



TIGERLINK

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

NEWS

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BURNING ISSUES

Severe **forest fires** have been reported from all over India—from Nagarhole in the south, through many parts of central India to the Himalayan slopes of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. Some forests suffer such conflagrations annually, but many areas have experienced a particularly dry winter in 1999 and fires have been early and notably more severe.

While little work has been done on the effect on animal communities of such fires, their long term effect on the vegetation is better known. Repeated burning creates a gradual shift in plant communities—the perennial grasses and herbs with their elaborate root systems that ensure continual growth and bind the soil, eventually give way to the ephemeral species that are more fire-resistant but less palatable to animals. When eaten these may be picked out by their roots, thus allowing bald patches to develop with consequent effect.

Fires result from several causes—they may be started by graziers in their desire for fresh grass growth, by *mahua* flower collectors wanting to ease their work, by the carelessness of pilgrims cooking meals as they pass through forest areas en route to a shrine or temple or be set deliberately as a perceived attack on the Forest Department. Once started, such fires are difficult to put out. Prior precautions are essential—the maintenance of appropriate fire lines, strategic deployment of fire watchers and a forest force alert and prepared for going into immediate action.

Lack of adequate resources for fire control, especially in the PA network, is a major reason that fires burnt so uncontrollably in 1999. Furthermore, in several areas, 1997 and 1998 were wet years with consequently reduced fire hazard, so some PA managers were lulled into a false sense of security which encouraged them to lay off fire-watchers and spend less on fire line maintenance in a bid to save funds for other conservation efforts.

Another reason may be changed attitudes. In past years, the Forest Department regarded such fires with extreme seriousness. The threat of suspension lay over

the heads of inattentive forest staff and widespread burning had to be reported to the State Government who would grill the Forest Department over the damage.

Now such threats appear to come into operation only when the press pick up the issue—often inappropriately. While much of Madhya Pradesh burnt without care nor notice, the local journalists' limelight focused on **Panna National Park**, one of the few areas where a concerted—and to a great degree, successful—effort was engaged to prevent the plateaux grasslands and vulnerable dry deciduous forests of the area from going up in smoke along with the surrounding territorial divisions. From the Field Director down, the forest staff were deprived of sleep and regular meals as day after day they fought round the clock to preserve the park. One fire watcher even collapsed of exhaustion and may have died if he had not been found and taken to safety by the Director, who came across his unconscious body when checking that the fire had been extinguished properly. In Uttar Pradesh, between 1990 and 1998, four men employed by the U.P. Forest Department died while on duty fighting fires. In 1999, a Deputy Ranger and one Forester died while fire-fighting in the Tehri Division of U.P.

- Fire fighting is but one **life-threatening danger faced by forest staff** in continuance of their duty. Each issue of this newsletter carries information of the tragic deaths of some of these **conservation front-line field workers**. In an effort to ascertain the full extent of those killed and further highlight the extraordinary tasks that the field staff face with little reward or recognition, *TigerLink News* Editor wrote to State PCCFs requesting a full list of those killed and/or injured since 1990 (see page 27).

In Uttar Pradesh 53 Forest Department staff have been killed since 1990. Many of the killings were as a result of forest offences—the majority being related to felling and the timber mafia.

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- *Esso award for tiger conservation*

Mr. Billy Arjan Singh and **Mr. Fateh Singh Rathore** have been awarded the first *Esso Tiger Conservation Award* for their **lifetime contributions to tiger conservation**. The award was presented by former Prime Minister of India, Mr. I.K. Gujral at a function organised in Delhi on 4 March 1999 during the Millennium Tiger Conference. The function was attended by the Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr. Suresh Prabhu and the vice-president of Esso Petroleum India, Mr. Peter C. Smith among other noted personalities in the field of conservation. The Esso awards, each of which carries a trophy and a cash award of Rs 1 lakh, recognise the efforts of an organisation or an individual over a lifetime in the conservation of the tiger. Mr. Billy Arjan Singh and Mr. Fateh Singh Rathore are the most senior tiger specialists. Mr. Arjan Singh has spent more than 50 years associated with the tigers of Dudhwa and Mr. Rathore has been associated with the tigers of Ranthambhore for nearly 40 years.

At the same time Esso also sponsored an exhibition of tiger paintings by the Ranthambhore School of Art in Delhi and Mumbai and in both cities children from several schools participated in a painting competition on wild tigers and their conservation.

- *TigerLink awards to Sariska staff*

At a colourful function, marking the 20th anniversary of **Sariska Tiger Reserve** on 10 April 1999, Shri S.C. Sharma, Addl. Inspector General Forests (Wildlife), gave out **three TigerLink awards**. The function was presided over by Shri Salauddin Ahmed, Principal Forest Secretary of Rajasthan. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan and the Director, Project Tiger were present. The awards were sponsored by a young tiger enthusiast, **Gobind Singh Akoi**.

Shri Ranjeet Singh and **Shri Surajmal**, Forest Guards, were awarded for their brave attempt to arrest poachers in Sariska Tiger Reserve. On the evening of 1 March 1999 they confronted poachers in the Tiger Reserve and tried to stop them. The poachers, who were armed with a rifle, fired at the two men, but they did not give up the chase. Though the poachers managed to flee after a long chase by these two men and some local villagers, they left behind a dead sambar which they had poached. The attempt made by the two men is admirable.

Shri Daulat Singh Shekhawat, Range Forest Officer, Sariska received a Rs 10,000 award for meritorious services to the tiger both in Ranthambhore and Sariska for over 20 years. His commitment to the cause of the tiger and his courage in

the field has provided great inspiration to his men. He has worked tirelessly against poachers.

Source: U.M. Sahay, C.F. Wildlife, Jaipur; Valmik Thapar

- *WWF-TCP awards for conservation*

At the Millennium Tiger Conference on 3 March 1999 in New Delhi, the Vice President of India Mr. Krishan Kant presented eleven awards donated by the WWF-Tiger Conservation Programme (WWF-TCP). The *'Tiger Conservation Awards'* were given in five categories along with a special award of Rs 2 lakh for *"team work in handling exigencies"*. This special award was presented to **Mr. B.S. Bonal**, Park Director, on behalf of **Kaziranga National Park** for the staff's dedicated round-the-clock work during the floods last year. The award for *"outstanding management of a tiger area"* was given to **Dr. Rajesh Gopal**, Field Director, Kanha National Park for the *"special attention"* he has given to the park.

Five awards consisting of Rs 10,000 each for special acts of bravery were also presented. **Mr. A.K. Brahma**, Range Officer, Bansbari Range, was awarded for his *"outstanding courage in defending Manas Tiger Reserve against militants"*. **Mr. M.G. Alexander**, Range Forest Officer, Anechowkur Wildlife Range, Nagarahole National Park received his award for diligent work in apprehending elephant poachers and other forest offenders. **Mr. Mohammed Iqbal Ahmed**, Forest Guard, Similipal Tiger Reserve was commended for his efforts against smugglers and poachers. The occasion in 1993 when, in spite of being inflicted with near fatal injuries, he prevented smugglers fleeing with the timber they had extracted, was particularly noted. Two bravery awards were given posthumously. One was presented to Malsawmi, widow of **Mr. Lalzawmliana**, Game Watcher, Dampa Tiger Reserve who was shot dead in October 1997 while making investigations against poachers in the reserve. (Donations may be sent for his widow and four young children in the name of Mrs Malsawmi, c/o the Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt. of Mizoram, Aizawl) **Mr. T. Chellaiah Thevar**, Watcher, Thirukarandgudi Range, Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve was the other recipient. He was honoured for his exceptional devotion to duty which led to a number of forest offences being detected and booked. He was killed by a timber smuggling gang while protecting seized logs (see *TL News* Sept. 1998).

Two awards of Rs 10,000 each for *"suppression of trade in tiger derivatives"* were presented. **Banikanta Saikia**, Forester, Bokaghat, Kaziranga National Park was awarded for his intelligence gathering and successful efforts against traders and poachers. **Mr. Soumen Biswas** of the *North Eastern Society for Preservation of Nature and Wildlife* in Siliguri was

honoured posthumously for his methodical investigation of the illegal wildlife trade which led to several trade rackets being exposed (see TL News Dec. 1997).

Dr. L.A.K. Singh, Research Officer, Simlipal Tiger Reserve was awarded Rs 20,000 in the category of "exemplary/innovative contribution to tiger conservation" and Rs 20,000 was awarded to **Mr. K. Thulsi Rao**, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve for his "notable work in involvement of people in tiger conservation".

Awards in the five categories are being given annually by WWF-TCP. Both government servants and others are eligible.

For further details contact: WWF-TCP, 172 B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003; Tel./Fax: 4698072

• *WPSI award*

At the Millennium Tiger Conference **Mr. Soumen Biswas** of the *North Eastern Society for Preservation of Nature and Wildlife* in Siliguri was also awarded by the **Wildlife Protection Society of India** for his contribution to the field of wildlife conservation and investigation and for his tireless work in exposing illegal wildlife trade. The award carried a sum of Rs 40,000.

• *Award for Karnataka staff*

Six forest protection staff have been awarded the State level "**Huli Samrakshaka Award**" for their outstanding contribution to the cause of protection of tigers in their habitats.

The awardees are: **A.T. Pooviah**, Range Forest Officer, Nagarahole for his courageous and tireless protection work during his 14 years of service. He has always led from the front in several encounters with hardened poachers at great personal risk and has booked over 15 poaching and smuggling cases. Such an example greatly motivates his team and today Nagarahole is one of the best protected wildlife ranges in Karnataka.

A.T. Venkate Gowda, R.O., Bandipur, began his 18-year career in the Forest Department at guard level. He has served with distinction in several ranges and is now a senior Range Officer and good leader, managing his men and resources intelligently, protecting his area from fire, illegal poaching and timber felling by organised gangs from across the Kerala border. Incidents of poaching in his area have reduced considerably and notable among his achievements is the seizure of the jeep of a notorious smuggler with over 200 kg of sandalwood.

