over more than 800 sq km in Sidhi district, had six big cats. It had the highest tiger population of 36 in 1992, when it was still undivided MP. After MP was divided in 2000, a large part of the then Sanjay National Park went to Chhattisgarh. The Chhattisgarh government renamed the forest area falling under its jurisdiction as Guru Ghasidas National Park with an area of 1,500 sq km.

Source: July 13, 2009, PTI

Court seeks affidavit on tiger protection

The Madhya Pradesh High Court has sought affidavits within a month from the Centre, State and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) on the steps taken to protect the tiger population of the state. A division bench of the High Court sought the affidavits while hearing a PIL filed by wildlife activist Navneet Maheshwari.

In the PIL filed three years back, Maheshwari, quoting surveys, said that the tiger population of MP had dipped to somewhere between 210-395 in 2007-08 from 710 in 2004.

Source: January 27, 2009, PTI

Deployment of special force to protect tigers

The MP government will deploy a Special Tiger Protection Force in three of its tiger reserves- Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench.

The All India Tiger Census enumerated tiger numbers to be about 300, less than half its previous numbers of 710 in 2002. It is feared that numbers have reduced further.

“Now a Special Tiger Protection Force is on the anvil to protect the big cats in various tiger reserves of the state,” said a senior wildlife official.

Every company of the force would comprise 112 jawans, three sub-inspectors and six head constables and will be headed by a Deputy Superintendent of Police.

The force will work under the control and guidance of the concerned Field Director, who will send a monthly report of the same to the NTCA.

Source: India Abroad News Service, July 5, 2009

Tigress found dead, three cubs missing

The depleting number of big cats in MP suffered another setback with one more tigress found dead at Bandhavgarh National Park on August 18. Her three cubs too are missing. This is the third tiger death at Bandhavgarh this year. Government veterinarian JP Tripathi, who carried out the postmortem said the death of the tigress seems to have been caused by poisoning because there were no signs of injury on the body.

Source: IANS, August 20, 2009

MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra officers transferred

(Former) Forest minister Babanrao Pachpute effected over 350 transfers in three days. This included over 240 range forest officers (RFOs), and the field director and conservator of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). TATR field director S H Patil was shifted without replacement, leaving Tadoba without a director. Similarly, over a dozen RFOs from wildlife areas were shifted without any replacements.

The worst affected reserves after the transfers would be Tadoba and Pench, with most RFO posts lying vacant. Both Pench and Tadoba are high on the hit-list of poachers, and this will only serve to make them more vulnerable.

Source: Times News Network, July 20, 2009.

Minister's bravado act: Pat a Tiger!

Agriculture Minister Balasaheb Thorat stirring up a storm when he **entered a tiger's cage and patted the feline in the Nagpur zoo**. A video of Thorat entering the cage along with eight to 10 local Congress leaders and patting a cub was made public, kicking up a storm. This is against the Wildlife Protection Act and also the norms of the Central Zoo Authority.

But the Maharashtra Forest Minister Babanrao Pachpute tried to explain his colleague's stunt as a gesture of 'love' for the big cats. “Balasaheb Thorat's love for wildlife is well-known. Just because he touched the tiger doesn't mean he did anything wrong. We will initiate an inquiry if required. But the zoo doesn't even come under my purview. It's under the Municipal Corporation's jurisdiction, their staff look after the zoo,” explained Babanrao Pachpute. Environmentalists are up in arms against this blatant flouting of the law, and insensitivity by a public figure. Under fire, Thorat said that “he had not done anything illegal but had gone to check if the authorities were taking care of wild animals, as he was also district-in-charge minister of Nagpur.

The centre did not take kindly to this episode. The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh said that they had asked the Central Zoo Authority to probe into the matter and submit the report. “If the minister is found guilty, law will take its course”

Ministry sources said Thorat was guilty of violating Section 38 (J) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and he could be imprisoned for six months or fined Rs 20,000, or both.

Thorat is said to have met Ramesh and apologised and ‘explained his side of the story.’ Thorat said he told the minister he had no wrong intention except the development of the zoo.”

Source: August 17, 2009, TNN

Comment: *The episode has fizzled out, and the centre and the state seem to have kissed and made up, there has been no action against the erring minister.*

Power plant spells trouble for Nagzira

The Adani power plant in Gondia district is located within ten km of the Nagzira National Park—an important tiger area, and a critical corridor connecting Tadoba to the Satpuda tiger landscape—one of the three important landscapes recognised in the All India Tiger Estimate.

The power plant is reportedly going to be fuelled by the Adani coal mine bordering Tadoba. The shocking bit is that though the forest clearance for the mines and the power plant it will feed is still to come through, construction is on and well on its way to completion.

Adani Power Maharashtra Limited has submitted a proposal for diversion of 164.84 hectares of forest land for establishment of 1980 mw coal-based thermal power plant at Tiroda. The power plant is coming up between the Kachewani and Tiroda stretch which has rich forests.

According to the MoEF certain parts of the area of this project are within the 10 km radius i.e. eco-sensitive zone of Nagzira.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar, *Times News Network*, August 8, 2009

Comment: *With the centre refusing permission to the Adani mines, the fate of the power plant hangs in balance*

Heavy tiger mortality around Tadoba

There is disturbing news from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). **In the past 11 months no less than five tigresses have gone missing—presumed poached. All tigress' had cubs—most of whom have either died or are languishing in the zoo. We have thus lost an entire generation of tigers.**

The last incident occurred on September 19. A cub around 14 months of age was discovered in a cattle shed in Ganeshpimpri village, one among three in a period of five days. All three were shifted to the zoo. This is the fifth incident of abandoned cubs found in villages on the fringes of TATR since November last year. Mothers of all the cubs found abandoned since have not been traced. There is intelligence information of movement of Bawariya poaching gangs in the area.

On November 5, traders who had been apprehended by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (assisted by the CBI) with two tiger skins (See Wildlife Crime for details) confessed to killing the tiger in TATR some two months ago. Sources say that one of the skins could be of the mother of the orphaned cubs found in September since the poachers said they had killed the tiger in that area around the same time.

The territorial forests around TATR are believed to have a population of about 20 tigers that is fast depleting.

Source: Ashwin Aghor, DNA, Tiger Research and Conservation Trust (TRACT), Satpuda Foundation

Tiger found dead near Nagzira

One more case of tiger death has been reported from Gondia district in Maharashtra, hardly five km from Nagzira National Park. It is suspected to have been poisoned. According to sources, the incident came to light on December 12, when the forest personnel, acting on a tip-off, picked up three persons and exhumed the carcass from the forest of Mangezari. The owner of the cow, Shalikram Ambedare, Dharmaraj Kirsan and Hanumant Pise allegedly mixed pesticide with the half-eaten cow.

All the vital body parts, like the skin, paws, nails, teeth of the tiger, are missing. (However a report in The Times of India, Nagpur edition states that “near the half-eaten carcass of the bullock, the forest department found pieces of carnivore parts, including stomach, heart, pieces of bones, etc. covered in a bag. Samples have been sent to the WII and Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. White and yellow hair and unclear pugmarks in the sand indicated that these belonged to a tiger. There has been no claimant for the bullock. All evidence suggests at a clear case of revenge killing by villagers and not handiwork of professional poachers”).

Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife, Vidarbha region) Nandkishore, said that all the three accused were in forest custody for interrogation.

This is the 14th tiger death since May 2008 in the region, according to the TOI report.

Source: ‘Tiger found dead in Nagzira’ *The Hindustan Times*, December 13. ‘Tiger suspected to be poached in Tiroda range’, *The Times of India*, December 12

State lags behind in relocation

Though the centre has taken a strong initiative to prioritise relocation with increased financial assistance—some states lag behind in their response. In Maharashtra 32 villages need to be resettled urgently from tiger bearing areas; four villages inside Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, 23 in Melghat, Wan and Ambabarwa sanctuaries, one in Pench, four in Navegaon. However, the state government’s resettlement record is dismal. In the last five years only one village (Botezari) in Tadoba has been resettled while four other villages have been partially resettled—one in TATR (Kolsa) and three from Melghat (Pastalai,

Churni and Vairat). Relocating villages is critical—both for the welfare of the people, as has been seen in the recent resettlement cases, and for tigers who need inviolate place for survival. Experts estimate that resettling these 32 villages will create space for at least 50 more tigers in these reserves.

In 2005, the TTF found that in 30 years only 80 villages and 2,904 families had been relocated from various tiger reserves across the country. There are an estimated 1,500 villages (3.25 lakh people) inside the core and buffer zones of tiger reserves currently.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar October 5, 2009, *Times News Network*; Kishor Rithe, Satpuda Foundation

Tigers extinct in Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary

Twelve years ago, there were nine tigers and a good number of leopards in this 139 sq km wildlife sanctuary. But there are no tigers there now. Chaprala in Allapalli division in Gadchiroli district has one of the richest forests in the country but has been labelled ‘zero tiger’ district. Can we bring back these tigers?

Conservationists say forest department’s ineffectiveness has led to increase in biotic pressures. Excessive grazing, tendu leaf collection, forest fires and teak smuggling have negated conservation efforts.

Hunting of prey species saw a sharp decline in ungulates which led to increased cattle kills by tigers and leopards. They were killed in retaliation leading the current situation. Now, there are few herbivores like chinkara, nilgai, wild boars and chital in the sanctuary. It is an important area, however, considering it is contiguous to Indravati Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh and is also considered a critical potential habitat for the wild buffalo.

Massive efforts are needed if we are to save this sanctuary. Five villages from within the sanctuary need to be shifted, the buffer zone must be developed to ease grazing pressure, coupled with stringent protection.

There are other threats that need attention. The Prashantdham Temple Trust has encroached upon sanctuary land and constructed 39 rooms. The park management has little control over the activities of the trust. Fishermen have formed a cooperative and do fishing on commercial basis inside the sanctuary.