Forester, **P.S. Nanjunda** from D B Kuppe range, Nagarahole, joined the department 16 years ago as a Forest Guard. Shri Nanjunda has made a mark in fire

protection duties in the dry zone. His devotion to duty and the cause of protection has led to his being involved in detecting more than five poaching cases and many smuggling cases. His achievement in improving protection around the Kerala border deserves special mention.

Narayan Sherigar serving as Forester at Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary in Karkala Division, has been with the department 17 years. He has been instrumental in booking 18 poaching and 34 timber smuggling cases so far. A particular achievement was in ensuring conviction in a famous gaur poaching case. His passion for wildlife has made him take an interest in education and in propagating the cause of conservation.

Syed Nizamuddin has had seven years of service as a Forester and been in both the social forestry and wildlife wing. Now posted to the Muthodi Range of Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, he had earlier been in the Tanigebyle Range. During his 4-year stint there he made his mark in combating the problem of timber smuggling which was rampant in the area. He has booked more than 50 cases involving different forest offences and his brave action in stopping timber smuggling in a convoy of bullock carts, despite being attacked and seriously injured, is commendable.

C.H. Shankar, Forest Guard from Tanigebyle Range, Bhadra WS has served in the department for ten years. This year's youngest awardee (32 years), he is commended for his consistent efforts at protecting his beat, ensuring that the area has improved during his posting there. His arrest of eight armed smugglers in a particular case deserves special mention.

The awards were instituted under the **Karnataka Tiger Conservation Project** and presented to the recipients on 16 February 1999 by the Forest Minister D. Manjunath. The awards carry a citation, a plaque and Rs 10,000.

Source: *Deccan Herald* 15 Feb. 1999; KTCP, No. 36, 1st Floor, Kanakapura Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 004; Tel: (080) 6611424; Fax: 080-6615286; E-mail: pbsolus@bir.vsnl.net.in

• *WWF-PATA conservation awards*

WWF-India have joined with the *Pacific Asia Travel Association* (PATA) to set up a **trust fund**, interest from which will be used for instituting a Conservation Awards Programme for outstanding work being done at field level. The first awards, to be announced on World Tourism Day, 27 September 1999 will be for outstanding work related to tiger conservation over the past two years. Donations to the fund are being solicited and suggestions and nominations for the 1999 awards are welcomed.

Source: Avenash Datta, WWF-India, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003

Andhra Pradesh

• **Uranium in Tiger Reserve**

An application for prospecting and exploration of uranium and other atomic minerals in Andhra Pradesh was submitted to the central government on 20 August 1998. However the State Government has been asked to obtain the recommendation of the Indian Board for Wildlife "since it involves wildlife areas". The Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve is threatened by this application for uranium exploration and mining (see *TL News* vol.4 no.2 Sept. '98).

Source: MoEF website: www.nic.in/envfor

Arunachal Pradesh

• **Poaching on the rise**

Poaching in the core of **Namdapha Tiger Reserve** is on the rise. On 24 February 1999 forest officials led by Mr. D.N. Singh, Field Director, **raided a camp and seized** dead sambar and barking deer, six tiger traps and a huge quantity of fish. The poachers managed to escape. The next day **forest officials** were **assaulted** and forest camps set on fire in retaliation. Lisu tribals are reported to have migrated into India from Myanmar and settled in and around the core of Namdapha Tiger Reserve. Although initially helpful to wildlife officials, it seems that, influenced and armed by traffickers from across the Myanmar border, a few of them later turned to poaching. *Early Birds*, an NGO based in the North-east, is urging the government to relocate the immigrant tribals from the area to prevent a situation of insurgency similar to that of Manas Tiger Reserve.

Source: Moloy Baruah, President, Early Birds, 26 Surujmukhi, P.O. Silpukhuru, Guwahati 781003.; *The Sentinel* 8 March 1999.

Forester killed in Srisailem T.R., Andhra Pradesh

In June 1998, the Field Director of Srisailem Tiger Reserve along with his staff, a watcher and two villagers went to investigate the site in Atchampet forest division, where one person, Sri Singoti of Todelagedda had been killed, possibly by a tiger. Hardly had they ascertained by the hairs on the ground that it was in fact a **bear attack**, than the animal also attacked their party. In the ensuing fight, one villager, Sri Pullaiah of Todelagedda and the Assistant Field Director, Shri M.A. Wahid sustained injuries requiring hospitalisation. Tragically, **Forester Rana Pratap Singh was killed by the bear** while trying to rescue Shri Wahid. Apparently the bear's cubs had earlier been killed by wild dogs and the mother was standing guard over the dead cubs.

Shri T. Rana Pratap Singh had been in service for nearly sixteen years. *"He was a young, energetic man with high quality of service, mind and integrity. He was always ahead of others in discharging his duties. It is this quality of the forester that made him fight so gallantly with the wild animal and in the process lay down his life. He deserves to be honoured with the highest honour of the Government for his courageous act."* He is survived by his wife and two sons aged eight and six years.

The staff of Project Tiger Circle immediately decided to contribute one day's salary to the bereaved family. Rs one lakh was awarded for his bravery and his family will receive full salary until superannuation of the deceased Forester. Rana Pratap Singh will be posthumously awarded the Chief Minister's *Sourya Pathakam*.

Source: Sri S.D. Mukherji, PCCF, A.P.; report by Shri D. Sudhakar, FD, Srisailem TR

Assam

• **Police withdraw from Manas**

It is reported that the Superintendent of Police, Barpeta District has "recently" **withdrawn** the battalion of **Assam Police** that had been posted in the Bansbari area of the **Manas Tiger Reserve** since 1989. The presence of the police next to the Forest Range Office has been an essential help during the last years of social unrest and increased poaching. Their withdrawal poses a threat to the Park. Local conservation activists are calling for them to be **re-deployed in the area**.

Source: Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Samanwoy Path (Survey), PO Beltola, Guwahati 781028 E-mail: bibhab@gwl.dot.net.in

• **More manpower for floods**

Flood time is fast approaching in Assam and a re-occurrence of the high **floods** that hit the **Kaziranga Tiger Reserve** last year is quite probable. One aspect of these floods that has perhaps not been adequately focused on is the high **loss of animal life** that occurs due to capture of animals **for the pot**. Seventy per cent of the animals flee the park for the higher land on the southern fringe where man has already colonised. To protect such areas **requires far more manpower** than is available. With the park staff already over-worked and under heavy stress due to themselves often being evacuees from their camps due to flood, poaching of rhinos gets priority attention while many deer, wild boar and other tiger prey species are

Appeal

On the night of 20 December 1998, a group of **miscreants** attacked Kahitama beat of **Manas National Park** and **killed three staff**—Bimal Chandra Kalita, Forest Guard, Hav. Bentik Sangma and Constable Chandra Keswar Gogoi.

Bimal Chandra Kalita was about 32 years old and had been working as a forest guard since 1989. He has left behind a young widow and two-month-old son.

Bentik Sangma was about 50 years old and is survived by three children and his widow.

Chandra Keswar Gogoi, 31 years old, joined service in 1993. He leaves behind a young widow and a daughter.

All three were excellent workers and lost their lives for the cause of protection of forest and wildlife. There is now no source of income for the bereaved families. An appeal is made to all well-wishers of forest and wildlife who can provide financial help to the families of the deceased. **Contributions** by cheque/demand draft may be sent to the Member Secretary, *Wildlife Areas Development and Welfare Trust*, Rehabari, Guwahati 781008. The amount will be distributed equally among the bereaved families of the staff killed at Kahitama.

Appeal sent by Dr. S.P. Singh, Field Director, Manas TR, Barpeta Road, Assam.

captured and killed. On the northern side, in high floods, deer try to cross the river and get swept to the north bank where they are easily captured. **Two herds of the endangered swamp deer** are reported to have **perished** in this manner during the last flood although there are no official figures to corroborate this as there is no mechanism to estimate the loss.

Kaziranga is known to have one of the highest prey densities of the sub-continent but if high floods become an annual feature, a serious prey base depletion will occur. At present no loss assessment is made.

It has been suggested that a ready party of at least 10 units comprising of 2 KNP staff and 6-7 staff from other wildlife divisions of the state, each equipped with vehicle or boat should be prepared and ready to go into service in the event of high floods occurring. Policing and

protecting wild animals in the non PA areas during high flood would be of great help to park management. Such a proposal with a budget estimate has been submitted to the Government.

Source: A.K. Barua, IBWL member, Wild Grass, 107 M.C. Road, Uzanbazar, Guwahati 781001

• **Rhino census in Assam's PAs**

While tiger census figures have been called into question in certain areas of the country due to a variety of reasons, the rhino census in Assam's parks and sanctuaries is undertaken by direct count and usually leaves no room for scepticism although some report that there has been an under count of rhino population in Kaziranga during the last two censuses.

The Department of Forests has made the entire census operation transparent by inviting members of the press and NGOs as part of the

enumeration team. The 1999 results are as follows:

Kaziranga	1,649 (1,164 in 1995)
Orang	46 (97 in 1991)
Pabitora	76 (68 in 1995)

Source: Shri A.K. Barua, TL participant

• **Rhinos decimated in Orang**

The severe **problems** in **Orang Wildlife Sanctuary** continue. The Range headquarters has been looted and the wireless system has been inoperative for over one year, seriously affecting rhino patrolling which is very dependent on the wireless communication. It is reported that the area is suffering from uncontrolled grazing and illegal tree-felling and that deer are poached even in broad daylight. This lack of proper management is reflected in the threat to the rhino population.

The latest census, undertaken in March 1999, reveals that the **number of rhinos** has **fallen by half**. Although not officially declared, the **1999** figure is said to be **46**, compared to **97** counted in the sanctuary during the **1991** census. In the five years **since 1995**, it appears that a shocking **52 rhinos** have been **poached** from this area and **20** died of **natural causes**. This is more than in the whole history of the sanctuary and compares to 10 poached and 7 that died of natural causes in the previous five years.

Source: *TigerLink* participant NGO, Assam

• **Civil administration rescues Orang**

It is reported that field management in the **Orang Wildlife Sanctuary** has **gone to seed** in the last six years, although the same grass-root field personnel who served in the years of zero rhino poaching are still present. It is suggested that feed-back from such

"old-timers" would provide valuable insights into the management and a mechanism should be devised for tapping into this source of experience.