Source: October 2009, Vijay Pinjarkar, *Times News Network*; Kishor Rithe, The Satpuda Foundation

ORISSA

Maoists strike Sunabeda

Barely two months after Simlipal was crippled with naxal attack, armed naxalites struck Sunabeda, a proposed tiger reserve in the Southern part of Orissa on June 23, 2009. Around 40 naxalites targeted the forest infrastructure of Sunabeda Wildlife Division. They demolished the forest gate, burnt down forest offices, assaulted guards and anti-poaching staff, tied up the watchman and set all documents on fire.

Again, on July 11, a group of 20 extremists led a second attack. It is learnt that the sanctuary is being used by Left-wing extremists to train their cadres. However, sources say that the recent allegations of naxalite aggression might actually be a facade to encourage the large scale illegal ganja cultivation that takes place inside the proposed tiger reserve. Allegedly, the so-called naxalite violence is actually headed by the ganja mafia and is aimed at breaking the control of the forest department to facilitate unhindered activity of the mafia.

Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary has been given ‘in principle’ approval by the NTCA as a tiger reserve since 2008, though the state is yet to notify it. It forms a contiguous patch with Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh. It is Orissa’s only remaining habitat that still reports the critically endangered wild buffalo and might potentially support the barasingha.

Source: June 24, 2009, *Express News Service*; Aditya Panda, Wild Orissa

Simlipal on the road to recovery?

It’s early yet for any real change, but there have been some positive efforts to ‘rehabilitate’ Simlipal Tiger Reserve, after years of neglect, mismanagement and the last crippling attack by naxals in March 2009.

Following media reports and intervention from the centre, the state has placed a good management team in the reserve. The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh has taken special initiative and taken up issues concerning the reserve with the state Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. An independent team was sent by the centre to assess the situation in the reserve, and has given its recommendations. Priority will be given to shift 223 families residing in four villages in the core critical area of the reserve. Shockingly, this has been pending for no less than

three decades. The families will be relocated in the places of their choice and according to the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Also, there is an effort to employ the Special Tiger Protection Force.

Source: August 13, 2009

Note: Just as we were going to press, news comes in on the death of a young tusker—barely about eight to ten years of age. He is believed to have been poached, though it is not ascertained. His tusks—would not have been more than a foot long—were missing and the trunk, half-chopped. He was found at Devsthali, which is at the heart of the reserve.

RAJASTHAN

Rs 104 crores for relocation

The central government has given a grant of **Rs. 104 crore to the Rajasthan forest department for relocation of villages from inside Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve**. This is believed to be the largest such amount given to any tiger reserve for relocation of villages. It will be used to move the villages of Moredungri, Bhir and Khatuli. While Moredungri is on the periphery of the park, the others lie along the Keladevi corridor.

Source: October 2, 2009, *Times News Network*

Rajasthan proposes new tiger reserve

Rajasthan is set to get its third and India's 39th tiger reserve soon. The NTCA has given 'in-principle approval' to the project at Darrah National Park, about 50 km from Kota. "Darrah forms an excellent tiger habitat not only because of the perennial source of water but also because it has a good prey base. The seven villages that are located in the sanctuary lie along its periphery and all of them are ready to relocate," a forest department official said. The state also plans to translocate tigers from Ranthambhore in 2011, once the tiger reserve is declared, and the area 'made ready' for tigers. This will include improving water sources, provision of salt licks, weed eradication and stepping up protection. The state forest department also has plans to develop the Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary so that along with Darrah and Ranthambhore this stretch will provide an area of 2,000 sq km of habitat.

Source: Anindo Dey, *Times News Network*, November 7, 2009

Ranthambhore siblings in Sariska?

Evidence suggests that all three big cats—a male and two females—airlifted from Ranthambhore to repopulate Sariska are siblings. All three tigers come from the same father, known as Anantpura male. The two females are from the same mother, known as Jhalra female or Machhli. Before selecting tigers for relocation, no DNA analysis was conducted to ensure genetic dissimilarity. It is important to conduct a DNA test before introducing tigers, particularly when we are repopulating from zero. In interconnected forests, a bigger breeding population keeps the gene pool healthy. But one has to be very careful about 'pocket reserves' like Ranthambhore or Sariska

Source: Jay Mazoomdar, *The Hindustan Times*, July 29, 2009,

Comment: Given that the tigers of Ranthambhore originate from a tiny gene pool, it will be utopian to imagine that one can get unrelated tigers from the reserve.

New Ranthambhore road spells trouble

On the one hand, the Rajasthan Government has submitted a proposal to the Centre for a tiger reserve at Darrah, but on the other, it is going to destroy a vital and only forest corridor between Ranthambhore National Park and Keladevi Wildlife Sanctuary by building a new road between Sawata and Hadoti. Both these PAs are within the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve and the road is a major threat to the future of tigers in this habitat.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been stressing the importance of maintaining this vital forest corridor intact. Both Keladevi and the Sawai Mansingh Sanctuary, serves as a sink for surplus young tigers pushed out of the breeding 'source' population in Ranthambhore. The connectivity between these three protected areas is therefore very important.

A number of big and small villages already dot the stretch between Ranthambhore and Sawai Mansingh. The highway passing through the corridor adds to the problem. The only unhindered corridor that exists between the parks passes through the Banas river. This is going to be destroyed by the new road project. Heavy sand mining in the river already spells trouble for the fragile ecosystem. This part of the river, besides being a very important source of water for wildlife, serves

the purpose of a crucial corridor for migration of wild animals vital for a healthy gene pool.

Source: December 16, 2009, *Pioneer News Service*

UTTARAKHAND

Critical tiger corridor lost to development

The narrow patch of forest across the Gola river near Lalkuan in Nainital district in Uttarakhand—the only critical corridor for movement of tigers and elephants between the Terai Central and Terai East Forest Divisions has recently been completely blocked by infrastructure development. **With the destruction of this vital corridor the entire Terai-Arc Landscape stretching from Yamuna river near Saharanpur, in the West, to Bagmati river near Chitwan National Park in Nepal, in the East, has been divided into two zones. The Gola River Corridor links 7,000 sq km of contiguous wildlife habitat in Uttarakhand, which has over 180 tigers and 1,000 elephants, mainly concentrated in the Corbett Tiger Reserve and Rajaji National Park.** This is the most significant part of the approximately 20,000 sq km Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) and is identified by the All India Tiger Estimate as one of three “viable habitats for the tiger’s long-term survival”. It was also one among 10 corridors identified as crucial to conservation efforts, by the Wildlife Institute of India in 2004 and again by the state forest department in 2005. It was already fractured – disrupted by boulder mining along the Gola river, the fast-developing town of Lalkuan and the heavily trafficked Haldwani-Bareilly road—soon to be expanded into a four-lane. Still, a green sliver, no more than a kilometre or two wide, remained to offer passage to endangered wild creatures. An onslaught of destruction has all but obliterated the passage. First was the **railway sleeper factory established in 2007, though the ‘real killer’, is likely to be the Indian Oil depot next to the factory, with a massive 15-foot wall encircling a bustling storage complex—an impermeable physical barrier for animals. Then in 2008, the forest department gave away the last 34 acres of reserve forest to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBT).** The net result of all this is that the corridor has ceased to exist. The chief wildlife warden of the state, Shrikant Chandola said that since the corridor was not a wildlife area, it was difficult to halt these development activities, while the Divisional

Forest Officer of the region explained that he was unaware of the existence of the corridor.

Source: Prerna Singh Bindra, *Elephants Must Forget, Tehelka*, August 29, 2009

Rs. 8.5 crore security plan for Corbett

The MEF Jairam Ramesh is reported to have cleared a Rs 8.5-crore Comprehensive Security Plan for the Corbett Tiger Reserve, which will be implemented over the next six years. The plan includes purchase of a microlight aircraft for surveillance and installation of sensors all over the reserve for monitoring. Funds are also likely to be made available for a new museum in Ramnagar.

In another move the minister has also proposed to include Van Gujjars in the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF). The creation of the STPF is the outcome of the budgetary allocation of Rs. 50 crores made last year for the same. The STPF for Corbett is slated to have 110 people and the Minister has suggested that the Gujjars, who have a good knowledge of the place, would be far better suited for the purpose than anyone thrust from the outside.

The Minister also suggested that microlight aircrafts will also be considered for other tiger reserves like Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh where there is a serious problem of connectivity.

Source: June 16, 2009, *The Indian Express*

Comment: *Though microlights may serve a good purpose in say, Sundarbans which is difficult terrain to monitor, it is doubtful they will be of any use in forests with a thick canopy like Corbett, and Namdapha. It’s also crucial that we improve the situation of the foot soldiers first.*

Mahakumbh: Unholy mess for Rajaji

Mahakumbh, the massive mela that comes after every 12 years is scheduled to start on January 14 in the sacred town of Hardwar. The impact of this on Rajaji National Park, an important tiger and elephant habitat—will be devastating. As it is the park is reeling under anthropogenic pressure, with the cities of Hardwar, Dehradun and Rishikesh encircling it—plus the villages that surround it, and problem of Gujjars-or nomadic herders and their cattle. The influx of millions of pilgrims will encourage unauthorised entry, increase tourism pressure, risk of forest fires, timber smuggling, dumping of garbage etc.

WEST BENGAL

A Sundarbans report

Two tigresses were captured (from villages) and released on September 1. Straying incidents have increased—there were 18 this year till September as compared to 15 in 2007-2008. This is not because of Aila, as is being bandied around. Some explain that tiger numbers have increased, which is ridiculous to say the least. **Tigers stray simply because of lack of prey base, driven by hunger. Poaching of deer meat is rampant**, and reports indicate that it is available on demand in certain islands, and is also smuggled to Kolkata for special customers.

One of the tigress' caught (Tigress 001) in September had already been through the drill before just about two months back. Another tiger last year came back twice, even when released more than 35 nautical miles away. He was ultimately taken to the Kolkata zoo. Tigers are repeatedly coming back to inhabited villages. There is little doubt that the task is fraught with risk and the forest staff works hard amidst mob pressure to do this, yet is it a solution? There has to be some long-term perspective and solution than capture, then release, again and yet again.

Patrolling in core areas to stop poaching is a must. **Patrolling is very poor, monitoring non-existent in core areas.** Which is also why number of mortalities by tiger attacks has increased—maybe not officially, for most of the fatalities are 'non-official' killed when fishing, honey-collecting in core areas.

The forest department is very ill-equipped, understaffed: **4,000 sq km of this mangrove forest is manned by 94 guards (there are 52 vacancies), of 12 rangers posts, five are vacant.** There are neither enough boats, nor boatmen to man them. There is no money for fuel. West Bengal delayed signed the MoU, due to which funds were also delayed in reaching the reserve. Also, one **post-Aila impact is that the dependence on the forest has increased—for livelihood and survival.** Therefore poaching, fishing inside sanctuary area etc is even more than before. It is pertinent to note that nearly five million people live in the Sundarbans.

Besides securing tigers (and their prey), we need to step up vigilance. There is enough intelligence information to suggest that these porous borders are used to **infiltrate arms—and also militants cross over from Bangladesh.**

Tiger numbers: Besides the forest department in Sundarbans no one really believes that the reserve

harbours 270 tigers. According to scientists, **It is suboptimal habitat—and the prey base can hardly support 50 tigers**, if that. Poaching of shark (for fins and oil) and dolphins (for oil) is another organised racket. The off-take is huge.

The forest department did a commendable job during Aila (along with some NGOs there working in the field. I was at Anpur village. The feedback I got from the villagers was that the forest department was the first to reach, give emergency aid, water—and were practically the only government agency still coming to their aid. They also said that an NGO based in the village had helped them with immediate relief and saw them through the initial months.

Mangroves have protected the sanctuary—there seems to be no damage there. The forest is untouched.

Source: Purna Singh Bindra, on email

Experts' say no to dykes

The West Bengal Government has proposed the creation of nearly 400 kms of concrete embankments in the Sunderbans to protect it from storms like the recent Aila. The government had sought the Centre's assistance after Aila and the Centre has agreed in principle to fund the Rs 1,000-crore concrete embankment project to protect the region.

The plan has however been criticised by experts on grounds that the **embankments will cause an ecological imbalance.** Concern has been expressed that the overlying load on loose sediment layers may cause the river banks to collapse and that the deep foundations along the embankments would impair the dynamic relations between the groundwater table and the river as seepage would be retarded. "Embankments do more harm than good. The inefficacy of embankments as a flood control measure has been proved in many parts of the subcontinent," says Dr Kalyan Rudra, a water management expert. After Cyclone Aila, hundreds of villages in the Sunderbans were marooned, with salt water intrusion destroying the paddy crop and rendering vast stretches of arable land fallow. The floods also washed away seeds, killed livestock and wiped out all stocks of freshwater fish and shrimp.

It has been suggested that the best protection measure would be the construction of the mud-and-bamboo embankments at a distance of 500 m from the older dykes, followed by a mangrove plantation programme in the intermediate 500 meter stretch.

Source: October 27, 2009, *Times News Network*

Prey base survey in Sunderbans

The Sunderbans' tiger prey base has finally come under the scanner. The state forest department has launched an extensive survey to check if the number of deer and wild boar has dropped drastically, forcing tigers to stray into villages.

The forest is being surveyed on the basis of wildlife track signs to check if there has been a decrease in prey animals. "There is no evidence yet that there has actually been a prey shortage, but we must try to find out. The survey is on. We have also decided to release prey animals that are now in captivity," said Subhendu Bandyopadhyay, DFO, South 24-Parganas.

To begin with, 22 deer will be released in the forest from the Jharkhali rehabilitation centre. It will also be checked if poachers have been entering the forest area in the guise of fishermen. "We have started scanning the fringe areas and will keep an eye on the fishermen. There will be strict vigil against poaching. We have started a search to check if traps are being laid to catch deer," Bandyopadhyay added.

Source: July 22, 2009, TNN

Three tigers, three villages, two days

Barely 48 hours after two tigers strayed into two villages near the Sundarbans, another tigress showed up in Lahiripara village in the South 24 Parganas district before being trapped by wildlife officials on 3rd July.

The animal was tranquilised and microchipped to keep track of its movements after its release.

Also, as mentioned above, on August 31, two tigresses were caught—and then later released the next day.

Source: Canning, July 3, 2009, PTI

Water temperature headed north

For the past three decades the surface water temperature in rivers around the Sunderbans has been rising at the rate of 0.05°C a year. This could spell doom for the mangrove archipelago's unique ecosystem spread over 9,630 sq km across India and Bangladesh. The revelation, in a study carried out over 27 years by scientists from India and USA, makes the Sunderbans one of the worst climate change hotspots on the globe.

"According to Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) documents, 20 to 30 per cent of species

in the islands face the risk of extinction under the impact of climate change if the global mean temperature exceeds 2°C to 3°C above pre-industrial levels. So, the current rate of increase of temperature is suspected to have hit wildlife in the Sunderbans badly," said Abhijit Mitra of Calcutta University's Marine Sciences department, the study team's principal investigator. The study, a joint initiative by CU and the University of Massachusetts, found that fast melting of Himalayan glaciers have decreased the salinity at the western end of the Indian Sunderbans while salinity has increased on the eastern end due to clogging of connections of estuaries with fresh water on account of heavy siltation and solid waste disposal from cities like Kolkata.

The scientists also studied variations in dissolved oxygen, pH levels (a measure of acidity), transparency and water quality to find out the impact of global warming on the ecosystem. "The surface water pH over the past 30 years has reduced in the region, thus increasing acidification. The variations in salinity and increased temperature could be the reasons for this," said Mitra.

"Climate change has already hit the livelihood of people of the Sunderbans. Both fishing and irrigation in the eastern part of Indian Sunderbans have been hit by climate change. The increasing salinity has affected irrigation. Commercial fish in this region have largely been replaced by fish that have no such value. Depletion of dissolved oxygen can cause major shifts in the region's ecology," he added.

Global warming accelerates the process of erosion in coastal and estuarine zones, either through increased summer flow from the glaciers or by increased tidal amplitude due to sea level rise, say experts. Erosion and sedimentation result in decreased transparency. "The reduced transparency has an effect on the growth and survival of phytoplankton, the microscopic plants in the oceans that produce three-fourths of the earth's oxygen supply," said Mitra.

The study concluded that although the observed changes could result from a combination of climate change and human intervention and related phenomena, the changes are real and their impact would be felt in the ecosystem in coming years.

Source: December 20, 2009, Kolkata, *Times News Network*

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

India roars at CITES

The **Indian delegation came down heavily on China at the 58th meeting of the Animals Standing Committee of the CITES**, asserting that the trade in farmed body parts of tiger continues to be a threat to wild tigers and hence must be stopped immediately. India stressed that their efforts in tiger conservation must be supported by CITES parties and complemented by restricting threats like poaching and trafficking of tiger skins and derivatives. India has substantially increased its budget for tiger conservation and efforts have been made to step-up intelligence based enforcement, creation of buffer zones, addressing man-tiger conflict and providing livelihood options to local people to garner their support. This would be effective only if the demand for tiger derivatives is controlled.

In what was a clear reference to illegal trade of tiger products, India urged the Standing Committee to recommend the Parties to refrain from accepting shipments of CITES listed species. **Consequently, for the first time the CITES Secretariat issued a notification calling on relevant parties to report within a timeframe the steps taken by them to stop trade in tiger parts.**

The ruling undoubtedly puts a serious question mark on the fate of at least 5,000 tigers currently in Chinese breeding farms as it has to now specify the steps taken to restrict farming in order to sustain tiger population in the wild. Other countries like Vietnam which are engaged in tiger farming will also have to report.

Source: projecttiger.nic.in/whtsnew/cites.pdf, PTI

World Bank chief meets Jairam Ramesh

At a meeting with the World Bank president Robert Zoellick, India again reiterated its stance that it would not welcome any field intervention from the World Bank in tiger conservation. The Indian delegation has headed by MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh and included senior forest officials ie DG (Forests) and ADG (Forests and Wildlife), NTCA member secretary and independent experts. India has steadfastly refused to be part of the World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative because of the bank's soft peddling on critical concerns,

ie its people-oriented policies which are at odds with the Government of India's initiative towards village relocation from critical tiger habitats and strict protection mechanism. However, it was decided at the meeting that **World Bank would implement its Poverty Alleviation programmes in villages in the vicinity of critical tiger habitats to garner support of local communities in tiger conservation.**

Comment: The worry here is that this sounds ominously like a replay of the World Bank-supported Eco-development Program which had a devastating impact on prime tiger habitats—as has been well-documented. Conservationists argue the damage caused to tiger habitats in India due to World Bank projects is monumental. The World Bank supported forestry projects have also caused major fragmentation and loss to tiger habitat due to destruction of natural forests and plantation of exotic species.

BANGLADESH

Zoo to release tigers and lions

News comes in that Bangladesh plans to release zoo lions and tigers into the Sundarbans. "The animals have been identified as 'excess', the chief administrative officer of Mirpur Zoo, Dhaka, Mafizur Rahman told the Associated Press news agency. The logic behind this absurd idea is that the "Sundarbans is home to about 300 royal Bengal tigers but has no lion population." Conservationists have opposed this, and are campaigning to phase out zoos in Bangladesh, using the sensible policy of 'no recruitment' or preventing any new births coupled with a ban on any new acquisitions. Actually, this sounds like a good idea for our country, and others in the region.

Source: AFP, Sanctuary Asia

MYANMAR

Tiger population falls in Hukuang TR

The tiger population in Myanmar's Hukuang Tiger Reserve has declined from 150 to less than a 100 according to the records of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The fall is reported to have been caused by multiple factors such as shortage of prey because of poaching, illegal trading and expanding forest plantations.

Authorities say that their major challenge is to strike a balance between wildlife concerns and the needs of local communities. Traditional medicine practitioners in the country are being urged to stop using tiger bones and body parts and special training programmes to combat wildlife trade and crimes have been introduced jointly by the Myanmar Forest Ministry and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

The Hukuang TR was established over a 22,000 square kilometers area in the northernmost Kachin state in 2004 and is the biggest tiger reserve in the world.