Meanwhile on 26 February 1999, a **few hundred villagers** moved into the sanctuary, **began felling trees** and erecting temporary structures in the Chandanpur area. This became front page headlines in the vernacular press. Fortunately Assam has "a very knowledgeable and wildlife conservation-conscious" **Chief Secretary**, Mr. P.K. Bora, IAS who, on the basis of the newspaper reports, was **instrumental in having the encroachers evicted** within four days of the incident. The Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police of the District were themselves present during the eviction.

Day-to-day PA management cannot be allowed to slide and civil administration be asked to bail it out in times of crisis. IBWL member, Mr A.K. Barua points out that material inputs are also not a panacea for all problems and "lackadaisical" management should not hide their negligence behind a 'law and order situation'. Source: A.K. Barua, Wild Grass, 107 M.C. Road, Uzanbazar, Guwahati 781001

• **Fish poaching in N.P.**

Although **Dibru-Saikhowa** has been upgraded to **National Park** status, its integrity is still under threat. It is reported that since the sad and demoralising death of Range Officer Narayan Sarma in November 1998, at least six major illegal cases of **fish poaching** have occurred. It is feared that the use of poison and other such destructive poaching methods in the spawning habitats of the park will ultimately lead to a significant drop of the brood stock in the net-

work of rivers of the Brahmaputra basin which it feeds. Local NGOs are urging the Wildlife Department to strengthen its intelligence gathering network and increase patrolling so that such culprits may be caught.

Source: *Early Birds*, 26, 'Surujmukhi', P.O. Silpukhuri, Guwahati 781003 letter to DFO, Tinsukia

• **Veterinary camps and poacher killed**

The *Refinery Employees Trekkers Guild*, an NGO of the employees of the Guwahati Refinery, conducted a free veterinary immunisation-cum-treatment camp at **Orang Wildlife Sanctuary** for the fifth consecutive year on 23 and 24 January 1999. A **poacher was killed** near the river bank when the Guild members were at work on the other side. The Guild notes that the prey base of the big cats in the area have been severely damaged by *unabated and large-scale poaching*.

The NGO, *Early Birds* also organised a veterinary camp on 27 and 28 February in and around **Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary**. Along with the veterinary camp a small health camp was also organised for the wildlife department staff and their family members with medicines donated by Guwahati Refinery Hospital.

Source: Moloy Baruah, General Secretary, Refinery Employees Trekker's Guild & President, *Early Birds*, 26 'Surujmukhi', P.O. Silpukhuri, Guwahati 781003

• **Mistreated HWWs**

In November 1997, under advice of the Governor, the Government of Assam appointed **Honorary Wildlife Wardens** to 26 Districts in the State. However 1½ years on, the required photo **identity cards** have **still not been issued**. At least 13 HWWs have submitted their photographs and signatures to

the Office of the Chief Wildlife Warden and sent several reminders.

Mr. Debojit Phukam of the *Megamix Nature Club*, Dhakuwakhana was appointed HWW of Dhemaji District. He had apprehended a few poachers dealing in river dolphins, in capture of leopard cats and in netting of migratory ducks. He filed a case in the Court of the District Judge in Lakhimpur but due to the fact that he was unable to produce any identity card or papers confirming his registration as HWW, the case fell through as it was registered in his capacity as Honorary Wildlife Warden. He had made several visits to Guwahati from Dhemaji (a distance of over 450 km) in his attempt to obtain the permit from the Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) but was merely ridiculed for his efforts.

Source: *Amar Asom* 20 March 1999

• **F.D.'s lack of funds**

On 4 May 1999 a **report** was presented in the Assam Assembly prepared by a committee from the **Development Department** headed by MLA, Derhagra Moshahary, outlining the major setback that the development programmes of the Forest Department had suffered due to **inadequate funds**. According to the report there is a virtual standstill in the infrastructural and logistic front of the department leading to a "dwindling trend in forest". The sector was allocated Rs 24.36 crore against the required Rs 35.39 crore during 1998-99 and the allocation for 1999-2000 is only Rs 26 crore.

According to the report the forest staff could not be provided with arms to fight the poachers, free ration and uniforms and other

kits to which they are entitled, due to the non-availability of funds.

The committee has recommended that the Finance Department should take appropriate steps to raise the budget of the Forest Department.

Source: *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, 6 May 1999.

• **New Forest Commissioner**

Alok Jain, who was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, has been posted as **Forest Commissioner of Assam**. Known as a dynamic officer, much is expected of him in this critical post.

Bihar

• **Money for PAs**

It seems that finally PAs in Bihar are getting a reprieve. 1997/98 funds have been released for Palamau and this year's will be released by June. Furthermore, Rs 2.03 crore is being provided for arms and ammunition for protection of wildlife areas, in particular the tiger reserves in the State. Training will be given to special forest protection personnel.

Source: Project Tiger directorate, New Delhi

Stop Press: The latest news from the Director, Project Tiger who visited Bihar in early May is again grim. The salary component of Palamau and Valmiki has not been provided in the 1999-2000 budget of the State Government. This will result in non-drawal of any Centrally or State sponsored funds because the Accountant General of Bihar will not issue the cheque drawing authority to them.

Due to paucity of funds, most of the areas of Palamau Tiger Reserve have been burnt. No water management or any work

which is essential for conservation is being carried out there.

• **Tiger toe-hold in mining area**

In south-west **Hazaribagh District**, south of the Satpahar Range, villagers still report the occasional presence of **tiger** in spite of the nearby Piparwar and Asoka open-cast coal mines. Talking to Mr. S.E.H. Kazmi, DFO Hazaribagh West, they reported animals such as bear, deer, sambar, wild boar etc. in the Satpahar forests although since the mines were opened, they no longer see the animals often.

Many of the villagers had seen tiger, one reported tiger killing his bullock three years previously, others had seen one in the Satpahar range as recently as last monsoon. They also reported its presence in the Koelara forests and at a small pond near the village, Khandar where a tiger is reported to come occasionally to drink water (a leopard comes "every day").

Elephants were also reported. One had sighted an elephant in musth, and in Thethangi village a herd of six had raided crops. One woman reported seeing 2-3 elephants who had raided crops and "played in the mud" two kilometres from the mine.

In spite of the depredation to livestock and to their crops, the villagers believe that these animals should stay in the forest saying that "they also need food" and the "tiger is the king of the forest" — its "decoration".

Source: Tape-recorded interview with villagers taken by DFO Hazaribagh West, sent by Bulu Imam, "Sanskriti", Hazaribagh 825301

• **Fires consume sanctuary**

It is reported that **forest fires** are raging in large parts of **Dalma**

Sanctuary, consuming forests in the hills between Dalma and Bhilai Pahari. Near Kothu village, beside the Chandil hill in West Singhbhum district, hundreds of acres of forest bed are reported to have turned grey. The fires are said to be advancing along the Bihar-Orissa and Bihar-West Bengal borders also.

Forest officials say this destruction is an annual feature. Sunku Savar, an Adivasi from Bhilai Pahari village, is reported to have said that "we have ignited the fires for our own survival". Fire is used to clear the ground of dry leaves which make the collection of the mahua flower more difficult and the new green shoots that sprout after the fire provide fresh fodder for the cattle. Besides this, when the ash is washed from the hills by monsoon rains, it acts as a fertiliser for the tribals' fields below.

Source: Manoj Prasad, *Indian Express* 16 March 1999

Delhi

• **'Love the tiger walk'**

A 'Love the Tiger Walk', to create awareness for tiger conservation, was organised in Delhi on 14 February 1999 as a part of **Tiger Trust's Save the Tiger Campaign**. About **350 participants** ranging in age from 5 to 65 years, wearing headbands with tiger stripes, and some children in wildlife costumes, walked from the National Zoological Park to Project Tiger headquarters at Bikaner House via India Gate. The participants chanted slogans and sang a tiger conservation song lead by **Mr. Anthony Marr**, Campaign Director, Western Canada Wilderness Committee. A painting and slogan-writing competition was also organised.

At Bikaner House the gathering was addressed by Mr. P.K. Sen, Director, Project Tiger, Mr. S.C. Sharma, Addl. Inspector General Forests (Wildlife), Angarika Guha, class III student from Sri Ram Public School, Mr. Anthony Marr and Mr. Pradeep Sankhala, Chairman of *Tiger Trust* who said that the walk was not a protest march but was in support of the efforts made by the Government of India.

Source: Sucheta Tiwari, *Tiger Trust*, 206 Rakeshdeep, 11 Commercial Complex, Gulmohar Enclave, New Delhi 110 049; Tel: 011 6516770, 6853760, 6858658; Website: www.inetindia.com/dynamic; E-mail: Sankhala-tiger@sm2sprintrpg.ems.vsnl.net.in

• *CWW changes*

Since 6 April 1999, Shri R.K. Dhawan is no longer Chief Wildlife Warden of Delhi. His deputy, DFO Negi has been given temporary charge.

Karnataka

• *Power lines kill wildlife*

A ten-year-old male elephant has been electrocuted in the Marada Forest Range of Joida taluk, near Dandeli in Uttara Kannada district. This is the second such electrocution in the range, caused by the elephants coming into contact with an 11KV KEB electric line which runs well below statutory height. About three years back a gaur died in similar circumstances.

Source: *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore 10 March 1999

• *Fire hits Nagarahole*

Nagarahole National Park has been devastated by a number of fires and the forest department has closed the area to visitors from 10 March 1999 as a safety measure. Local NGO, *Wildlife First!* contend that while "well-placed as far

as funds and equipment for protection is concerned" the area has suffered "considerable damage" due to a lack of preparedness and too few fire-watchers employed. They report that two of the ranges in the park have suffered minimal damage while the other five have suffered extensively, highlighting the poor control and commitment of the Rangers concerned in those five.

The NGO, *Nagarahole Wildlife Conservation Education Project* (NAWICOED) has also turned its energies towards fire prevention and issued bi-lingual leaflets outlining the dangers of fire to the national park.

Shri S.C. Sharma, Addl. I.G. Forests (Wildlife) and Shri P.K. Sen, Director Project Tiger undertook a site visit at the end of April to assess the damage and suggest solutions for the future.