Source: October 7, 2009, *Protected Area Update No. 82*

CHINA

China fails to stop tiger trade

In the run up to the Year of the Tiger, **tiger skins and bones are being sold in China's markets**, with enforcement agencies turning a blind eye. That's the message of a new report published by the Environmental Investigation Agency, which recently conducted undercover investigations into the illegal big cat skin and bone trade in China.

Over the course of a three week investigation in July and August this year, **EIA was offered four tiger skins, 12 leopard skins, 11 snow leopard skins and two clouded leopard skins, along with dozens of pieces of skin, bones and skulls.** At a local festival in Tibet, nine people were seen wearing tiger skins, and 25 wearing leopard skins, in full view of the authorities. Most, if not all, of the big cat skins sold in China are sourced from neighbouring countries such as India, Burma and Nepal.

Buying and selling parts and derivatives of Asian big cats is illegal under Chinese law, and the international trade is outlawed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), of which China is a member.

Since 2004, the EIA has conducted yearly investigations into the Asian big cats skin and body part trade in China, and while the market has declined in some areas, this has largely been due to the collapse of demand amongst the majority of the Tibetan community, as opposed to efforts by the Chinese government.

Source: Debbie Banks, EIA; Belinda Wright, WPSI, October 22, 2009.

INDONESIA

Tiger traders arrested

Indonesian authorities have arrested five wildlife trade suspects for attempting to illegally sell Sumatran tiger skins following a raid that took place in Jakarta on August 7. Derivatives of many protected wildlife species were recovered in addition to two tiger skins. On July 16, a raid in Sumatra recovered 33 tiger skin pieces, which ranged in size.

Both raids were conducted by the Indonesian Police and the Indonesian Department of Forestry, Directorate-General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA), working in conjunction with the WCS Wildlife Crimes Unit and local partners.

The raids are part of recent efforts by Indonesian authorities to control the illegal wildlife trade. In the last 18 months, they have arrested 20 people for trading in tiger parts. Seven of these cases have already resulted in prison sentences and fines, and the rest are awaiting trial.

Source: Wildlife Conservation Society, August 13, 2009

MALAYSIA

Malaysia losing battle to save tigers

Malaysia's dwindling tiger population could be wiped out in less than a decade unless authorities halt the illegal trade in tiger parts and poaching, a wildlife expert warned. Wildlife activists said that Malaysia, estimated to have just 500 wild tigers is losing its battle to save the endangered big cats.

"The level of poaching is so high that if it continues we will lose the tigers in less than a decade," Washington-based Save the Tiger Fund director Mahendra Shrestha told AFP after a conference on tiger conservation, adding that the other big threat was logging, and loss to habitat.

Douglas Uggah Embas, Natural Resources and Environment Minister, said the government had sought the help of the military to battle poaching, adding that **Malaysia was committed to an ambitious plan to double the tiger population to 1,000 by 2020.** "We hope by working together with the military and the local community, the enforcement will be more effective," he told reporters.

Tiger farming in Thailand is also fuelling the illegal trade. Investigations into a seizure of tiger bones in June suggested that these are harvested from captive tigers, thus giving further proof that tigers in theme parks and tiger farms were butchered for traditional medicine and were finding their way into the illegal wildlife trade.

Source: Kuala Lumpur, July 21, 2009, AFP

NEPAL

Global Tiger Workshop

The Global Tiger Workshop co-organised jointly with the World Bank and other Global Tiger Initiative participants was held in Kathmandu from October 27-30, 2009.

The four-day Kathmandu Global Tiger Workshop ended with issuing the 'Kathmandu Declaration' **that seeks collective political commitment from all levels of governments to save tigers.** It was also decided to celebrate 2010 as the 'Year of the Tiger' throughout the world in order to create global awareness.

The workshop called upon the states to conserve and manage buffer zones and corridors that connect core breeding areas in tiger landscapes and asked Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) to stop infrastructure projects in critical habitats. It also called upon financial institutions to avoid financing development projects that adversely affect critical tiger habitats.

Among others, the workshop has recommended empowering local communities that live in and around tiger landscapes with sustainable economic incentives and appropriate technologies to minimise conflict between human and tigers.

The workshop has urged all countries to implement CITES resolutions, enhance the capacity of Interpol, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the CITES Secretariat and regional wildlife enforcement networks to effectively combat the illegal trade in wildlife at the international level. The participants from more than 20 countries also sought the international community's commitment to support long-term campaigns "with measurable outcomes on tiger conservation in the wild" and helping achieve the goal of doubling the tiger population within the next 10 years.

The recommendations will be presented to the ministers of the TRCs, who will meet in Thailand in

January, 2010, and ultimately to the heads of governments, who will meet in Vladivostok, Russia in 2010.

Source: *The Asian Tribune*

Comment: *India's participation was minimal, given its firm stance that the only assistance it would take from the World Bank is in capacity-building, and not for any initiative within tiger reserves. India would, however, support any initiative of the World Bank to curb illegal trade of tiger skins and derivatives, and influence the government of China to stop internal consumption of tiger parts.*

Nepal wants anti-poaching secretariat

The Global Tiger Forum called for setting up of a new secretariat to contain the rampant poaching and trafficking of big cats across South Asian countries. The World Bank has pledged financial assistance of \$ 200,000 for assisting in the control of wildlife trade. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the 'Save the Tiger Fund' have also shown interest to support the project financially and technically. The Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation, Dipak Bohora, said that the government was ready to play a key role in the establishment of the regional anti-poaching secretariat in Nepal.

Source: Kathmandu, October 26, 2009, Ramesh Prasad Bhushal, *Himalayan Times*

Bardia to double in size

Nepal is preparing to double the area of Bardia National Park by annexing 898 sq km of forests to the current 968 sq km. The expansion of the National Park is vital for the conservation of tigers as the area proposed to be annexed is considered an important habitat. Bardia is home to other endangered wildlife including the one-horned rhino and elephants.

Source: nepalnews.com, October 26, 2009,

Nepal tiger population increasing?

According to the latest census, the population of tigers in Nepal is satisfactory. For the first time, the project covered major wildlife reserves and forest areas using digital camera trapping system to track the beasts. The census, made public on 27th July 2009 puts the number of breeding tigers at 123, up from 121 in 2000. According to the census, the Chitwan National Park

hosts 91 breeding tigers, the highest number in the study area. The census found eighteen, eight and four breeding tigers in the Bardia National Park, Sukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve and the Parsa Wildlife Reserve, respectively. The project scanned potential habitats of the tiger outside the protected areas in 14 districts stretching from Rautahat in the east to Kanchanpur in the far west. The census indicated that 10 out of 14 districts across the Terai belt may have tigers. The census found a satisfactory population of prey species, which is crucial for maintaining a satisfactory tiger population.

Source: *The Kathmandu Post*, July 28, 2009

Comment: *While the tiger population in Chitwan appears to be ok, two other areas have shown massive decline. Shuklphanta till recently (2005) boasted of having a tiger density of 17 per 100 sq km. Today it is down to 1.8 per 100 sq km. Similarly tiger numbers have dropped drastically in Bardia. The overall tiger situation in Nepal is said to be precarious.*

Tiger skin seized

Police have arrested three persons with fresh skin and about 12 kg bones of tiger from Hakim Chowk, Bharatpur in Nepal.

The trio has been sent to District Forest Office, Chitwan, for further investigation.

Source: www.myrepublica.com, December 6, 2009

PAKISTAN

A tiger for the Chief Minister

Going against both national law and international convention **Sulieman Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab province and nephew of former Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif and now the country's main opposition leader imported a Siberian tiger. Sulieman Sharif obtained the tiger from Canada on 23rd July despite a ban on the private import of large cats. This is also a contravention of CITES.**

The tiger was set to be housed in an electrically-cooled compound on the family estate of Raiwind, a few kilometres outside Lahore, the Punjab capital.

There was a huge hue and cry was raised by the press and public—which had more to do with the fact that the compound would run on local electricity (Pakistan's nationwide power shortages are so severe that daily outages last 10-12 hours), than any concern for the tiger.

Subsequently, Shahbaz Sharif is said to have ordered the tiger to be taken away immediately.

The World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Pakistan chapter says the Sharifs have now agreed they should no longer keep the tiger. "We understand it has now been handed over to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) government," Ali Hassan Habib of the WWF told the BBC. It is not clear why NWFP has been chosen, but one possibility is that it is cooler there than in Punjab. "After the matter came into the press, the Sharifs approached us themselves for help," Mr Habib said.

"We don't have the facilities here to keep the animal, but we willing to help relocate him elsewhere. The question does arise as to how the tiger got in, as the environment ministry had recently banned its import."

It is expected the tiger will either be housed in a public zoo in Pakistan, or relocated abroad.

Source: Syed Shoaib Hasan, *BBC News*, Islamabad, July 29, 2009

RUSSIA

Danger signals for the Siberian tiger

Results from the Siberian Tiger Monitoring Program indicate that Siberian tiger numbers are falling in the Russian Far East, primarily due to poaching and habitat degradation. Official estimates of Siberian tiger numbers in Russia come from full range surveys conducted only once every 10 years. The last such survey, conducted in 2005, revealed that 428-502 tigers resided in Russia, compared to 415-476 tigers in 1995 suggesting that tiger numbers were stable during that 10-year period.

But a decade is a long time lag, so a yearly monitoring program was designed to act as an 'early warning device' in case changes in the status of tigers occurred between full range surveys. Since 1998, tigers and their prey are counted on 16 survey units totalling 23,555 km² (over 9,000 square miles), which represent 15-18 per cent of the existing tiger habitat in Russia. In 2005 a total of 115 adult tigers were counted—significantly higher than the 12-year average of 95 tigers. However, **in 2009 only 56 adult tigers were counted on these survey units, representing a 40 per cent decrease from the average. The findings suggest that both prey and tiger numbers are falling in the Russian Far East.**

Last winter's extremely low count could be an anomaly in terms of tiger numbers, but trends in red deer and roe deer numbers (key prey for tigers) also show a decline.