Source: *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore 7 March 1999; NAWICOED; President, *Wildlife First!*, Bangalore

• *KTCP enters second year*

The **Karnataka Tiger Conservation Project** (KTCP), which is being implemented by the Karnataka Forest Department in partnership with several local NGOs at four important tiger habitats—Nagarahole, Bhadra, Kudremukh and Bandipur, in February launched its second year activities. The three-year project, which started in January 1998, has an overall outlay of Rs 1.4 crore (approx. US\$ 340,000), provided as a grant by the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York with assistance from *Save the Tiger Fund* (set up by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Exxon Corporation), Gary Fink-MCG Healthcare and other donors.

To mark the inauguration of the second year's activities, 5 patrol jeeps, 2 high-speed motor boats, 45 sets of wireless equipment and 250 insurance policies for field protection staff were handed over to the Forest Minister of Karnataka by Dr. Ullas Karanth at an impressive function held at the State Forest Headquarters in Bangalore. This is in addition to the 9 patrol jeeps and other equipment donated during the first year of KTCP.

As part of the staff motivation component, six protection staff personnel from Nagarahole/Kudremukh wildlife divisions and Bandipur/Bhadra Project Tiger reserves were selected for the newly established "*Huli Samrakshaka*" state level award under KTCP for performing exemplary protection duties (see page 3).

KTCP has made a significant impact at field level with the successful implementation of several planned activities in the areas of protection, staff capacities/training, community education and conflict resolution. However the positive impact of the KTCP would have been far greater, if the Karnataka Forest Department's response in dealing with problems pointed out by the NGO partners from time to time had been more earnest and positive, particularly in the case of problems plaguing Nagarahole National Park.

Source: KTCP, No. 36, 1st Floor, Kanakapura Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560004. Tel: (080) 6611424; Fax: 6615286; E-mail: pbsolus@blr.vsnl.net.in

Kerala

• *Denotifying Periyar?*

A high level delegation from Kerala came to Delhi in April to

initiate the process of **denotifying an area of the Periyar Tiger Reserve for the Sabarimala Temple**. The MoEF is understood to have informed them that they could offer no assistance in the matter.

Vinod Kumar Damodhar, President of the *Friends of Elephant Forum*, writes to *TigerLink* to request participants to **write to the Forest Minister of Kerala**, "to withdraw the decision to allot 50 acres of forest land in the Project Tiger area of Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary in Sabarimala in the temple area, in the name of so called development". Damodhar highlights the irony of such action in the 25th year of 'Project Tiger'. He also points out that "the temple of Sabarimala is famous for Lord Ayappa who himself was a great lover of tigers." He writes that "the controlling of devotees is the only way to curtail rush in the area and the clearing of forest is not an alternative". As he points out, such clearing of the forest for development would be a violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act. Jayakumar C. of the *Nature Club Council* agrees that the area already leased out is sufficient if properly managed and opines that the move "will impair and devastate the long term conservation of tiger and elephant in the reserve and surrounding areas."

Source: *Friends of Elephant Forum*, Blessings, Near Chinmaya Mission School, Medical College Road, Calicut 673 016; *Nature Club Council*, P.B. No. 815, Kowdiar P.O., Thiruvananthapuram 695003 E-mail: nccouncil@hotmail.com

• **Atlas of forests**

The **Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI)** is preparing an atlas of forests in the state using remote sensing satellites. According to Mr. A.R.R. Menon, Prin-

cipal Investigator of the scheme, the project envisages to prepare range-wise information at 1:25,000 scale.

The KFRI has already begun a case study in the **Machar range**, spreading over an area of 60 km². Under the scheme, financed by the Forest Development Fund, details of about 10 themes like vegetation, drainage, communication, etc., will be collected with a view to supplementing information on other geographic features. Degradation threats will be specially monitored to eventually help adoption of possible safeguards against further degradation.

It is hoped that ground resolution of two square metres would be available with the launching of the next generation of Insat satellites. Availability of such minute details will in turn help in the identification of dominant species and their distribution pattern which has been so far difficult due to unfriendly terrain. Once the project is complete it would be **published in a book**. The Forest Department is also planning to set up a **computer network** using the data available.

Source: *Indian Express* 24 January 1999

• **WB funded Forestry Project**

Kerala became the fourth state to have a World Bank funded **Forestry Project** when Phase I started in 1998/99. (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and M.P. were the first three.) **US\$ 47 million** is being provided over a 4-year period, partly as a soft loan. The project is divided into three components of which biodiversity conservation is the smallest with around \$ 5 million. It is to be hoped that wildlife will not be adversely affected by this project as is allegedly happening elsewhere.

Madhya Pradesh

• **Forests threatened by governmental changes**

In its devolution of powers to **District Planning Committees (DPCs)**, the Government of M.P. may be unwittingly paving the way for its forests to be eaten up further by the timber and poaching mafias and other commercial interests. While the Police Department, a State subject, has been exempted from the changes, the Forest Department is being included under the purview of the new committees, in spite of it being on the Concurrent List and a department that has both a regulatory role and a quasi-judicial role under various acts and rules.

Under Government Orders dated 30 March 1999, amongst other changes, the **DPCs** are given the **power to evaluate** and recommend the course of action to be taken in **illicit felling** cases, to **transfer** class II, III and IV **employees** and to oversee Forest Department spending, in that letters of consent from the DPC will be required before money is released.

Furthermore the State Government has passed an order dated 4 April 1999 whereby all **regional offices of the Forest Department stand abolished after 1 July 1999**.

There is a **big apprehension** in the Forest Service that the biotic pressures on the forests will be impossible to contain if, as proposed, the day-to-day working of the Forest Department is brought within the administrative purview of the newly created district governments headed by the DPCs. It is pointed out that most of the Revenue lands have already been distributed as "pattas" or been encroached so it is quite im-

aginable that the people who are elected or nominated on the DPCs may have a great interest in either timber, non-timber products, mining or encroachment. Since the **DFO will be subservient to the DPC**, how will he be able to book cases against his 'masters' to whom he has to report? Removing the regional office of Conservator further increases the apprehension as there will be no one to point out any lapses of the DPC and DFO under it. The Government of India specifically included Forests on the Concurrent List to have some control as it was seen that the states were finding it increasingly difficult to save them from destruction.

Source: *The Hindu* 27 April 1999; orders of the State Government dated 30 March 1999

• **Part of Madhav NP given away for dam**

On 18 March 1999 the court of the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Revenue, in Shivpuri District passed an order **excluding 2,062.05 ha.** of land from **Madhav National Park** falling on the western bank of the Sindh river. It was contended that this land had come to the Water Resources Department after obtaining environmental clearance from the Centre in 1979. An application to this effect was submitted on 25 February 1999 to the SDO Revenue. It would seem that the SDO's decision turned on a letter dated 16 March 1999 from the **Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife)** stating that *"the exclusion of the submergence area from the National Park will not have an adverse affect on wildlife conservation"* and a letter from the **Director of Madhav N.P.** of 8 March 1999, expressing similar sentiments.

In August 1979 the Environmental Appraisal Committee of the Department of Science and Technology did give environmental clearance for the **Sindh River Project Phase II (Mohini Sagar dam)**, subject to a number of conditions. However in December 1984, central clearance was withdrawn as the State Water Resources Department had not complied with the environmental safeguards stipulated in the permission.

In December 1995, the MoEF approved diversion of 3,106 ha. of forest land for the project under Section 2 of the F(C)A, 1980 but on the condition that the legal status of forest land remained unchanged (see *TL News* Vol.2 No.1). It was later discovered that the Ministry had been misled as to the status of the area as in fact it fell within the extension of Madhav National Park, notified in 1983. After a site inspection report of the River Valley Projects (RVP) sub-committee, MoEF withdrew clearance. The RVP committee even contemplated legal action against the proponents of the project which violated environment norms (see *TL News* Vol.2 No.2).

Forest Department sources say the SDO's is a **wrong conclusion** which can be torn to shreds in a court of law since the environmental clearance by the Government of India had clearly stated that the legal status of forest land shall remain unchanged.

Who will save the forest if even forest officials hand it away?

Source: *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 21 April; *TL News* Vol.2 No.1 & 2; DST letter 1979; MoEF letter 1995; SDO order 18 March 1999

• **CAG report on illegal mining**
According to the report of the **Chief Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**, the **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**, is being

"badly ignored" in Madhya Pradesh as **illegal mining** is being carried out in many forest reserves of the state.

The CAG report states that in **Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary** illegal mining of valuable diaspora and pirophilite stone is being carried out by Bundelkhand Granite (Paniyar), Chhattarpur. The lease was granted by the Collector, Chhattarpur for a period of 20 years, on a no-objection certificate issued by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO). Later, a joint inspection by the DFO, Chhattarpur and Director, Panna National Park was conducted in October 1993 after a complaint was sent to the Chief Secretary by a villager. The report revealed that the mining was going on **inside the boundary** of the forest area.

However, Bundelkhand Granite obtained a stay order from the court against the notice issued by the Collector for stopping the mining in the area in May 1995. They even removed 80 trucks of stone worth Rs 40 lakh from the spot, while the Regional Director and Collector accused each other for the illegal mining.

The CAG's report accuses the Forest Department of having failed to take any positive steps to get the order quashed and stop the illegal mining. It also reveals other cases of **illegal mining** being carried out in the reserved forest areas of the state. According to the report, mining in the Khurela and Maujpur areas of **Shivpuri National Park** is being carried out in an area of 6.97 ha. The lease for the mines which was renewed after three years was given by the Collector, Shivpuri.

The CAG has taken *"serious note of the illegal mining being carried out in the forest reserves*

of M.P." and expects the Forest Department to take immediate steps to check these activities and preserve the rich fauna and flora of the state.

Source: *The Hitavada* 21 April 1999.

• **C.M. dismisses EIA report**

In spite of the CAG report which backs up some of the facts presented in the report, 'The State of the Tiger: India's tiger crisis' produced by the *Environmental Investigation Agency* (EIA) (see page 49), M.P.'s **Chief Minister**, Shri Digvijay Singh dismissed the entire report as "based on hearsay, speculation and undependable newspaper reports". Reacting to a letter addressed to him by Congress President Sonia Gandhi requesting a clarification, the C.M. is reported to have said that the document "would have been invaluable" if "it had ascertained the facts through field visits, rather than depending on hearsay reports and getting misguided by individuals craving for publicity and financial gains in the name of tiger conservation." In fact this is exactly what the London-based NGO had done, travelling exhaustively through the State, verifying facts and information and collecting photographic documentation.