"If tiger numbers were responding to the reduced number of prey" said Dimitri Pikunov, one of the coordinators of the monitoring program and a representative of the Russian Academy of Sciences, "we would expect there to be a lag before we saw tigers decrease. **The fact that both prey and tigers are falling simultaneously strongly suggests that poaching is the driving force.**" Record snowfalls only served to worsen the situation.

Russian scientists and NGOs recommend changes in law enforcement regulations, improvement in habitat protection, and a strengthening of the protected areas network to reverse the downward trend. Presently the fine for possession of tiger skins or tiger derivatives is minimal, the number of enforcement inspectors in the forests is insufficient, and the illegal harvest of Korean pine and Mongolian oak (key species providing forage for ungulates) is high.

Source: October 16, 2009, Michiel Hötte, WCS Russia Program

Tiger released in the wild

A 14-month-old tiger was successfully released to the wild on September 16. One of only 450 surviving Amur tigers in the wild, the cub spent six months undergoing rehabilitation supported by the International Fund for Animal Welfare and other groups and government agencies. Prior to the release, the tiger was radio-collared by scientists from the Russian Academy of Sciences who will monitor the cub in the following months.

The orphaned tiger was found last March when it wandered into the village of Avangard desperately looking for food. It was captured without resistance by the tiger protection specialists from Inspection Tiger. The cub had little chance of surviving on its own. At eight months, the small and weak cub weighed only 37 lbs (17kg).

From the 28th of May to the 15th of September, the tiger cub was under the daily care of Dr Viktor Udin. When it was released into the Ussuriisky Nature Reserve the tiger weighed 70kg and was in good health.

Source: September 16, 2009, Wildlife Trust of India

VIETNAM

Hanoi's records largest-ever seizure

Hanoi's Environmental Police have made their largest-ever seizure of wildlife products following the confiscation of more than two tonnes of bones from a store in Dong Da district, Hanoi January 10, 2009.

Environmental Police first stopped a motorcyclist transporting a set of tiger bones and ten kilograms of serow bones and horns in Ba Dinh district. Following investigations, they raided the products' end destination, a store belonging to one Ms Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam, and discovered another set of tiger bones, six frozen tiger skins, seven bear paws, 16 bear gall bladders, six porcupine stomachs and 69 bags of bones from various wild animals. Her testimony led to a third arrest of a man manufacturing the tiger bone gel found in Ms Tam's warehouse.

The case is the latest in a string of major seizures, and reflects Hanoi's improved enforcement capacity since the Environmental Police were established as a division of the Hanoi Police Department in 2007. Since their establishment, the Environmental Police have handled 100 cases, of which about thirty involve wild animals like leopard cats, civets, pythons and monitor lizards. One of the seizures yielded no less than 24 tons of frozen pangolin meat and scales.

Source: January 19, 2009, TRAFFIC

On tiger farms...

"Chinese herbal medicine is a wonderful tradition and helps people everywhere. But tiger bone is not herbs. Scientifically, without herbal additions, tiger bone has been proven to be exactly the same, and have the same effects, as mole-rat bone. Neither of them has been proved, medically, to help human bodies. But if they did, they would only be a minor analgesic, not even as powerful as aspirin.

It is not the scientific value – the chemistry of this bone – but irrational symbolic belief about what tigers represent, which makes people imagine that tiger parts can cure what is wrong with them. Xionsen Bear and Mountain Tiger Village in Guilin effectively acknowledges this in a document submitted to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), saying that selling tiger bone to patients with rheumatism would fulfil a "social need".

To legitimise the use of tiger bone in Chinese medicine, in fact, would blacken the name of Traditional Chinese Medicine throughout the world.

To farm tigers in order to provide it, betrays Chinese tradition even more deeply: it betrays China's tradition of respecting wild nature and valuing spiritual and scientific truth.

First, tiger farming destroys the conservation of wild tigers. Farming wild animals endangers the same animals in the wild: this has been demonstrated everywhere—with bears, crocodiles and turtles, as well as tigers. People make money from it due to human weakness, human greed and human gullibility. People always believe that “wild is better”, and if they can, they pay more for wild than farmed. And so more wild tigers—in other countries, not China – die. Poachers kill wild tigers cheaply everywhere, sell them for Chinese medicine, and make more profit out of them than tiger farmers do out of farmed tigers.

Second, no zoo anywhere in the world needs to keep more than five tigers in cages to show to tourists. Breeding tigers like battery hens imitates some of the worst mistakes of western modernisation, which most leading social thinkers in the west now denounce. Keeping so many mole rats in cages – which would be just as effective medically – would be bad enough. But to keep tigers in groups in cages is an offence against evolution and against nature, because tigers evolved to live wild and alone.

Wild and alone is how tigers need to live, as ancient Chinese tradition knew. For our spiritual health, we human beings need to respect this animal to whom Chinese tradition looks up as the solitary “happy tiger in bamboo,” guardian of wild nature.

The money spent on maintaining tigers in Guilin would be far better spent by respecting nature in accordance with Chinese tradition, conserving wild tigers in a wild forest environment, protecting them from poachers and enriching human lives by making a tiger reserve that the international community would respect and marvel at.

Tiger farming caters to the most gullible and ignorant aspects of human nature. It is a barbaric practice. It can give China a bad name internationally and thus injure the achievements of China today. To farm tigers in order to sell illegal tiger parts for medicine is a way of earning money that looks primitive and exploitative. The rest of the world has learned from China in the past, from its traditions of respecting nature, science and spiritual truth. Tiger farming betrays these traditions.

Ruth Padel is a leading British poet, a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and of the Zoological Society of London. She is author of Tigers in Red Weather, and of Darwin – A Life in Poems.

Courtesy: www.chinadialogue.net

WILDLIFE CRIME

26 tigers die between June to November

Between June and mid-November 2009, there have been reports of the **26 tiger deaths**, of which ten are confirmed poaching cases

- **Karnataka had the highest number of tiger deaths at seven.** Of these, five were ‘found dead’, including three tigresses from Nagarhole (one of which had recently been relocated to Bhadra-see States for detail). One tiger was reported to have died from in-fighting in Bandipur Tiger Reserve and one tiger skin was seized. Preliminary investigations indicate that it had been killed a few months earlier in Bandipur. An old trophy skin was also seized in Mandya District, but this has not been included in this analysis.
- **Madhya Pradesh lost five tigers.** Two allegedly died of poisoning, including a tigress in Bandhavgarh. A tigress was found dead in Pench, and two tigresses allegedly died of in-fighting in Kanha.
- At four **Assam and Uttarakhand** had the third highest number of tiger deaths. There were three tiger deaths in Kaziranga; one was found dead, one allegedly died from in-fighting and a third from suspected poisoning. One tiger was poisoned in Orang National Park. Two tigers were found dead in Uttarakhand including one in Corbett. As we go to press there is news of one more tiger found dead in Dhikala in Corbett on December 12—and yet another one, a tigress four days later in Sarupduli range.
- **Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra** each lost two tigers. A tiger skin was seized and a tiger cub was found in Tamil Nadu. Two tiger skins and tiger bones were seized in Uttar Pradesh. The cause is yet uncertain. In Maharashtra a tiger was found dead in Chandrapur District, and another near Nagzira National Park (see states for details).
- **Orissa, Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal** each lost one wild tiger. A tiger was killed by poachers in Simlipal, Orissa, while in Kerala, one tiger allegedly died from in-fighting, and another tiger was found dead in Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in West Bengal.

So far this year, from 1 January to 15 November, 76 tigers have died. Of these, 27 tigers were killed by poachers.

Courtesy: Wildlife Protection Society of India

Alarming rise in Leopard killing

The slaughter of leopards continues unabated—either victims of the ever-escalating conflict or killed for their skins. From **January till November no less than 254 leopards have died, of which 142 have been poached. Uttarakhand is by far the worst state with no less than 75 deaths this year.**

At this appalling rate, we may lose the leopard very soon. Unfortunately, few take the plight of the leopard seriously—it has little sympathy and public support mainly due to escalating man-leopard conflict.

Some cases of tiger and leopard seizures:

- According to a TOI report, the police and the forest mobile squad intercepted an auto rickshaw at Thenkila near Mangalore (Karnataka) on 12th July and arrested three people on charges of illegal possession of three tiger skins.
- An engineer, Vijay Babu who was trying to sell a tiger skin in Hyderabad was nabbed by the police on August 21.
- In an operation by Chamarajnagar (Karnataka) police one tiger skin was seized on 8th August 2009. Two persons have been arrested. The tiger was said to have been shot about six months back in Bandipur Tiger Reserve.
- Forest department officials seized a tiger skin and arrested two suspects near Erode, Tamil Nadu. The operation was done by a team headed by the Satyamangalam DFO. The suspects confessed that they procured the skin from Perunthalamanna in Kerala, and a joint investigation by the officials of WCCB and forest department is going on.
- Two leopard skins were seized and four wildlife traders arrested for the same in Valmikinagar near Valmiki TR, Bihar, along the Indo-Nepal border in the first week of December. The traders were trapped following an undercover operation jointly by the Tiger reserve officials and Wildlife Trust of India. The seizure was done at the Laxmipur village bridge, about six km from Valmikinagar,” said S Chandrasekar, DFO-I, Valmiki TR, who headed the operation. Valmikinagar has been long suspected to be a thriving conduit for illegal wildlife trade between traders in India and Nepal.

Sansar Chand’s jail sentence suspended

The Supreme Court of India, by an order dated 24th August 2009, has suspended notorious wildlife criminal

Sansar Chand’s jail sentence and ordered that he be “enlarged on bail to the satisfaction of the Trial Court”.

On 29th April 2004, the Trial Court in Ajmer had found Sansar Chand guilty of offences under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, and had sentenced him to five years imprisonment. Sansar Chand had unsuccessfully challenged the judgment, in an appeal followed by a criminal revision petition in the Rajasthan High Court. He is now looking to the Supreme Court to let him off the hook. While this is the only case in which Sansar Chand is currently undergoing imprisonment for a conviction, he is an accused in several other pending cases in the Trial Courts. Sansar Chand has been convicted of wildlife offences in two earlier cases in 1982.

Sansar Chand is believed to be India’s biggest wildlife criminal, who has been responsible for more tiger and leopard deaths than anyone else. **During interrogation by the CBI in 2006, Sansar Chand apparently admitted to selling 470 tiger skins and 2,130 leopard skins to just four clients from Nepal and Tibet.**

However, Ashok Kumar of WTI adds that it will be incorrect to assume that Sansar Chand will be a free man at any time in the near future. He is currently under judicial custody in a seizure case of Sariska Tiger Reserve. Additionally, there are seven cases against Sansar Chand in various stages of trial which will reach the judgement stage one by one.

Source: New Delhi, 25, September 2009, WPSI/WTI

Key players in wildlife crime arrested

In a major breakthrough, **officials of Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in a joint operation with Central Bureau of Investigations nabbed Tashi Tsering, a key player in wildlife trade on November 5 at Majnu ka Tilla in Old Delhi. Tashi’s arrest was part of a series of arrests and seizures made by WCCB and CBI simultaneously in Delhi and Nagpur. The investigation agencies simultaneously seized on 5th November two leopard skins, eight otter skins and a log of protected red sanders wood in Majnu ka Tilla, while the haul in Nagpur yielded two tiger skins and nearly 40 kg of tiger bones.**

This case was remarkable, a step ahead from the usual routine cases since detailed intelligence uncovered the entire chain of illegal trade—from the actual poacher

to middlemen, financiers, traders—all of whom were netted by the agencies. For instance Keru, a pardhi (a traditional hunting tribe) allegedly actually poached the tiger. The skins and derivatives, through middlemen would eventually reach Nepal via Majnu ka Tilla in Delhi, the most frequented route for tiger and other wildlife derivatives. Tashi was the link between these middlemen and the dealers in Nepal. All of these, ie the entire chain from poacher to dealer has been arrested. Keru, incidentally has also been involved in tiger poaching cases in Nagarhole as well. The case is evidence enough that wildlife poaching gangs are operating across the country and are well-linked and organised.

Tashi has been in this ‘business’ for over two decades, he is reportedly the link between Sansar Chand and the dealers in Nepal through where most smuggled wildlife goods go. He is believed to be involved in many tiger and leopard poaching cases –including the Khaga case, one of the largest illegal hauls which included four tiger skins, 70 leopard skins, 221 blackbuck skins, 18,000 leopard claws, 132 tiger claws and 150 kgs of leopard and tiger bone.

Skin sized of Tadoba tiger?

It is suspected that one of the skins seized by the WCCB and CBI at the Nagpur Railway station on November 5th was killed in the Tadoba Tiger Reserve. Both the tiger skins were fresh, one barely a month old.

It is believed that the gang had been camping for 15-20 days in Ballarshah, from where they boarded the Sampark Kranti Express. Ballarshah is close to Ganeshpimpri near Tadoba from where three tiger cubs each were found orphaned in September. Their mother was ‘missing’. **Investigations revealed that one among the two tiger skins seized on November 5 could well belong to the mother, as the poachers confessed to killing a tigress around the same time in that area.** She was among the five tigresses who went ‘missing’ in the past 11 months.

Comment: It may be well-worth to match the DNA of the Ganeshpimpri cubs with the seized skin

Notorious poacher Bhima caught

The November raids also resulted in another prize catch, Bheema, a suspected aide of notorious trader Sansar Chand and wanted in connection with the killing of several tigers and leopards, Bheema was arrested on

November 17 from Ballabgarh in Haryana in a joint operation by the WCCB and Gurgaon police. Earlier, the WCCB and CBI had successfully nabbed seven poachers and wildlife traders from Nagpur and Delhi on November 5. A WCCB official said the arrested traders and poachers provided leads which resulted in Bheema’s arrest. The accused is involved in a number of cases pending in nine States, including Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. He is also suspected to have been involved in poaching cases in Maharashtra and Karnataka. A case against Bheema was registered in the Rajendra Park police station in Gurgaon on July 7, 2008. Bheema was earlier nabbed by the police on August 15, 2005, with a tiger skin, seven kg tiger bones, 500 gm tiger fat, and tiger canines but he was out on bail. Bheema’s arrest is expected to throw light on the working of the racket and illegal trade network in the country, especially in North India.

Source: The Pioneer, The Indian Express, PTI

Sariska accused nabbed by CBI

The CBI has arrested Jeevan and Surta, accused as the main tiger poachers of Sariska. The two were nabbed in Bathinda, Punjab, with help from the Wildlife Protection Society of India. The authorities have been on the trail of these poachers for the past five years.

Source: The Indian Express, New Delhi, 11 October 2009

NGO worker held for poaching

An NGO worker, who was allegedly involved in poaching deer in the Sunderbans, was arrested on October 14. Swapan Sardar (40), a resident of Purba Gurguria in South 24-Parganas, was accused of trapping deer, according to the forest department.

Two deer skins were recovered from Sardar’s residence. Officials said Sardar has been working as a double agent. “While he took money from the NGO as reward for locating deer carcasses and skin, he himself engaged poachers to kill the animals. Sardar was instrumental in killing several deer. He would smuggle the carcasses out through Baruipur and sell the meat,” said Somnath Sarkar, the Baruipur forest ranger.

Sardar was interrogated by forest officials and police. It has been revealed that he operated in the Sunderbans and had engaged a team of five locals to poach deer. A steel trap was recovered from near his

residence. “The NGO paid him Rs 30,000 for locating deer carcasses in the Sunderbans this year. We have enough evidence to suggest that he had poached them,” added Sarkar. Sardar is also believed to have been involved in the smuggling of a tiger skin that had been seized earlier this year.

Sardar has denied the charges. He told police that he has not been living in his home for a year and had no idea how the skins reached his residence. But forest officials claimed that he was part of a larger gang that has been operating in the forest. “This will help to bust the poaching racket. We are keeping vigil at the forest and have a network of informers, which is helping us track down poachers like him. Unless deer poaching is curbed, prey base will continue to dwindle and lead to more tiger straying,” said Sarkar.

Source: Monotosh Chakraborty, October 16 2009, *Times News Network*

Tiger poacher convicted

A court in Khatima, Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand has sentenced Birbal alias Totha Ram, a resident of Panipat to three years rigorous imprisonment and fine of Rs 10,000 in connection with the seizure of a tiger skin on August 2004.

The staff of Terai East Forest Division, Uttarakhand with the assistance of Wildlife Crime Control Bureau and WPSI had arrested bawariya poacher Totha Ram with a tiger skin from Banbasa in 2004. Sixteen bullet marks were found on the skin. A case under Wildlife Protection Act 1972 was registered at Khatima range.

He was also arrested in the interim, while out on bail on the tiger poaching case, with tiger trap and other poaching tools when he was on bail in tiger skin case.

Bawariya poaching gangs are active in different parts of the county, recently this poachers sister Dilipo was convicted to five years rigorous imprisonment by a court in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, for a 1992 tiger case. She had earlier been convicted in November 2005, by a court in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, for carrying the skin and bones of a tiger that was killed at Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in February 2005.

Source: WPSI

Poachers surrender in Manas

On 26th November 2009 at Bansbari (Manas National Park), six hard core poachers surrendered with one country made pistol, five country made guns, two deer

skins, three deer horns, traps and knives to Khampa Bargayari Dy Chief, Bodo Territorial Council. Beside Baryagari, A Swargiyari, Director Manas National Park were also present. In his speech Khampa Bargayari exhorted all poachers to surrender and lead a life of respect dedicated to conservation.

Source: TRAFFIC India

ANECDOTES

Snakes on the Menu

An adult male tiger was found dead at Chargheri in Gosaba in Sundarbans on July 18. The autopsy revealed two snakes in the stomach, one of them the venomous king cobra. It is probably for the first time that a tiger consuming poisonous reptiles like cobra has been noted.

This raised questions about the tiger’s unusual diet. Was it the tiger’s age—he was believed to be over 12 years—and the stress of catching suitable prey that forced him to eat snakes? Another possibility is that the lack of prey base in the terrain pushed the tiger to partake in this unlikely meal.

Source: TNN, PTI July 21

Tiger hunt lasts 24 hours

Tiger killing sambar is a drama that is played out in the forest umpteen times, it is the way of the beast, killing for survival.

However one such hunt recently hit the headlines:

Dawn of November 13. A sambar was cornered by two tigresses and tried to escape by jumping into the shallow waters of the Telia Lake in the Tadoba Tiger Reserve. It was an unequal battle of course, yet the sambar soldiered on in a battle that lasted nearly 24 hours. The tigresses seemed young, and hence were perhaps unable to down the sambar even as he struggled with a broken leg. It happened four times that morning—the tigress chasing the sambar (the second tigress kept to the other side of the lake and was not so proactive), who would escape into the water. He would lie low for some time, and so would the tigers perhaps fooling the sambar into a false sense of security. The lake wasn’t a safe refuge either, there were crocodiles in the water, (admittedly wary of tackling a full grown stag like this one), forcing the sambar out.

The battle lasted till the next morning—the visitors returned only to see the remains of the sambar. The tiger, had finally, successfully downed its prey.

AWARDS

Awards given to Assam FD personnel

On the occasion of Wildlife Week, Chief minister Tarun Gogoi announced a higher compensation for forest staff killed on duty, and also said that forest employees will also be awarded medals for outstanding services.

He gave awards to 31 personnel, including an Assam Rifles official, for their contribution towards conservation of wildlife in the state last year. While most of the award winners are state forest department staff members working in protected areas, two are from the police department and three are members of eco-development committees formed near national parks.