The Chief Wildlife Warden, Mr. P.K. Mishra is also reported to have told newsmen that "there is no cause for worry. The report is one-sided and has no truth." With respect, it might be suggested that Mr. Digvijay Singh and the Chief Wildlife Warden could usefully heighten their awareness by a similar strategy of field visits to see for themselves the ground realities in their 'tiger state'.

Source: PTI, *The Indian Express* 3 May 1999; *M.P. Chronicle* 1 May 1999

• **Potential viable tiger population unit**

"Sanjay National Park (SNP) is the largest protected area in M.P. (1,938 km²) and combined with the adjoining Sanjay Dubri Sanctuary and the nearby Tamor Pingla Sanctuary, forms an extremely large protected conservation unit (nearly 3,000 km²). Part of the Deccan plateau, SNP contains sal forest interspersed with bamboo. Several perennial rivers and many small streams flow through its very undulating terrain. The PA is surrounded by territorial forests which provide an extensive buffer. It has the potential to be an **important area for biodiversity conservation** and due to its size, is one of few areas in the tiger's range that could support viable populations of a number of mammalian species, including tiger, sloth bear and gaur.

However, at present it is a **little-known** and neglected area which deserves more attention and needs greater financial input and infrastructural resources. In spite of the habitat being intact, on a visit at the end of March 1999, we observed that it supports a very **low density of wild ungulate**. Over the five day visit, driving approximately 270 km through 4 of the 7 ranges of the national park, checking water points and forest tracks, we saw only 8 nilgai, 3 chousingha, 3 chinkara, 1 wild boar, 2 civets, 3 jackal and 5 sloth bear. Very little evidence of other ungulates such as sambar and chital was found. The number of Alexandrine parakeets was noteworthy, as in many other areas there have been serious population declines.

Two leopard tracks were seen but no tiger evidence, although its presence was confirmed

throughout the park. But the reports were very sporadic suggesting very low tiger density—understandable given the apparently low prey abundance. The 1998 census figure for SNP is **17 tigers** and 64 leopards, i.e. for every 100 km² there are only 1 tiger and 3 leopards. Langur were encountered in good number—on average one troop was sighted every 5–6 km. **Bear** signs were **abundant** and tracks were seen almost every kilometre throughout the park. Spending two hours one evening near some flowering mahua trees, we saw four sloth bears at one place. Such sights are reportedly not unusual for SNP. Dy. Ranger, K.P. Sharma, who accompanied us, had even met a group of eight bears together in a *ber* (*zizyphus*) patch during its fruiting season. In the distance at dusk, due to the number, he had first mistaken them for a herd of buffalo! SNP may have one of the highest sloth bear densities of any park in India. This needs to be highlighted and given special attention in the management of the park.

This year, due to extremely dry conditions, **fire** has ravaged the park and almost all the areas driven through had recently burnt and were devoid of ground cover or fodder. Frequent recurrence of such forest fires will limit the recovery of ungulate populations. Lack of adequate infrastructure, low park budget and the extensive hilly terrain make controlling fire in this area a major difficulty for park management. Special effort and support in future years is essential to prevent **damage** such as has occurred this year.

The park has a network of **767 km** of forest road and 30 km of PWD road, but for the nearly

2,000 km², park authorities have **only 3 working vehicles**. The "flying squad" for the park has **no vehicle** and the 4-5 men reserved for this have been taken from an already understaffed park—for 95 beats, only 72 forest guard posts are allotted of which 18 remain unfilled due to the tough and remote working conditions (i.e. **43% under staffed at guard level**).

SNP has 51 villages with a relatively small population of 7,546 people but with a cattle population of over 15,000 which means that the park suffers from **biotic pressures** such as grazing in many areas. However, there are **extensive good habitats** with only a few small settlements. These productive areas, along a few perennial rivers, have the potential of supporting wildlife densities comparable to the best parks of India in similar habitat."

J. Van Gruisen, editor *TigerLink*; Dr. R.S. Chundawat, Wildlife Institute of India, P.O. Box 18, Dehra Dun 248001

• **Sal borer dies out**

It is reported that the **sal borer plague**, that appeared in many parts of Madhya Pradesh in 'epidemic' proportions, **has died out** now.

In the **Kanha Tiger Reserve** **sal borer** was said to have affected 10,000 **sal trees**. These are reported now to have cured themselves. Mr. Nagpuri, Kanha Range is reported as saying "*the problem is now over*". Only about 150 trees have actually died, around 2,000 show some evidence of damage and no fresh beetle activity has been recorded since November 1997, thus confirming comments stated in the January 1998 report by Shri P.K. Sen and V. Thapar regarding the so-called 'sal borer scandal'.

In November 1997, the M.P. Forest Department had estimated that 150,000 hectares of **sal forest** across the State had been affected by the sal borer. In many areas this was considered to be in "*epidemic proportions*" and their solution was widespread felling of affected trees. However, conservationists, experts, the MoEF and the Supreme Court intervened to restrict the wholesale felling operation (see TL News vol. 4 no.1).

Source: Belinda Wright @vsnl.com; PT Directorate

• **Tiger cub killed**

A tiger cub was crushed to death by a truck on the national highway in **Seoni district** on the night of 16 February 1999. The Divisional Forest Officer, Mr. Devendra Kumar Singh, said the male cub was one year old. The skin of the cub has been sent to Mysore for stuffing. The figure will be displayed at a specially built interpretation centre at Kanha National Park.

Source: *Statesman* 18 February 1999

• **Diamond mining threat**

Piqued at M.P.'s refusal to grant them a diamond exploration licence for southern Raipur district areas, Indian representatives of the multinational company, *De Beers* led an appeal for easier mining laws at the 86th Science Congress which was held in Chennai in the first week of January, claiming that the exploration of diamonds in India is "*trapped in the quagmire of political dithering and archaic laws*". Later the same month, newspapers carried large advertisements **inviting** offers from Indian companies for "*exploration, exploitation and marketing of diamonds*" in a joint venture with the M.P. State Mining Corporation. The areas where this is

proposed include ten blocks, each measuring around 5,000 km², in the districts of **Raipur, Bastar, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Bilaspur, Raigarh, Surguja, Sidhi, Satna, Panna and Chhatarpur**.

The list of pending mining projects issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, apparently includes a proposal dated 18 September 1998 for survey and investigation in the Panna district.

Participants with information on any mining activities and threats to PAs in their area should please send details to *TigerLink* or *Kalpavriksh*.

Source: PTI report; Advert. (also on www.unido.org); sent by *Kalpavriksh*, Apt. 5, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhanna, Pune 411004. Telefax: (0212) 354239; E-mail: ashish@nda.vsnl.net.in

• **Bastar threatened**

It is reported that the water flow of the once perennial **Indravati** river, which originates in the Kalahandi area of Orissa, has started **reducing**, particularly over the last 4 or 5 years. In February 1999, it was apparently reduced to a trickle at the place where it enters the Bastar District, threatening havoc to lakhs of people that live along its banks as well as to the rich fauna and flora that its waters support, including in the Indravati Tiger Reserve in the southern part of the state.

Deforestation and construction of dams in the upper reaches are cited as possible causes. However it seems that there is also an extraordinary natural phenomenon that may spell its death knell—"*stream piracy*". The flow of the larger Indravati is getting diverted towards the Kholab river through the Jaora nallah and fulfilling the prophecy of a Britisher, writing earlier this century, that "*the*

Kholab will eventually succeed in beheading the Indravati". The rivers occur within a few hundred yards of each other on the flat Jeypore plateau.

Shri Arvind Netam, patron of the NGO, *Bastar Society for Conservation of Nature* and former State Minister for Agriculture, has written to the Orissa Chief Minister requesting urgent remedial action, wondering "how such a natural catastrophe remained unnoticed and unattended by the concerned authorities of the two states."

Source: letter dated 16 March 1999 to CM Orissa from BSCN, Jeevan Sadan, Nayapara, Jagdalpur 494001

• **Are tigers down by 35%?**

TigerLink has heard rumours that the **1998 tiger census** of Madhya Pradesh revealed a figure of **less than 600 tigers** for the state. No confirmation of this is available but the Director, Project Tiger has been informed and is looking into the accuracy of the report. The figure presented for 1997 was 927 tigers.

At a meeting of forest officers in Bhopal, over 3 days in May, the Field Director of Kanha National Park stated that the census of 1998 revealed 699 pugmarks of tiger.

Source: *Jansatta* 19 May 1999

• **Forest Secretary changes**

Shri Sandip Bannerji is the new State Forest Secretary.

Maharashtra

• **Irrigation project threatens Melghat**

A proposal for clearing the **Upper Tapi Irrigation Project Stage II** in **Melghat** region is being sent by the Irrigation Department to the State Government for administrative approval. The proposal was

prepared in March 1978 but was not cleared after the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980. But now the State Government has asked the Irrigation Department to immediately send their proposals for administrative approval.

Of the total **1673.30 ha of forest land** to be submerged under this project, **244 ha** is required from **Melghat Tiger Reserve**—Rangubeli (137 ha) and Kutanga (107 ha). The initial contract, worth Rs 30 lakh, has been awarded to DD Associates, to facilitate land acquisition and forest clearance work. A multipurpose irrigation and hydroelectric power project, the dam site itself will be near Nawatha in Khanda District of Madhya Pradesh. **Stage One** has already been **completed** at Kharabuti in Jalgaon and Dhule Districts.

Another big project which came before many committees of the Government of India for clearance was the multi-crore **Chikhaldara Pump Storage Project** at Bhimkund (see *TL News* Vol.4 No.2). The *Nature Conservation Society*, Amravati, feels that this project should not be cleared under any circumstances since it is situated in the buffer of the PA and will adversely affect not only the rich forest and wildlife but will also disrupt the river system and involve submergence of agricultural and grazing land which will increase pressure on the remaining forest.

Source: Kishor Rithe, Pratishta, Bharat Nagar, Akoli Road, nr. Sai Nagar, Amravati. E-mail: ncsa@bom3.vsnl.net.in; Bittu Sahgal, Editor, *Sanctuary Magazine*, 602, Maker Chambers V, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400021 Fax: 022-2874380, E-mail: bittu@giabm01.vsnl.net.in

• **Mining and roads in Melghat** **Melghat Tiger Reserve** is said to be becoming more of a haven for

"grazers, PWD engineers and contractors", than it is for tigers. Roads and bridges are being constructed and illegal **quarrying**, to supply soil and boulders for the roads, is going on inside the Reserve.

Recently the Dy. Conservator of Forest of West Melghat Forest Division, Mr. Vikas Gupta, **arrested one contractor** after he found an illegal quarry near Retyakheda village "on the boundary of the satellite core area" of the Tiger Reserve. The contractor was released on bail on 4 April 1999.

On a subsequent investigation by Honorary Wildlife Warden, Kishor Rithe of the *Nature Conservation Society*, Amravati, two more quarries were found in Jarida and Hataru ranges being operated by four contractors who local villagers allege were operating with the "blessings" of one senior forest officer. Dy. C.F. East Melghat has registered an offence. It appears that these contractors have political connections who are intervening to dilute the enquiry. NCS, Amravati is demanding an **enquiry** from the anti-corruption bureau to expose this racket.

Since January 1997, the District Collector of Amravati started road widening and **bridge construction works** in Melghat on a large scale. This includes converting metal roads into black top roads and construction of five major bridges. In the case of two bridges near the villages of Dolar and Pili, the government had already decided to rehabilitate the villages that the bridges are meant to connect. Instead of spending over Rs 30 lakh on bridge construction, would it not have made more sense if the government provided this amount for rehabilitation? The road widen-

ing has also increased the traffic in the reserve (see TL News Vol.4 No.2). Some of the construction work violates the F(C)A 1980, and the *Nature Conservation Society* has decided to go to court to stop this destruction.

Source: Kishor Rithe, NCS, "Pratishtha", Bharat Nagar, Akoli Road, Near Sai Nagar, Amravati E-mail: ncsa@bom3.vsnl.net.in

• **Unified control**

So far **Melghat Tiger Reserve** has been under dual administrative control, divided between the **wildlife and territorial divisions**. The Field Director managed the Sanctuary and the National Park area while three territorial Divisions, East, West and South Melghat came under the Amravati Circle, managed by the Conservator of Forest. This dual control created great difficulty for forest and wildlife management and a proposal for unified control was under consideration for the past two years.

Finally the decision has been taken and **unification** was launched by the Chief Wildlife Warden from **1 May 1999**. A 1,894.21 km² area of Melghat and surrounding tiger habitats, out of a total of 2,940 km² of reserve forest, will be completely under the administrative control of the Field Director, Melghat Tiger Reserve. On 26 April 1999 an order had been issued, directing the opening of a separate wildlife circle at Amravati under the administrative control of the Field Director of Melghat. Gugamal N.P., Melghat WLS, Ambabarawa and Wan Sanctuaries in Akola District and Narnala Sanctuary are included in the newly created wildlife circle.

Many NGOs and wildlifers applauded the decision. Congratula-

tions to Chief Wildlife Warden, **Mr. M.G. Gogate** for making this possible.

Source: Bittu Sahgal, Sanctuary Magazine bittu@giasbm01.vsnl.net.in; Kishor Rithe msconst@bom3.vsnl.net.in;

• **Use of sun and water in MTR**

Melghat Tiger Reserve has completed **25 years** and celebrated its 26th foundation anniversary day on 22 February 1999.

Inherent water scarcity has been a limiting factor of the reserve. However over the last six years field staff have successfully used small cement bunds (less than 30 cm) to create **artificial water holes**. These small, inexpensive bunds are situated at shady points below natural oozes, minimising loss due to percolation and evaporation. Situated in steep and rugged terrain competition to the wildlife from domestic livestock is "**ruled out**". 50 such sites have been developed and about 400 more identified to be created within 2-3 years. The total cost ranged from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 per bund.

Encountering problems in keeping their wireless network charged and operating due to distant and erratic electricity supply, Melghat Project Tiger brought **solar battery charging units** from Maharashtra Energy Development Agency (MEDA) in 1991-92. These solar plants are very cost effective and are working efficiently even after 8 years. A solar energy distilled water unit was also acquired later for maintaining batteries. Solar energy is also being successfully used for **power fencing** around cultivated fields and for **solar lanterns** for the field staff.

Source: *Mel-vyaghra* February 1999—R.K. Wankhade, Dy. Director, Project Tiger Melghat, Amravati 444602; Tel: 0721-662792; Fax: 0721-662792

• **4 tiger deaths reported**

The decomposed body of a **tiger** was discovered by forest officials on 23 December 1998 in **Navegaon National Park** and the paws, teeth and whiskers were missing. Information suggests that the carcass of a gaur, which had been killed by the tiger, was **poisoned** with pesticide by herdsmen who discovered it in the forest. It is believed that the tiger consumed the gaur and died. Later poachers collected its body parts. No arrests have been made.

Three tigers deaths have been reported from **Chandrapur district** since January 1998. A dead tiger cub was found in a cultivated field near Shegaon village on the **periphery of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve** on 15 January 1999. The officials contend that the cub died of **malnutrition** but others, on the basis of wound marks on the body, suggest that the cub was **stoned to death** by the villagers. The nails from three of the cub's paws were also missing. The body has been sent to Chandrapur hospital for post-mortem.

Two tigers (a male and a female) are reported to have been poached in the Taluna beat of Rajura Range in Chandrapur (compt. no. 183 and 163). It is suspected that a waterbody was poisoned. First a peacock was found dead and then a tiger on 2 March 1999. On 30 March, forest staff **recovered** another tiger **skin and bones in Rajura forests**. It seems the tiger was poached around ten days before the recovery. The Forest Department has **arrested three persons** in this offence. Two of them, 27 year old forest worker Prakash Baburam Atram and 25 year old Ravindra Waghmare, are from the Tulana

village while Nagu Mallaji Tekam, 24 years of age, is from Bhendada village.

Source: Atul Dhamankar, Green Pigeon Nature Society, Shivaji Chowk, Chandrapur Maharashtra 442402; Kishor Rithe, NCS, "Pratishtha", Bharat Nagar, Akoli Road, Near Sai Nagar, Amravati E-mail: ncsa@bom3.vsnl.net.in

• **Tadoba tiger sighting**

The Director, Project Tiger, Mr. P.K. Sen on his first visit to the **Tadoba Tiger Reserve** in February 1999 encountered **four tigers** strolling along the road. They approached the Fiat car in which he was travelling and nearly came up to the bumper to sniff at it.

• **Tiger 2000 meet**

On 29 March 1999, Sanctuary Magazine and the British Council jointly organised a **panel discussion** on the status and prospects of the tiger for the next millennium. Mr. S.P. Godrej was the Chief Guest and panelists were Valmik Thapar, Fateh Singh Rathore and Bittu Sahgal. V. Thapar gave a slide presentation on the '**Cult of the Tiger**' as expressed in different cultures through the centuries. F.S. Rathore spoke on the rise, fall and rise of **Ranthambhore**. The theme of Bittu Sahgal's presentation was whether we are developing the tiger to death. He stressed that the main long term threat to the tiger was not just poaching, but the destruction of tiger habitats by commercial and **developmental projects**.

The discussion drew a capacity crowd (about 300) including industrialists, businessmen, journalists, students, wildlifers, environmentalists. There was plenty of interaction and questions were asked to all the panelists, with a number of individuals as-

king how they could get involved in the effort to save the tiger.

On the same day, in the morning, Valmik, Fateh Singh and Bittu gave a **talk to about 300 children** at the same venue, with the help of slides. This too was extremely interactive, with the children asking a variety of questions. They were also given postcards to write to the Chief Minister, asking him to protect the tigers of Melghat. They then took turns painting a giant banner with messages to save the tiger.

Source: *Sanctuary Magazine*, 602 Maker Chamber V, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400021

• **State Department on net**

The **Nagpur division** of the Forest Department has become the only State Government department to launch its own website on the internet. The website: **www.wildlife-vidarbha.org**, containing details of tiger reserves, national parks and sanctuaries in the region, was inaugurated by the Minister of State for Forests, Vinod Gudadhe Patil at the office of the Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Shri Bhagwan on 15 February 1999. Mr. M.G. Gogate, the Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) told forest officials in his introductory remarks that the launch of the website had added to their responsibilities. The website is a step towards making the department more transparent.

Source: *Indian Express* 17 February 1999

• **World Forest Day celebrated at Amravati**

On 21 March 1999, World Forest Day, *Nature Conservation Society*, Amravati organised a one day Seminar on **Biodiversity Conservation and Role of University Teachers** in collaboration with the Forest Department, Amravati.

Around **60 university** teachers from the departments of Biology, Zoology, Biotechnology of the various colleges in Amravati University participated in the seminar. Vice Chancellor of Amravati University Dr. S.T. Deshmukh, Conservator of Forests, Amravati Circle, Mr. S.W.H. Naquwi, Mr. V.T. Patki, Field Director of Tiger Project Melghat, Mr. Mahip Gupta (IFS) Dy. C.F. Amravati division, Mr. Praveen Srivastava (IFS) Dy. C.F. East Melghat division were present at the inaugural and valedictory functions.

Source: Kishor Rithe, Pratishtha, Bharat Nagar, Akoli Road, nr. Sai Nagar, Amravati.

• **Controlling poaching**

Range Forest Officer, Murkanda, **Mr. Ukey** and his staff have been working hard to control poaching in their area. Honorary Wildlife Warden, Gadchiroli, Mr. M.S. Chauhan reports that Mr. Ukey and his staff should be commended as they have distinguished themselves in their physical effort, will power and understanding of wildlife conservation. Between July 1998 and February 1999, Mr. Ukey and his staff **nabbed eight gangs of poachers** who were using electrocution to poach wildlife. Cases were registered against them in the court, two of the cases were from the boundary area between Murkanda Forest Range and Ghot Forest Range and have been handed over to the RFO Ghot Forest Range for inquiry.