Forest staff faces a lot of risk to their lives from timber mafia, fatality from attacks by animals—and in Kaziranga they face the wrath of the floods in the Brahmaputra river every year. In the last decade no less than 13 forest guards have lost their lives and over 50 forest guards have become physically handicapped in the state.

Source: PTI

Sanctuary Asia Awards

Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), along with Sanctuary Asia, announced the Earth Heroes 2009. The awards celebrate their 10th year, and are given to honour those who have dedicated their lives to the defence of India's rich natural heritage, while working tirelessly to safeguard our planet from the worst impacts of climate change

The Lifetime Service Award was conferred upon by Brijendra Singh, whose name is synonymous with the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Four decades after he began, he continues to patrol the park in the company of forest guards and is currently engaged in expanding the physical area and improving the conditions of work of the staff of all tiger reserves in India.

This year, the Wildlife Service Awards were presented to

- Jointly to Dr. Divya Mudappa and T.R. Shankar Raman for their exceptional contribution to wildlife biology, particularly in the human-dominated landscapes adjoining Protected Areas in the Western Ghats.
- Mike Pandey for dedicating his life to the protection of wild nature through the use of cinematography.

- Narhari Pandurang Bagrao who restored degraded forests with the help of villagers and enabled wildlife in the forests of Shahapur, Maharashtra
- Paresh Chandrakant Porab, a Ranger with the Goa Forest Department, who worked with fierce commitment, and courage, to protect Goa's forests under his control, in the face of vested interests.
- Prabir Kumar Palei, one of Project Tiger's a Forester in the most remote forests of Similipal, for his monumental contribution to the conservation of the Similipal Tiger Reserve for over three decades

The Wind Under the Wings award, this year, honours Vijay Pinjarkar, Special Correspondent, The Times of India, Nagpur. The Young Naturalist Awards are presented to Aamod Zambre, 21-year old Zoology student, for his pioneering work in scientific research Arunachal Pradesh's Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary; Prosper S. Marak for protecting the biodiversity rich Garo Hills of Meghalaya from the ruthless mining industry and Vishal Jayant Bhave, all of 23 years old, discovered as many as 80 new Opisthobranch in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra – a species hitherto unknown in coastal India

The joint recipients of the Green Teacher Award are Dr. Marselin R. Almeida and Dr. (Mrs.) Sarah. M. Almeida.

Fifth CMS Vatavaran Film Festival concludes

CMS Vatavaran, India's leading wildlife and film festival concluded on 30th October at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. There were 25 awards in 15 Indian categories and 10 awards in nine international categories. Filmmaker Krishnendu Bose was awarded the 'CMS-UNEP Prithvi Ratna Award' for his efforts in spreading awareness and enhancing people's understanding of environmental issues through his films.

In the 'National' category 20 awards were given. Rita Banerji bagged the 'Technical Excellence Award-Best Cinematography' for her film 'A Shawl to Die For'. Noted filmmaker Shekar Dattatri's 'S.O.S.- Save Our Sholas' was awarded 'Technical Excellence Award-Best Story'. The 'Ecotourism Award' was handed to Sanjay Barnela for his film 'Leave Nothing but Footprints'. Director Praveen Singh won the 'Wildlife Conservation Award' for his film 'The Asiatic Lion- on a roll call'. Naresh Bedi's 'Rolling Dunes of Thar' was

given the 'Nature Award'. 'Goa Goa Gone' by Kurush Canteenwala was awarded the 'Delhi Chief Minister's Environmental Conservation Award'.

A total of 10 awards were handed out in the 'International' category. Of these, the 'Student Film Award' went to director Hannah Smith Walker for 'Why Don't we Ride Zebras?' 'Nature Award' went to 'Rain Forest- the Secret of Life' directed by David Warth and Michael Balson. Directors Heinz Greuling and Thomas Weidenbach won the 'Wildlife Conservation Award' for their film 'Eco-Crimes: Tibet Connection'.

Award nominations invited

The Ministry of Environment & Forests invites nominations for the Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Conservation Award 2008. The award is given for significant contribution in the field of wildlife conservation, which is recognised as having made or has measurable potential and major impact on the protection and conservation of wildlife in the country. The MoEF has also invited nominations for the Amrita Devi

Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award, 2009. The award is given for significant contribution in the field of wildlife protection, which is recognised as having shown exemplary courage and valour or having done exemplary work for the protection of wildlife in the country. For details log on to: <http://moef.nic.in/index.php>

Hero of Ranthambhore Awards

'Hero of Ranthambhore' awards are given out by Tiger Watch, an NGO based in Sawai-Madhopur, and are aimed at encouraging people working at the ground-level for wildlife conservation in and around the tiger reserve.

This year's awards were given to Jagdish Singh (ex-army personnel), Forest Guard Rajveer Singh and Police Constable Jaagan Singh. Posted at Khandar range, Jagdish Singh was brutally attacked by villagers while he caught 36 cartloads of illegally felled wood. Rajveer Singh was felicitated for his expertise and efficiency in rescuing and rehabilitating injured wildlife. Jaagan Singh was awarded for his valour in arresting many dreaded poachers.

Source: *Tiger Watch Newsletter*, May-June 2009

INSTITUTIONS AND NGOs

Campaign to save the Tiger

Sanctuary magazine, Bengal Tiger Line & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Bengal Tiger Bachhao campaign organised a five-day awareness campaign to save the tiger. The campaign—'Bagher Jonyo Haatun' (Walk for the Tiger) began on November 9, and in five days covered 15 villages adjacent to the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve. The prime objective was to create awareness among the villagers to cooperate with the forest department and work hand in hand with it while tackling critical situation like tigers straying into villages. In the recent past there have been several such incidents at villages near the forest. It also encouraged villagers to plant mangroves. Folk artists from Orissa's Ganjam district performed tiger dance, adding colour to the initiative. Around 15,000 people, including students, teachers, NGO workers, panchayat officials and foresters were present.

Source: *Times News Service*, November 12, 2009

International Conservation Course

Satpuda Foundation conducted the first of its kind International Course in Education as a tool for 'Species Conservation with a Focus on the Tiger in India' on November 2 through 20, 2009. The course was conducted by Satpuda Foundation in collaboration with the Wildlife Department of Maharashtra, SGB Amravati University, Environment Education and Conservation Global (EECG) and Nature Conservation Society, Amravati (NCSA). The course was conceptualised to demonstrate how environmental social marketing techniques can be integrated with overall education and communication strategies to produce focused campaigns that are effective and practical tools for solving conservation problems. The course illustrated educational concepts and processes by demonstrating how they can be employed to assist in meeting the conservation needs of the tiger in India and the habitats on which they depend.

Source: <http://www.ncsaindia.org/satpuda/course.htm>

Sniffer Dog Training Programme started by TRAFFIC India

The second phase of the 'Sniffer Dog Training for Wildlife Enforcement' programme was successfully

inaugurated on 3rd November 2009 at the Dog Training Centre, 23rd Battalion of the Special Armed Police, Bhopal. Five German Shepherd dogs and 10 Forest Department staff were inducted into the training that will continue for the next nine months. The Forest Departments of Haryana and Uttarakhand already have one sniffer dog each. Encouraged by the success of the pilot project, this time the dogs have been made available to Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra, who have sent their staff to be trained as handlers and assistant handlers. TRAFFIC has sponsored the complete cost of the training as well as procurement of the dogs. MP and Jharkhand will get two dogs each whereas Maharashtra will get one dog for sniffing out tiger and leopard parts.

Source: TRAFFIC India

Wildlife enforcement workshop held in Raipur

TRAFFIC India and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-India in partnership with the Chattisgarh Forest Department and NTCA conducted a two-day training workshop on wildlife enforcement in Raipur. The workshop, held in June, was attended by over 50 officials of the forest department.

Source: Shubhobroto Ghosh, WWF

Orientation programme for Kerala judiciary

High Court Judges of Kerala came together to take part in a three-day 'Orientation Programme on Wildlife Conservation' organised by TRAFFIC-India and WWF-India at Kerala Judicial Academy, Cochin in the first week of October. In his inaugural address the Chief Justice SR Bannurmath, Kerala expressed his concern over the growing illegal wildlife trade in the country and the need to build awareness on environment and wildlife related laws among Judiciary members.

Source: TRAFFIC India.

Workshop on wildlife enforcement held

A three-day workshop was held in Bhopal in November for police and forest officers of Madhya Pradesh by TRAFFIC in collaboration with DEFRA and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

Source: TRAFFIC India.

MEDIA

The MoEF launched its new website(<http://moef.nic.in/index.php>), which it said was part of an ongoing process to bring more transparency and citizen-friendliness into their functioning and to become a more accountable and transparent ministry. The website is simultaneously a platform for the Ministry to provide the world with a window to its functioning and to receive feedback on its working.

Save Our Sholas

India's Western Ghats are among the most important biodiversity hotspots in the world, and home to rare species found nowhere else on the planet. But they've been ravaged and systematically destroyed over the decades. While cash crops like tea and coffee have taken over vast stretches, other human impacts such as dams, roads, overexploitation of forest products and fires have devastated fragile habitats, sometimes irretrievably. All that remains of once extensive forests and grasslands are precious fragments scattered here and there. *SOS - Save Our Sholas* provides a glimpse into the amazing diversity of life in the 'shola' forests of the southern Western Ghats. It also illustrates some of the pressing problems that beset this habitat and seeks to inspire viewers with examples of conservation successes that came about because of peoples' action. The film aspires to bring about a renewed interest and awareness in the conservation of the Western Ghats, which are the birthplace of most south Indian rivers, and a lifeline for hundreds of millions of people in peninsular India

Indira Gandhi on Environment and Forests

Few know of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's immense contribution to environment and conservation. She was a visionary when it came to environmental issues. The extensive and stringent legislation on environment, forests and wildlife that is in place today is due to her personal initiative. She also launched Project Tiger in April 1973. The book, *Indira Gandhi on Environment and Forests* is an excellent, well-researched collection of her speeches on the subject. It is published by MoEF and has been edited by Mohammed Khan and Varad Pande.