TigerLink congratulates Mr. Ukey and his staff for their dedicated work in the cause of wildlife conservation.

Source: Mr. M.S. Chauhan, HWW, Village Chaprala, P.O. Chadampalli, Tehsil Chamorshi, Dist. Gadchiroli

Orissa

• *Satkosia WLS*

Orders have been issued to transfer the **Satkosia-Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary** from the territorial wing of the forest department to place it under DFO Wildlife, Satkosia. However the speed of the implementation of this order has been slow. Meanwhile the area is under severe threat and there have been a number of cases of elephant **poaching** including that of an adult tusker at Katrang near Tikarparha. Areas that 4-5 years before used to harbour tigress and cubs have suffered due to continuous timber smuggling and poaching. It is believed that several of the villages inside the sanctuary are being used as base camps for these activities.

A local NGO, *Wild Orissa*, which has been monitoring the area, reports that it has a rich floral and faunal diversity, a healthy population of Indian gaur, sambar and elephants and can also provide a **good future for the tiger**. The area abounds in natural salt licks and water holes. But the **ill-equipped forest staff** has been unable to control the pressure of the continuous **timber smuggling and poaching**. There have been a number of armed attacks on the staff including the DFO in the last ten years. The communication network in the area is in disarray and the forest division does not possess a four wheel vehicle. The WWF-TCP has promised to donate field equipment on the condition that the area be brought under the Wildlife Division. NGO members argue that forest personnel need to be supplied with arms and that a paramilitary force such as the Central Reserve Police Force be used before the place is

"wiped out". *Wild Orissa* strongly suggest that this area be immediately placed under Project Tiger as this would *yield excellent results in a short time*.

Source: Surjit Bhujabal, Chairman, *Wild Orissa*, 5R-1, O.U.A.T. Colony, Gopabandhu Chowk, Bhubaneswar, Orissa 751001; Tel: 0675-458784, 419272

Forest Guard killed

On 24 April 1999 Forest Guard **Shri Bhagwan Majhi** was assaulted and **beaten to death** by a group of professional timber smugglers also involved in elephant poaching, in Angul Division of **Satkosia Sanctuary**. The smugglers who had come to fell prime teak trees at Tulka section killed Shri Bhagwan Majhi and severely injured another forester, who is now battling for his life in hospital. It appears that the culprits, although identified, have yet to be arrested.

The *Wildlife Society of Orissa* has strongly condemned this incident which is the second case of murder of forest personnel in the state during 1999, the first one taking place at Nayagarh Division in January. The society has accused the PCCF of total inaction and apathy since various proposals for strengthening the hands of the field personnel like stringent forest laws, equipping them with modern arms and giving them firing powers are gathering dust at the State Forest Headquarters in Bhubaneswar. The field personnel have also not been paid salaries for the last two months due to the Letter of Credit system which results in late disbursement of funds though the money is lying with the Finance Department.

Biswajit Mohanty <biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in>

• *Tiger poisoned*

Within the last two months, a **tiger** was **killed in** the **Satkosia Sanctuary** when poachers mixed "*strong poison*" in the carcass of an animal that had died at Lebangi village within the Lebangi Reserved Forest. The poacher removed the skin, teeth, nails, etc. of the tiger.

One man has been arrested in connection with the incident but the local people are reportedly dissatisfied with the forest officials due to "*their callous activities*". Over the last two years endangered species have been harmed and the timber mafia has been actively felling teak within the Sanctuary.

Source: Niladri Bihari Mishra, Central Hospital Colony, Banikala 758038, Keonjhar, Orissa

• *Sunabeda survey*

Wild Orissa are planning a survey of the **Sunabeda Sanctuary** located in the Nawapara District bordering Madhya Pradesh. They are proposing that the area be included as a tiger reserve and are proposing to bring out a status report to back their proposal. There are "*confirmed reports*" that wild buffalo continue to exist on the M.P. side.

However, the NGO are looking for **financial support** to continue their surveys as they "*totally lack in equipment and gadgets like binoculars, cameras, field guides etc.*" and also need to find the funds to hire a vehicle for the survey.

Source: Surjit Bhujabal, *Wild Orissa*, 5R-1, O.U.A.T. Colony, Gopabandhu Chowk, Bhubaneswar, Orissa 751001 Tel: 0675-458784, 419272

• *Plea to protect forests*

"*I would like to bring to the notice of TigerLink participants, the plight of the excellent forests in*

Koraput District of South Orissa. The Jeypore hill tracts house excellent forests, contiguous with those of Bastar, Indravati Tiger Reserve.

During my visit to the place, in April 1998, I was able to note the deteriorating conditions prevalent— (1) extensive deforestation, (2) overgrazing by cattle, (3) forest fires set by tribals for mahua flower collection, (4) shifting podu cultivation, (5) Akantha shikar practised by tribals, and (6) weed infestation by Eupatorium in deforested lands.

But prey species, leopards and an odd tiger or two still hang on in this habitat. My friend, a resident of that area reported the sightings of two tigers in 1997. Leopard sightings are not uncommon while sloth bears are abundant. Hence all is not lost in this paradise and if given adequate protection, these forests will certainly bounce back to their former splendour and glory."

Jeben Benjamin, Starina, Paul Street, Neyyoor 629802, K.K. District, Orissa

Rajasthan

• Uniforms and training for reserve staff

Tiger Watch has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Forest Department. The NGO will be organising refresher training courses for the staff of **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve**. The course is being designed by ex-Field Director, Fateh Singh Rathore in conjunction with the Tiger Reserve Office. Batches of ten will come in rotation to participate in this course and on completion each member of staff will be provided with a set of **uniform**, boots and rucksack. The project is being funded by the **Rhino Rescue Trust U.K.**

Tiger Watch's Moghiya rehabilitation programme is awaiting land clearances.

Source: Ashutosh Mahadevia, Tiger Watch, E-mail: tigerwatch@hotmail.com

• Eicher trucks aid tigers

On the recommendation of Valmik Thapar, **Eicher Motors Ltd.** loaned the **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve** one of the few **4-wheel drive** Eicher Canter trucks that have been made. This has been given for a period of eight months, starting from March 1999, for testing purposes. The vehicle has been used for patrolling, anti-poaching and management activities. It has proved very powerful in the field and already been of immense use to the Park.

Congratulations to Eicher for this generous gesture!

Those interested in having more details about this vehicle may contact Eicher Motors Ltd., Eicher House, 12 Commercial Complex, Greater Kailash II (Masjid Moth), New Delhi 110048 Tel: 6445521 Fax: 6431929

• RNP leopard deaths

The tragic death of a male and female leopard occurred on 8 May 1998 in the **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve** after they had fed on the carcass of a camel. The camel had earlier been treated with various chemicals for its injuries but had succumbed after wandering into the fringe area of the park.

Inadvertent deaths, but a warning for what can happen anywhere.

Source: V. Thapar, Ranthambhore Foundation

• Leopard kills child

In the early hours of 17 May 1999, a leopard straying from the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve killed a 2 year old child called Shimla who had been sleeping with her parents outside the now closed cement

factory of **Sawai Madhopur**. When chased by the parents who heard her screaming, the leopard jumped over the boundary wall and disappeared into the abandoned cement plant. Project Tiger personnel with the Police were pressed into service to find the girl.

By afternoon only her frock was recovered and the public of Sawai Madhopur started agitating so the District Administration authorised an effort to catch the leopard alive. Thirty people over 12 hours took part in the operation—search parties combed the area with forest personnel, police and guides. The girl's head was recovered and the leopard was found to be hiding in a cool dark corner of a boiler within the factory.

Three attempts to tranquillise the animal were unsuccessful. Finally Mohammad Saeed, an old time Project Tiger driver succeeded in tranquillising the leopard from very close quarters in the darkest corner of the cement plant with the help of a torch which was the only source of light. Mahindra Singh, another forest driver and Jhanshyam helped Saeed in tranquillising the leopard. Naffees spotted the animal and Rajbeer Singh tracked it. The capture was due to this commendable team work.

The leopard, a fully grown male, was sent to Kota zoo but died of internal haemorrhaging a few hours after reaching.

The bereaved family were given immediate 'compensation' of Rs 15,000 as per rules.

Source: G.V. Reddy, Dy. Conservator Forests, Ranthambhore TR, Sawai Madhopur.

- **'New' HWW for RNP**

In April 1999 Mr **Fateh Singh Rathore** was made **Honorary Wildlife Warden** of Ranthambhore National Park.

- **Ranthambhore controversy**

In April, national newspapers suddenly carried prominent news stories, under such headlines as "*Foreign and favoured in Ranthambhore*" and "*Oh, to be the beeb*", alleging that parts of the **Ranthambhore National Park** had been closed for the BBC to film there. An area of the park, namely the **Padam Talao and Rajbagh lake section**, had been closed to tourists. Shri Salauddin Ahmed, the dynamic Secretary, Rajasthan Forest Department explained the decision as one required due to the "*abuse*" by tourist traffic and the need to rest the region. Initially the restriction also applied to the BBC and other film crews who were shooting in the park. However, their earlier agreements were later honoured and they were again allowed to shoot. The area's closure and the film crew's presence were never connected in the way the press was alleging.

It seems that the tour operators and guides who have a financial interest in showing a tiger to the tourists, were the ones to have started the furore in the press. Ironically, the publicity has backfired as it has left many tourists with the impression that the whole park has been closed.

Steering Committee member, Valmik Thapar, lauds the decision and after a site visit at the end of April believes that deer, wild boar and even antelope have increased their use of the area. Being a vital breeding habitat for tigers, he believes that it should never be

subjected to the kind of tourism it received earlier. However he suggests that it could be opened to the Department Canter for two 1 hour rounds of only the lake area both morning and evening thus allowing a minimum of 100 people to see the area while keeping disturbance down to only one vehicle.

Source: TL participants; 'Visit Report' for MEF et al. by V. Thapar, PT Steering Committee member

- **Cattle compensation for RNP**

The **WWF TCP cattle compensation scheme**, which has been effective in checking poisoning of tigers around protected areas in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, is now to be extended to the environs of **Ranthambhore National Park** and its two adjoining protected areas in Rajasthan—Sawai Mansingh and Kuwalji. There are 72 villages surrounding Ranthambhore, with a cattle population of 1,00,000. The TCP will provide funds for information on cattle/buffalo killed by carnivores, 50% of the assessed cost of the animal killed (the other 50% to be met by the Park at the same time), cost of guarding a kill if such a decision is taken, and the actual cost of transportation incurred by the nominated NGO partner.

While no compensation will be paid for cattle killed within the National Park (since grazing is not permitted inside), it will be provided for livestock killed in its buffer and in the other two PAs where cattle grazing is legally permitted.

Source: *Tiger Update* January 1999

- **20 years of Sariska**

At a colourful function in **Sariska Tiger Reserve** on 10 April 1999 Shri S.C. Sharma presented three TigerLink awards (see page 2). The

function was presided over by Shri Salauddin Ahmed, Principal Forest Secretary of Rajasthan. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan and Director, Project Tiger were present.

The day's events marked the **20th anniversary** of Sariska Tiger Reserve. The day was also spent focusing on the **problems of Sariska**, from village relocation to the impact of weeds and mining. Creation of corridors at Sariska TR and Ranthambhore TR were discussed and a committee was set up to identify and survey suitable areas. Every problem was carefully discussed.

What was unique about the meeting was the presence of both federal and state government members of the Steering Committee and other experts. A broad-ranging discussion and highlighting of issues could finally help in resolving some problems. Shri Rajendra Singh of the *Tarun Bharat Sangh* offered his kind help in the relocation of villages and he believed that many of the villages would want to relocate voluntarily. WWF-TCP representative, Brig. Talwar had his first opportunity to visit the Reserve and it is hoped that some of the infrastructural requirements of Sariska will be fulfilled by WWF. Salauddin Ahmed the Principal Forest Secretary had spearheaded the meeting and decided to hold such brainstorming every two months in different field situations. The next meeting will be held in Mount Abu in the second week of June 1999.

Source: Project Tiger Steering Committee member, V. Thapar; minutes of the meeting

- **Sariska tiger sightings**

The Field Director, Sariska reports that in the first days of May, **eight different tigers** were sighted in Sariska during a 24 hour period.

Fingers are crossed everywhere that Sariska grows rapidly under the present dynamic Principal Forest Secretary, Salauddin Ahmed and Chief Wildlife Warden, R.G. Soni.

V. Thapar, PT Steering Committee member

• **S.C. order hits illegal mining**

The Supreme Court's order dated 12 December 1996 has affected **2,196 mining leases** situated in the **forest areas**, according to the State Forest Minister speaking in the Vidhan Sabha. The forest area affected by mining was 14,391 ha., he reported (over 1% of the State's total forest cover). The mining department has cancelled 89 mining leases falling in forest areas and 99 mining lease holders have surrendered their mining leases. The State has apparently lost Rs 10.5 crore in mining royalty.

The Centre has rejected the renewal of 284 cases sent to it by the State and approved 615 cases. 370 cases are under consideration of the Central Government and 219 such cases are under the scrutiny of the State Government.

The minister also informed the assembly that the State Government had identified **7,722 ha. revenue land for exchange with forest land** out of which the Forest Department had given no objection certificate in regard to 4,564 ha. land. The revenue land would be given free of cost to the forest department and the expenses for development of forest on it would be borne by the mining lease holders.

Source: *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur 22 April 1999

Tamil Nadu

• **KMTR conservation problems**

The **Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve** (850 km²) situated at the

southern extremity of the Western Ghats covers a variety of habitats and is "**critically important for long-term wildlife conservation**" due to its high biological diversity. A large number of species endemic to the Western Ghats occur within the Reserve, as also a number of globally rare and endangered species. It is therefore a matter of serious concern that the area is reported to be suffering from a number of **problems and threats**:

Tourism: a large majority of visitors to the **core areas** over the last 3 years are reported to come only for "**fun and picnicing**" and have no care for nature, thus bringing **disturbance** to wildlife and the habitat, especially through the noise and the "**sackloads of garbage**". The **tourist zone** attracts lakhs of visitors annually and here also there is a lack of adequate control and checking. There is also **political pressure** to open up even more core areas for picnicing.

Pilgrims: one of the most serious problems affecting KMTR is the huge numbers of pilgrims that visit the religious sites situated within the reserve. During the festival of Sorimuthianar in July, tens of lakhs of people invade the reserve over a ten day period with **little control** or regulation. Blaring music, shops, garbage, habitat damage due to clearing areas for camping and the cutting of wood for fuel and even poaching of animals for food have been reported.

Private holdings and leased plantations: a number of these exist within the park with the associated problems of road access, firewood collection, illegal ganja cultivation and even poaching.

Tribal settlements: a number of these are on forest land and apart from allegations that they play host to poachers from Kerala, there is also the threat of demand for more land. There is also a report that the World Bank aided Ecodevelopment Project has offered 3-5 acres per family in prime wildlife areas of KMTR without thought to the wildlife impact.

Misdirected management: it is reported that much management time goes in "**putting concrete in the jungle**"—check dams, water-holes, watch-towers, walls, fences, concrete platforms and pavings for trees and buildings. It is suggested that such funds could be better used for procurement of equipment such as radios, poaching patrols, wildlife monitoring and other such useful conservation requirements. In contrast **anti-poaching efforts** are **sporadic** and poorly organised.

Lack of personnel and arms: the Forest Department is said to be suffering from **50% vacancy** in the state.

Wildlife monitoring and research: except for the annual one-day census, there is reported to be a virtual **absence of attention or work** in this direction.

Kannikatti road: there is a recurrent proposal to build a **major highway** connecting Papanasam with Trivandrum running through the rainforest core area of KMTR via Kannikatti. Such a road would prove an "**ecological disaster**" said to be comparable to the submergence of Silent valley in the loss to rainforests.

Source: *TL* participants

• *Dam threatening*

The Tamil Nadu government is pushing to revive the **Pandiyar-Punnampuzha Hydro-Electric Project** in the Gudalur Taluk of Nilgiri District. The project, originally mooted in the 1960s with Planning Commission approval received in 1968, envisages the construction of **several dams**, two diversion weirs, a tunnel and other interconnecting arrangements and power houses on the two rivers. This river system flows into Kerala and the original plan was to generate electricity for the two States. It had apparently fallen through due to lack of agreement between them. The revised plan includes irrigation and proposes to divert a sizable quantity of water from west to east of the Nilgiri District to irrigate land on the eastern and north-eastern slopes.

The Rs 1,500 crore project would "*spell disaster to the already over-exploited and environmentally degraded regions of this district. Besides submerging prime forest lands and cultivated ones, a portion of Mudumalai National Park would also be submerged.*" This would affect the elephant corridors and increase already high animal-human conflict. About 2,500 tribals would also be uprooted.

The *Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association* (NWEA) has been actively opposing the dam in Tamil Nadu and in Kerala an anti-dam committee has been formed with several groups agitating against the dam. The committee has compiled 5,000 signatures from Gudallur.

So far no proposal has come to Delhi for environmental clearance and on 23 March 1999, the Kerala High Court restrained the two governments from taking any

further steps to implement the project. The Kerala State Farmers' Relief Forum and farmers of Waynad and Kozhikode districts had filed a writ petition in February 1999, seeking to direct the two Governments not to proceed with the project, requesting that their grievances should first be heard, and to direct the PCB to conduct a study on the ecological impact of the proposed project. Justice C.S. Rajan directed the Kerala Government to consider the representation and pass orders within two months of receipt of the order, after hearing the forum in person.

The local NGOs are watching the situation closely. NWEA points out that with the huge amount of money involved, if existing hydro-electric plants in the district were modernised and the transmission lines and system strengthened to reduce losses, the expected yield from the Pandiyar-Punnampuzha project could be made up easily. Also, T.N. is second of all states in the production of wind energy so "*thrust could be made in this direction without going ahead with this ecologically disastrous project.*"

Source: A.C. Soundarajan, NWEA, c/o Dist. Forest Office (North Divn.), Mount Stewart Hill, Udthagamandalam 643001, Nilgiris; V. Jayarajan, Action Committee against Pandiar-Punnampuzha Dam, Parisarakshavedi, Elambachi P.O., Kasaragod Dist. 671311, Kerala; Technical Report March 1998 of Asian Elephant Conservation Centre, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012; *The New Indian Express* 24 March 1999

Uttar Pradesh

• *Sal borer in the Doon valley*

The Friends of Doon Society report that the **Doon valley** has been hit by the **sal borer beetle** and they are concerned that the in-

festation should be tackled speedily and effectively for fear of its potential threat to Rajaji National Park.

Source: Winter 1998-99 Newsletter of FOD, c/o EBD Business Centre, 49 Rajpur Road, Dehra Dun 248 001

• *Slivers of hope for Rajaji?*

The Government of India has now formally approved the grant of **two acres of land to each Gujjar family of Rajaji National Park**, covering both Pathri and Gandikhata sites. It is reported that "*the park administration is gearing up to ensure the eligibility criteria are met and the process of allotments goes through smoothly.*"

After another incident of **elephants** in Rajaji N.P. being **killed by trains** (the matriarch and two calves from one herd were killed on the night of 29 September 1998), the Forest Department and local NGOs lobbied hard to force the Railway Board to take the matter seriously and ensure that steps be taken to prevent such accidents in future. A joint inspection (between senior officials of the Railways, the Park Director and experts from the Wildlife Institute of India) took place and **agreement** was apparently **reached** on safety measures required, including enforcement of speed restrictions.

However, it seems that the agreement has not been implemented and on **1 April 1999** another adult **elephant** was **killed** in a train collision, at Raiwala in the Mothichur range of the Rajaji National Park. This was the fifth incident in the last five years.

Source: Winter 1998-99 Newsletter of *The Friends of Doon Society*, c/o EBD Business Centre, 49 Rajpur Road, Dehra Dun 248 001 Tel: 657748/654487; Joint statement issued at the Third National Consultation on Wildlife Conservation and People's Livelihood Rights, Bhopal