India's Green Book

The Wildlife Institute of India has released India's *Green Book: Forests and Wildlife*, which gives a concise overview of various issues and facets concerning the subject. These include forest policy and legislative framework, forest management, forests and people, conserving biodiversity, wildlife management, research and International treaties and conventions. The book is well-presented and is a handy ready-reckoner especially for media persons for whom it is targeted. The book will be translated into Hindi and other languages shortly. The core team which brought together the book is P.R. Sinha, Dr V B Mathur and Bitapi C Sinha.

A judicial perspective on conserving PAs

WWF and Enviro Legal Defence Forum have collectively published *Conserving Protected Areas and Wildlife* which gives detailed information on the status of core issues regarding the implementation of Wildlife Protection Act of all states and union territories. This covers a gamut of issues such as the notification of Protected Areas, status of settlement of rights and other matters concerning vacancies, protection, allocation of funds, diversion of forest lands, resettlement rights, registration of arms, etc.

Nature magazine launched

Aakhon Aaranyak, a nature magazine in Bengali was launched in August in Kolkata. The first issue had articles on varied subjects such as diversity and importance of butterflies, a photofeature on Kanha, a travelogue on Singalila and Anaimalai. It acquainted the reader with the lesser-known, but very rich Nagzira National Park in Maharashtra, and focuses on two endangered species: the hoolock gibbon and gharial. The magazine is published by Kamal Banarjee and Kusal Mukherjee is the editor. The rest of the team comprises Tanmay Choudhary, Narayan Ghorui and Souryadip Mukherjee.

Cat's Eye on Katarniaghat

Katarniaghat Foundation just published its inaugural issue of its newsletter, *Kat's Eye* which contains a good

compilation of articles on this sanctuary which is part of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (Uttar Pradesh). The first issue has articles mainly contributed by Chanramani Kant Singh, S Kumar, Neeraj Kumar, Ramesh Pandey and Dhrujyoti Basu. It is hoped that the magazine will help highlight this jewel of a park nestled in the Terai that is home to diverse endangered creatures ie tiger, elephant, one-horned rhino, barasingha, the gharial and the Gangetic dolphin.

The Katarniaghat Foundation came into existence almost two years back. The foundation had been working in the field of wildlife conservation in Dudhwa-Katarniaghat area.

Living Jewels from the Indian Jungle

Edited by Ashok S Kothari, Boman F Chhapgar
BNHS, Oxford University Press

Could you, even in your wildest imagination, envisage a tiger strolling down the urbane Malabar Hill in Mumbai for a drink at the nearest watering hole—the Gowalia Tank? Or for that matter as you cling on for dear life to the 6.57am local, screwing up your nose as the stink arises from Mahim Creek, think that this was where a tiger had mauled a Parsee cart owner as he trundled up the *nullah*? Unbelievable? Yet true. And one among the many gems found between the covers of *Living Jewels from the Jungle*, a book comprising of carefully selected articles, notes, paintings, illustrations from the library of the Bombay Natural History Society. Did I say *book*? Somehow the word appears a bit inadequate in the face of all that the tome contains, and conveys. *Living Jewels from the Jungle* is an experience, a trip down nostalgia lane, or more accurately, an exploration of a lost world. It tells the tales of the jungles of the bygone era, when the great forests of 'Hindoostan' were replete with wildlife, when the pace of life was more leisurely, when hunting was a royal pastime.

Living Jewels is the third in a series by the same editors, the earlier ones being *Salim Ali's India* and *Treasures of Indian Wildlife*.

Source: Perna Singh Bindra, *The Pioneer*

WORKSHOP

Bengal Tiger Consultations conclude

Sanctuary Asia held the last in a series of five national level consultations at Teen Murti Bhawan in New Delhi on the 28th and 29th of July 2009. The inaugural session of the Fifth Bengal Tiger Consultation was chaired by Dr Karan Singh, Member of Parliament and co-chaired by MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh. The consultation focused on the tiger, eco-systems, climate change and national development. Participants included a significant number of senior political leaders, government officials, economists, scientists, educationists, students' representatives and media professionals. Among them were Minister, Human Affairs Development, Kapil Sibal Minister Corporate Affairs and Minorities, Salman Khursheed, senior BJP leader V P Singh, noted author Mark Tully, Dr Prannoy Roy NDTV, cricketer Rahul Dravid. The two day consultation focused on critical wildlife habitats and the umbilical connection between these fast vanishing oasis and the country's food and water security. The link between the wildlife trade and insurgent groups in India and the need to partner science and sociology with economics to achieve ecosystem regeneration were also discussed.

The consultation arrived at a set of recommendations after discussions over seven working sessions. The recommendations included, among others, demands to create 'Green Economic Zones' around protected areas, to reinvigorate the Indian Forest Service and to make environmental education a central part of students' curriculums at both school and tertiary levels.

Source: 29 July 2009, Sanctuary Asia

Media Workshop

A two-day workshop on Media and Wildlife Conservation was organised by the Wildlife Institute of India in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forests on December 10 and 11 in New Delhi. The MoS (Env. & Forests) Jairam Ramesh released 'India's Green Book' prepared by the WII and gave the inaugural address. The workshop was attended by wildlife biologists, scientists, senior officers and media persons.

Capacity building for wildlife law

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), MoEF and TRAFFIC India, with the support of DEFRA, Govt. of UK, have launched a series of capacity building initiatives across the country to strengthen wildlife enforcement. The first workshop on this series was held from 20-21st August, 2009 at the Tamil Nadu Police Academy, Chennai. Over 30 officials from the Forest Department, Police, Central Industrial Security Force, Customs and Railway Protection Force attended this two day programme.

Source: TRAFFIC India.

USEFUL LINKS

<http://moef.nic.in/index.php>
www.projecttiger.nic.in
www.wii.gov.in
www.wfindia.org
www.bnhs.org
www.ncf-india.org
www.savethetigerfund.org
www.satpuda.org
www.nbralliance.org
www.wildlifefirst.info
www.wildorissa.org
www.wildifeorissa.org
www.atree.org
www.corbettfoundation.org
www.sanctuaryasia.com
www.wildlifetrustofindia.org
www.wpsi-india.org
www.iucn.org
www.catsg.org
www.wild-tiger.blogspot.com
www.wildaid.org
www.tigerwatch.net
www.eia-international.org
www.panda.org
www.amur.org.uk
www.tigrisfoundation.nl
www.21stcenturytiger.org
www.tigertrust.info
www.wcsindia.org
www.tigers.ca
www.mongabay.com

RANTHAMBHORE FOUNDATION

It is needless to reiterate that Ranthambhore Foundation has an outstanding record in the field of conservation. Ranthambhore National Park, in the district of Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, India has been the focus of activities and serves as a model to showcase the efforts being made by the Foundation. The Foundation undertook every possible measure to ensure conservation of wildlife and forests, especially tiger and its habitat all over India and also in other tiger range countries.

The Ranthambhore Foundation's field activities in the year 2008-9 included education and awareness programmes, greening activities including nursery and tree plantation, policy advocacy and newsletter publications.

Among its greening activities, the Foundation raised 50,000 seedlings in its nurseries in the year 2008. In association with the Prakratik Society the Foundation distributed 70,000 saplings among local people in the monsoons of 2008. Since about 37,000 saplings remained undistributed, only 50,000 saplings were grown for the year 2009. The Foundation made a serious effort to involve students on a large scale in plantation activities. About 3,200 students from 17 schools planted 7,000 saplings.

To spread education and awareness on environment and conservation issues, the Foundation, through its Environmental Education Programme, has organised nature camps, cultural programmes, environmental quizzes, painting and essay competition among the students of different schools and colleges of Sawai Madhopur. It has also motivated teachers to participate in environmental meetings and to join awareness rallies and visit the National Park. Over 3,000 students from 35 schools participated in general knowledge, debate, essay and quiz competitions on environmental issues. Over a thousand students teachers participated in nature camps organised in 35 villages around Ranthambhore National Park. Two environmental awareness rallies which had nearly a thousand student participants were organised.

Educational tours to different schools were also organised. Fifteen schools and members of Ranthambhore Nature Club participated in these visits. Culture programmes with nature themes were also organised in various schools around the park.

An innovative mobile library, containing large number of books, journals and periodicals on forest, wildlife and environment was taken to different villages. The villagers, particularly school children benefited from reading them. This year 21 such mobile library visits were organised from April '08 to January '09.

As far as policy advocacy is concerned, the Foundation, through its executive director has been participating in a large number of meetings, workshops and deliberations. It has intervened in pursuing the Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court of India to reach a viable solution to the Rajaji National Park Elephant Corridor and diversion of National Highway-7 which passes through the crucial Kanha-Pench tiger Corridor.

The Delhi office also published three volumes of the newsletter, *Tiger Link* which was distributed widely, especially among policy makers, decision makers, experts and NGO's concern with tiger conservation across the globe. It also served as an information based for media professionals and those seeking concise information on tiger conservations. Many letters and emails of appreciation were received.

Some abbreviations used:

MoS (Env. & Forests)	: Minister of State (Independent Charge), Environment and Forests
MoEF	: Ministry of Environment & Forests
NTCA	: National Tiger Conservation Authority
WII	: Wildlife Institute of India
WPA	: Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
FCA	: Forest Conservation Act, 1980
PTI	: Press Trust of India
UNI	: United News of India
IANS	: India Abroad New Service
TOI	: Times of India
TNN	: Times News Network
WCS	: Wildlife Conservation Society
WTI	: Wildlife Trust of India
WPSI	: Wildlife Protection Society of India
TR	: Tiger Reserve
WLS	: Wildlife Sanctuary
PA	: Protected Area
RF	: Reserved Forest
CCF	: Chief Conservator of Forests
CWW/CWLW	: Chief Wildlife Warden
CF	: Conservator of Forests
DFO	: Divisional Forest Officer
DCF	: Deputy Conservator of Forests
ACF	: Assistant Conservator of Forests
RFO/RO	: Range Forest Officer/Range Officer
TATR	: Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve