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Across the Globe to Save the Tiger



NEWS

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PARAMILITARY FORCES WILL NOW HUNT FOR POACHERS

At long last, the plundering and murder taking place in our forests reaches the front page of a national newspaper. Tigers, elephants and all the variety of wildlife and fauna under the forest canopy will now hopefully get the protection that top wildlife bureaucrats, conservationists, environmentalists and the forest guards have long been asking for!

The *Indian Express*, on May 19, reported the statement of central government Minister of Environment & Forests Shri T.R. Ballu that should halt poachers and criminals in their tracks. This sobering news should be a dire warning to anyone involved in this callous and murderous trade.

Indian and international poachers and smugglers should be aware that no quarter would now be given in the battle to save our wildlife from poachers and criminals. In an unprecedented move, according to the *Express*, the Union Ministry has requested state governments to engage the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the Border Security Force (BSF) to deal with poachers, dacoits and militants eating into their forests and national parks. And, New Delhi will foot the bill.

Whereas once the problem of poaching and illegal activity was confined to just a handful of protected areas, now almost all the prime sanctuaries and tracts of irreplaceable forest have come under the gun, trap, axe and poison employed by criminals and their associates.

The decision came after a day-long meeting held by the central Environment Minister with his Environment Minister colleagues from the various states. Justifying the action, Additional Inspector General of Forests, in the Union Ministry, Mr S.C. Sharma told the *Indian Express* that it was time to uphold the 'supremacy of law in our precious forests'.

One of the existing problems that neuter local forest officials in their protection duties is the complex procedure relating to arrests of poachers and smugglers. The courts often take the guards themselves to task if they open fire on armed criminals. If a paramilitary force was deployed and forest police stations established, the forest guards would get legal immunity and arrests could be made without involving the police. There are over 100 forest officials throughout the country involved in costly litigation to defend their actions in their own territory, a ridiculous situation that indicates to criminals that they can get away with 'murder'.

New Delhi has also appealed to the state governments to declare forests and wildlife departments as 'priority sectors' and exclude them from the existing ban on fresh recruitment.

Indian Express, May 19, 2000.

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The Natural Treasury is Our National Treasury

The year 2000 has been so far a year of horrors for the natural world. It started in January with the worst ever haul of tiger and leopard derivatives from a small town in U.P. At the same time, endless reports of diminishing forests and never-ending scams of timber mafia shook the world of conservation. Now comes news of drought.

The ignorant political leadership of this country has never bothered about the country's natural wealth, its forests, trees and wilderness. They have merely watched, over the decades, the incessant looting of natural resources. Big business has increased its turnover from mining from Rs 48 crore at independence to Rs 40,000 crore today. Yet nothing has gone back to repair and restore the land thus defaced. Conservationists who opened their mouths about this were dubbed anti-poor and anti-development.

The Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) puts the rate of exploitation at Rs 50,000 crore each year—it's probably closer to Rs 80,000 crore. Most of the looting takes place on forest land. Some people have valued this land at close to a trillion dollars. Our bureaucratic planning commission knows all these figures but refuses to allocate enough money each year to protect, regenerate and restore it. Ignorance is all-pervasive. Our delightful finance ministers refuse to make any mention of India's great natural treasury—the most valuable part of the country—in any of their budgetary speeches.

The same ministry, in its wisdom, has banned any fresh recruitment of forest staff. There are 40 per cent vacancies in this sector.

One of our greatest tragedies is that prime ministers in the last decade have treated the MoEF like some non-existent department. Yet, this ministry should rightly have the same status as defence or home. The reason is simple. If you rip the natural world apart, you die. That is what has started to happen in India. A tiny minority has got super rich tearing into the natural world, while the majority of our people have entered a phase of drought and devastation. We have become expert money grabbers but few among us think of putting even a penny back. Let's also not forget that besides the excessive exploitation of forest land by legal and illegal business interests, this land also absorbs pressures from 400 million livestock, the timber needs of a billion people and the greed of every mafia in village, town and city. And still the issue is not a priority. We create security forces for our airports, industries, ports, but not for this invaluable sector that officially comprises 20 per cent of India.

It's time for a wake-up call. Let's create a think tank, have a brainstorming session, educate ourselves about nature. Let's act now, otherwise we will end up digging the graves for the Indians of the future, yet unborn.

Valmik Thapar, *Indian Express*, May 20, 2000.

Stop Press: Paramilitary forces for Simlipal Tiger Reserve

The central government has agreed to bear the cost of deployment of CRPF jawans to guard the Simlipal Tiger Reserve from timber smugglers and poachers. With this step, Akhand Shikar too shall be controlled to a large extent since there used to be terrible shortage of police force for guarding the huge area of nearly 3,000 sq. km.

The CRPF has done wonderful work in Barbara Reserve Forest of Puri Forest Division and, encouraged by the results there, the state government made this request to the centre. The centre shall bear the cost of nearly Rs 1 crore per annum which shall be incurred for deployment of this force.

Source: Biswajit Mohanty. E-mail: biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in.

• **Panna Tiger Award**

The annual **TigerLink Bagh Sewak Awards** for 1999 were given away at the Madla Gate of the park on December 17, 1999. This is the fourth year of the awards and the two latest recipients were M.P. Tamrakar, Range Forest Officer for Hinouta Range, and Shiv Singh, a daily wage earner from Madla Range.

Tamrakar's award recognises his tremendous efforts towards saving Hinouta from forest fires thus helping in the protection of important wildlife habitat over the last four years, and his contribution towards the overall improvement of the forest in his range.

Shiv Singh, an experienced daily-wage worker last year played a key role in apprehending one of the main accused in a leopard poaching case and, with

the help of two fellow-workers, caught and disarmed two forest offenders. Both cases are before the court.

• **Esso Award for Tiger Conservation**

The Esso Award for Tiger Conservation goes this year to **Mr K.M. Chinappa** for lifetime service to the tigers of Nagarahole National Park, in Karnataka. For 32 years Chinappa stood up to gangs of poachers and the timber mafia. Often at great risk to his own life, this tough forest official inspired others by his example and continues the conservation fight now within the NGO system. *'This award salutes K. M. Chinappa for his service to the tiger and the nation, whom he has served with extraordinary courage and valour throughout his life'*, so reads the citation.

Sanctuary Magazine Awards

The Sanctuary Millennium Awards were instituted to recognise and draw national attention to the contribution of individuals working for the protection of wildlife and habitats in India. The award giving ceremony took place in Bombay on June 16 and is sponsored by ABN AMRO.

• **J.C Daniel** received the Lifetime Service Award and Rs 1,00,000, for his unstinting defence of natural India; for helping to protect elephant ranges; for helping to consolidate the foundation of the Bombay Natural History Society; and for helping mould and motivate a virtual army of field biologists and naturalists.

Wildlife Service Awards of Rs 15,000 each went to:

• **Subrata Pal Chowdhary**, Calcutta: an expert in the art of immobilisation and transport of wild animals, risking his life on innumerable occasions in defence of wildlife that wander into human settlements, and for his part in the seizures of illegal wildlife produce.

• **Bivash Pandav**, Orissa: his work on sea turtles along Orissa's coast has drawn international recognition and helped protect these vital turtle populations, at the same time as forcing the government to take immediate protective measures, thus saving a very significant population of turtles from extinction.

• **G.V. Reddy**, Ranthambhore: the remarkable recovery of the forest of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, has been largely as a result of the Field Director's efforts in recent years, helping Ranthambhore to regain its reputation as one of India's finest tiger reserves.

• **C. Achlekar**, Goa: has encouraged local villagers and fishermen to protect nesting turtles and their hatchlings along Goa's beaches by such initiatives as 'Project Turtle' in Morjim village. His efforts have resulted in an increase in the number of hatchlings making it into the sea.

• **Divakar Sharma**, Lucknow: as Honorary Wildlife Warden of Haridwar and Dehradun, he is responsible for exposing several wildlife trade networks, having devoted much of the last 20 years towards fighting illegal wildlife trade.

In addition to the above, *Sanctuary Magazine* also encouraged interest and talent in wildlife photography and writing by making awards to six contributors.

Awards

• **WWF—India Tiger Conservation Awards**

It is indeed heartening to see the WWF making serious awards for those involved in tiger conservation. The awards fall into various categories and include both people and National Parks. In the latter category, both **Kaziranga, in Assam and Panna, in M.P.** receive an award. In the case of Kaziranga, the award goes for determined protection in the crossfire of floods and well-armed poachers during 1999, but takes note of continuing bravery, commitment and camaraderie since 1990. Panna's award was for the determined efforts to protect the park under difficult conditions, keeping the terrible hazard of seasonal fires down and limiting the damage, thus protecting large and important areas of this Project Tiger Reserve.

The following category was for special acts of bravery:

Saroj Kumar Mohanty, Forester, Simlipal Tiger Reserve. With rare and determined investigative qualities, Mr Mohanty is a key member of the detection team of the reserve. He went in the guise of a poacher, nabbing the man and unearthing 20 kg of elephant tusk. When the awards were given he was recovering in hospital from serious injuries sustained from an elephant whilst endeavouring to drive back a herd from outside the forest.

Ram Kumar, Daily Wage Earner, Dudhwa National Park. Mr Kumar showed exemplary courage in taking on encroachers who had planted a flag and

constructed shelters in the reserve. This, despite not even being on the regular payroll. He was wounded in crossfire between foresters and encroachers, after removing their flag.

Babulal Orang, Forest Guard, Manas Tiger Reserve. In the last 14 years, Babulal has been involved in over 100 encounters with poachers, during which 30 poachers have died. He and his colleagues have shown exemplary courage despite limited funds, arms and infrastructure.

• **Sanjoy Deb Roy honoured**

The late Deb Roy was honoured on the basis of a recommendation by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), in the U.K. The EIA had put Deb's name forward for the Clark-Bavin Award, organised by the Animal Welfare Institute, Washington DC, in the U.S.A. The nomination was accepted and S.C. Sharma of MOEF received the posthumous award on behalf of Deb Roy's family, at CITES in Nairobi, in April 2000.

Source: Debbie Banks, EIA, London.

Another new award, being set up by West Bengal's Institute of Climbers & Nature Lovers will be named after the late Dr Kalyan Chakraborty, the Founder of the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, and, the late Sanjoy Deb Roy, former Addl. IG (WL), GoI. There will be two annual awards in both their names. A fitting tribute to two brave and determined men.

Source: Mrinal Chatterjee, Institute of Climbers & Nature Lovers. E-mail: Sunderbantiger@hotmail.com. 21 March 2000.

Please Send in News of Awards

All *TigerLink* participants are reminded to let us know about any awards given in their regions to people recognised for their contribution to saving tigers and wildlife in India.

Arunachal Pradesh

• **Burmese immigrants pose threat to Namdapha National Park**

One of our most important big cat sanctuaries, unique as the only one where tiger, snow leopard, leopard and clouded leopard are found, is under acute pressure from Lisu tribespeople, according to an NGO. Poaching is rife for markets in China and many attacks have been reported on forest guards and their camps, as recently as February of this year. It is estimated that the Lisu can earn many thousands per tiger. Forest officials admit the problem and yet reports to the Ministry of Environment and Forests have so far resulted in no action. Nature's Beckon, the NGO, are also concerned at the construction of an unnecessary bridge and major road inside the National Park. Encroachment is also taking place on a massive scale.

Source: Nature's Beckon.

• **N-E's biggest timber scam to be hushed up?**

At least 50 wagon loads of illegally felled timber is being kept quiet by Assam forest officials. Several foresters have been injured on duty and they have been pressured to drop cases of assault. There is suspected connivance between forest officials of the Dibrugarh territorial forest division and railway officials. The haul, discovered in November 1999, is estimated to be worth Rs 7.5 crore. The timber was consigned to timber merchants in Haryana and Delhi.

Source: *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, November 1999 and Nature's Beckon.

• **Declare 'Joydihing' new wildlife sanctuary, propose NGOs**

The contiguous rainforests, under reserve forests of Joypur, upper Dihing and Dirak, should be combined as one wildlife sanctuary according to Nature's Beckon, a local NGO. These incredible forests that border Arunachal Pradesh and Assam have a unique and endangered range of species, including hoolock gibbons, tiger, clouded leopard and elephant; and yet thousands of acres of rain forest are being cut, resulting in soil erosion and the loss of huge numbers of wild species. Dr S.N. Rai, Director, Forest Survey of India at Dehradun, has surveyed the area and according to him this is one of the richest rainforests in the world. A number of prominent environmentalists, scientists, and both national and international NGOs have appealed to Assam Forest Minister to have this area designated as a wildlife sanctuary.

Source: Soumyadeep Datta, Director, Nature's Beckon, Tel: 03662 21067; Fax: 03662 20076.

Assam

• **Village cooperates with local NGO**

Nature's Foster, a local NGO in Assam, have been working tirelessly to create greater awareness of our dwindling forest habitats and wildlife, particularly at the Kakoijana Reserve Forest. Working with villagers on tree planting and endeavouring to motivate the villagers themselves to cease tree cutting, one of their concerns has been to protect the habitat of the golden langur. They are disheartened that local forest officials have so far done little to conserve

the forest and its wildlife and even the local markets sell tortoise and deer meat under their noses.

Source: Gautham Ghosh, C/o G.C. Ghosh, Nr Prakash Cinema, P.O. & Dt Bongaigaon, 783 380, Assam.

• **Poachers nabbed**

At Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary on February 8, 2000, in a swift operation led by Range Officer Mrigen Barua, four known and dangerous poachers were arrested along with deadly firearms, from a nearby village. The seized guns included home-made and hunting rifles.

Source: Bihbab K. Talukdar, Secretary General, Aaranyak Nature Club. E-mail: bihbab@gw1.vsnl.net.in.

• **Veterinary Camps**

WWF and Early Birds held a veterinary camp at Kaziranga National Park. In May, these NGOs collaborated in the vaccination of 39 domestic elephants and 635 cattle, for the seventh consecutive year. The Wildlife Department provided full cooperation.

Another camp was held at **Pabitora Sanctuary** by Early Birds ostensibly for domestic elephants and cattle, on November 13-14, 1999. This is the seventh year of the camp and a priority was the vaccination and deworming of pachyderms and bovines. Members of the club expressed concern about the degeneration of grasslands in the area, essential for the rhino's survival. Mayong H.S. School also benefited from an outing and bird watching exercise.

• **Preventing 'foot and mouth'**

At Orang National Park, a veterinary and health camp was held by Early Birds/Refinery Employees Trekkers Guild, for the sixth consecutive year and two injured elephants were treated along with the vaccination of livestock. The latter assumes significance when

considering recent outbreaks of foot and mouth disease among sambar and other ungulates at Bandipur National Park. Local villagers were also attended to by Drs Arabindu Das and Utpal Baruah and medicine worth around Rs 5,000, donated by Guwahati Refinery Hospital, assisted in the treatment of more than 150 people.

• **Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary under threat of destruction**

Due to timber mafia, hooliganism and massive immigrant population, according to recent reports from Early Birds, this 70-sq. km sanctuary with a vast riverine tract and a beautiful habitat for both rhino and tiger will soon disappear unless strong action is taken to improve management.

Source: Moloy Baruah, President, Early Birds, Guwahati.

• **Two leopards killed**

In separate incidents, the first at Kaziranga on N.H. 37, a speeding truck hit and killed a 5'7" leopard and forest officials have filed a case. In the second death, at Nagaon district, an 8' male leopard was shot dead after ignorant and callous intimidation by villagers and police caused several people to be injured by the frightened and enraged animal. No case has been registered.

Source: Debojit Phukan, Hon. Wildlife Warden, Dhemaji District and Coordinator, Megamix Nature Club, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur, Assam 787055.

Andhra Pradesh

• **Wildlife Art show a success**

A four-day wildlife art show, 'Wash—2000', showcased the work of about 30 artists. It was organised by the Birdwatchers

Society of A.P. and held from January 14, 2000. The show was held at the ICCR gallery and was aimed at encouraging wildlife art and raising awareness about fauna and flora issues.

Source: Aasheesh Pittie, Hon. Secretary, Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh. E-mail: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net. *Deccan Chronicle*, January 13, 2000.

Bihar

• **Elephants on the rampage**

Migrating from Palamau, a group of around 17 elephants killed six villagers in Chakai block, Jamui district and caused considerable damage to paddy, houses and tube-wells. On December 2, villagers erected a roadblock to try and raise pressure for something to be done by the authorities. Only religious fear had prevented them from killing the elephants; even so tribal folk have tried with bows and arrows and firecrackers, to halt them. Some elephants, including a calf, were injured. According to newspaper reports, the Forest Officer, Chakai range and DFO, Jamui had no solutions to the problem.

Source: *Times of India*, December 8, 1999.

• **Government's coalmines impact on forest and wildlife migratory routes**

Despite recommendations to the contrary from wildlife experts, Coal India went ahead with their open cast 'Ashoka' mines in Pipawar area of Hazaribagh division. The deafening noises of blasting and heavy machinery means considerable disruption to wildlife that use the area as a corridor between Palamau, Chatra and Hazaribagh forests. Reports

from the enumeration survey indicated very rich wildlife diversity, including tiger, leopard, jungle cat, wolves, sloth bear and ungulates. Enumeration reports also indicated that wildlife was dispersing from the area as a direct result of the disruption. The controversy has been going on since 1998 and despite recommendations, enumeration's and surveys submitted to senior forest officials such as the regional CCF, Hazaribagh, the PCCF, Bihar disagreed and clearance was given for the open cast mining to proceed! It appears that the Bihar Forest Department does not agree that wildlife exists in the area, despite the reports of their expert field people. *Strange? Even stranger is the name of the mine—wasn't Ashoka a great conservationist?—Ed.*

Source: Kazmi, Hazaribagh, December 8 1999.

Goa

• **The Green Cross**

The Green Cross, a local NGO, in Mapusa, has written regarding Goa's neglect by wildlifers and their concern that poaching and illegal felling is rampant in the state. Anyone able to assist should contact the Green Cross. They have also requested assistance to obtain three pagers for their wildlife rescue squad. They also request assistance or advice regarding their observation that fake tiger claws and skins are being sold to tourists in Goa. They are not even certain as to what is genuine and what is fake, but the point is well taken that something should be done about it.

Source: Mirmal Kulkarni, Chairman, The Green Cross, 6 Hiru Naik Bldg, Dhuler, Mapusa, Goa. Tel: 252463/254463.

• **Tiger family holidaying in Goa?**

In an interesting report from Goa's CF, Richard D'Souza, four tigers (one tigress, with four cubs and a male tiger), have been observed in the Valpoi taluka of Goa. This area is barely 15–20 km from the Maharashtra border and 8 km from the Karnataka border. Richard wants to explore the possibility of radio tracking the tigers to see where they move in order to protect such areas. He is convinced that they will otherwise be poached. He feels that the Maharashtra-Goa-Karnataka triangle is going to be one of the most important tiger conservation areas over the next twenty years. What are the chances of a radio collaring project?

Source: Bittu Sahgal, *Sanctuary Magazine*, March 28, 2000.

Gujarat

• **Oil spill**

Officials of an oil company allegedly sent a team to destroy evidence of an oil spill by removing the bodies of dolphins and turtles, but the timely intervention of forest guard Jumabhai, prevented them from doing so.

The spill, visible over eight kilometres, according to sources in Jamnagar, was caused by a breach in the IOC Vadinar–Kandla pipeline near Salaya around November 15 and nearly 15–20 tonnes of oil are believed to have destroyed large parts of the marine park and a forest department nursery. The spill is not the first, nor will it be the last according to forest department experts who advised against its construction in the first place. The marine park is rich in marine life including corals, 200 species of fish, including 8 species of shark, dugong, turtles and also 78

types of terrestrial birds. There are some marine species found nowhere else in the world, like the small *Ikedosoma pirotanesis*. Satellite studies indicate that the unique mangrove areas are already rapidly disappearing and if there are more oil spills, the whole area may completely vanish.

Source: Sudhir Vyas and Shyam Parekh: *Times of India*, 25 November 1999.

• **Ahmedabad Nature Lovers produce booklet on birds and insects**

Another NGO really endeavouring to create awareness about environmental and wildlife issues, ANALA, have recently published an excellent brochure as part of their millennium activities. They also planned a retreat to the marine park in the Gulf of Kutch in January 2000 and another field trip to Gir Forest.

Source: Madhu Menon, ANALA, 27-28, Sanskar-II, Nr Ketav Petrol Pump, Polytechnic Road, Ahmedabad 380 015. Fax: 079 6300153.

Karnataka

• **Help needed at Nagzhira National Park**

According to a recent report, the Ranger at NNP, Mr Khune, is doing an excellent job despite many logistical problems. Camps have been set up at 11 locations inside the park and **patrolling takes place even at night, on foot, due to the increasing problems of illegal bamboo extraction and poaching. Mr Khune's weapon permit has apparently been taken away from him despite the fact that he received many threats to his life from locals.**

Source: Poonam Harshawardhan, Tiger Trail Safari, harsh@webginn.com

• **Kudremukh National Park compensation delays**

The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) had promised in June 1999, to pay Rs 20 crore in compensation to the KNP for their activities inside the park. To date, only Rs 25 lakh has been deposited with the state government, none of which has reached the field. The state government has however, given Rs 5 crore to the KNP from funds deposited with them for prospecting at Nellibeedu for fresh mining. Of this Rs 2 crore has been given to the Karnataka Forest Development Corporation as compensation for the cessation of their forest operations due to the declaration of the national park.

Source: Niren Jain.

E-mail: Nirenjain@hotmail.com.

• **Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary (BTR) mines travesty**

Notified in 1974 and finalised in 1998, BWS was declared a tiger reserve in 1998. A mining company was given an adjacent area for exploitation in 1963 on a twenty-year lease and this was not renewed. However, the mining continues to this day under permission from the State Department of Mines and Geology and is causing considerable disturbance to wildlife. Day and night all year around, ore trucks ply the public road right through the BTR and should be stopped.

Source: D. Yatish Kumar, Conservator of Forests, Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. defbhadra@vsnl.com. March 8, 2000.

• **The world's largest save-the-tiger scroll unveiled**

On March 6, 2000 in Bangalore, a scroll signed by over **one million Indian school children**, was accepted on behalf of Project Tiger, by S.K. Chakrabarti, Chief

Wildlife Warden of Karnataka and Ullas Karanth, field biologist and Member, Steering Committee, Project Tiger. **Indian Cricketer Robin Singh** along with thousands of guests were present at the function. This had been organised by *Sanctuary* and *Cub* magazines with help from Britannia Biscuits (Tiger biscuits brand) throughout schools in India. 705 schools, 1,500 teachers and 14 cities were all involved in this amazing demonstration of concern for the tiger. **Project Tiger's Director, P.K. Sen:** 'Children are at the very centre of our purpose and whether or not the signatures motivate adults, the fact is that those young people are forever imprinted with the idea that they are defenders of the tiger.'

Source: *Sanctuary Magazine*.

E-mail: bittusahgal@vsnl.com.

• **Bandipur tigers doing well?**

According to the pugmark report from the 1999 census, the tiger population stands at 79, contrasting against other parts of the country. According to forest officials there has not been a single case of poaching since 1993. Bandipur has also recorded an increase in the numbers of leopards (80) and wild dogs (20 packs), and herbivore numbers have also risen. Bandipur, Nagarahole and Biligirirangana provide shelter to over half the tigers surviving in the forests of Karnataka. The three parks boast around 170 tigers.

Is there any science in these precise counts?—Ed.

Source: R. Mallesha, Himagiri Conservation Society, Gundlupet 571111. Tel: 08229 22731. *Times of India*, Bangalore, November 3, 1999.

• **Karnataka Wildlife Conservation Society**

Reports from NAWICOED, the wildlife educational NGO, indicate that an even greater response has been forthcoming in 1999 than earlier years to their publications, slide shows, nature camps and public awareness programmes. Working closely with NWCS, K.M. Chinappa continues his wonderful work with young people. The conservation programme, supported by WCS and Exxon, GTP and others, has donated a further five jeeps for patrolling in Bandipur and Nagarahole; in addition, patrol boats in Bhadra and Bandipur, wireless sets for Bhadra and Kudremukh and field kits for Bandipur. An insurance scheme that has been set up for forest guards is also in operation.

Source: K.M. Chinappa, Publisher, *NAWICOED Newsletter*, P.O. Box 50, Srimangala, 571217; S. Kodagu, Karnataka.

• **Ranthambhore School of Art in Bangalore**

The painters of the Ranthambhore School of Art held an exhibition on the tiger recently in Bangalore. Originally encouraged by the Ranthambhore Foundation, the school has produced some fine artists under the guidance of their founder and master painter, Muralidhar Parashar, who was interviewed by the *Indian Express*, Bangalore, at the opening of the exhibition in March 2000.

Source: *Indian Express*, March 11, 2000.

• **Nagarahole news shocks**

After years of excellent management and protection with active NGO and independent scientific field support, Nagarahole is again under extreme pressure from timber mafia, forest fires and yet-to-

be-explained ungulate deaths. These problems have all been happening in the last six months. Members of the 'Project Tiger Steering Committee', who visited Nagarahole also expressed their concern about the fact that the park is around 40 per cent understaffed. The teak smuggling, said to be the first of its kind out of Nagarahole, could not have been done if staff had been at full strength and vigilant, reported retired range officer, K.M. Chinappa, now heading a local NGO. In November, poachers were arrested at Nagarahole after a fight between rival poaching gangs, and forest guards foiled them in their attempt to shoot a tusker. Reporters from the *Times of India* were detained while investigating the huge forest fire that had been raging last April, and accused of complicity by fire fighting officials. They were later released. Nagarahole has also been facing problems of massive cattle grazing and the deaths of wild ungulates, deer and gaur, could be as a result of disease spread by domestic livestock.

Sources: *The Hindu*, March 8, 2000; February 26, 2000. *Times of India*, April 7, 2000. Various other newspaper reports. Praveen Bhargav, Wildlife First, Bangalore.

Kerala

• **Call for Project Tiger to declare Parambikulam as tiger reserve**

Friends of Elephants in Calicut are heartened to learn that there are a reported 20 tigers in this wildlife sanctuary and feel that along with other forest areas in Tenehua District, it should be declared a Project Tiger Reserve. They also report that there are NGOs locally who are concerned at the forest department's apparent determina-

tion to proceed with the Pooyamkuttu Project in Periyar which will permit commercial exploitation of timber. They plan to file a case against the forest department under section 55 of the Wildlife Act for non-performance of their duties.

Source: Vinod Kumar Damodar, President, Friends of Elephants, Breeze, Calicut 673006, Kerala.

• **Railway line threat to Periyar**

Sabari Rail is a 165 km long railway line with an estimated cost of Rs 600 crore and planned in order to provide better transport for pilgrims visiting the shrine inside Periyar Tiger Reserve! Conservationists and wildlifers are very concerned that even the 60 km first stage will pose a serious threat to wildlife and conservation values. It is believed that the rail line is being planned because of vested interests.

Source: *Tigerlink*.

• **Retaliatory killing**

In April a goat was lifted in or on the edge of Wayanad Sanctuary in Naiketty. Poisoned bait was put out and a female leopard and two cubs died.

Source: A.V. Manoj, Geetha Estate, Naiketty, Wayanad.

Madhya Pradesh

Bandhavgarh tiger photo

Recently, a television network as well as a national newspaper revealed a picture of a group of people posing after shooting an enormous tiger in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. Enquiries are underway by the police and forest department to catch those who were posing with the dead tiger and identify the location of the

picture in order to launch prosecution. Unfortunately it is understood that little progress has occurred in the case!

Source: *Tigerlink*, June 6, 2000.

• **Central Government wildlife officials express concern**

A CITES team, accompanied by senior central government officials expressed their concern in February over violations of the Forest and Wildlife Acts and the declining quality of management of protected areas, according to a report in *The Hindu*. They were also critical of a computerised presentation given by one senior MP conservator, which they felt glossed over the ground level realities that exist in the state, particularly those of poaching and field administration. The Additional I.G. of Forests, Mr S.C. Sharma, and the Director, Project Tiger, Mr P.K. Sen, were two of the central government officials present on the visit. The seizure of a huge quantity of tiger skins and body parts at Khaga, in U.P. has awakened wildlife officials and wildlife experts to the fact that tigers are being poached from under the noses of wildlife management from various parts of the country, particularly the northern states. This is despite vehement denials from state wildlife officials, such as in M.P., that such illegal activities are taking place. Various examples were cited as being in gross violation of the Wildlife Act, including the seizure of two spotted deer from the premises of a senior Congress (I) leader at Kerwan.

Source: Lalit Shastri, *The Hindu*, February 2, 2000.

• **Chief Minister's millennium wildlife 'bombshell': hunting and fishing**

Wildlife experts were stunned when, at the Khajuraho millennium celebrations, Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh announced amongst his tourism ideas, a proposal to promote mahseer fishing in the protected Ken River, near to Panna Project Tiger Reserve and the Ken Gharial Sanctuary. He also mentioned that he was considering granting permission for the forests to be used for controlled hunting of 'some species of wild animals'. Experts pointed out such a bizarre plan would not only be contrary to the Indian Wildlife Act, but would also have a spiraling adverse impact on other species of wildlife. *And M.P. also now permits the shooting of Nilgai that 'endanger life and property'.*—Ed.

Source: *The Hindu*, November 26, 1999.

• **Man-made forest fires and cattle grazing at Panna Tiger Reserve**

Yet again, the question has to be asked about the sanctity of Project Tiger Reserves. The location of villages inside sanctuaries and national parks is a grisly issue and there has been much debate about how to solve the problem in the interest of wildlife and local communities. Notwithstanding this premise, at least Project Tiger Reserves should be freed from the problem. Excessive grazing, illicit tree felling, tendu leaf collection and forest fires put a huge amount of pressure on the management of a reserve such as Panna, bringing to question the whole issue of what a protected area means. The state government has been sluggish to solve the problem of relocations and compensation for villagers inside Panna and until ac-

tion is taken, wildlife management will continue to be an extremely difficult task.

Source: *The Hindu*, December 18, 1999.

- **Tiger census aided by Nature Club**

Thirty members of this local Bilaspur NGO recently participated in the Achanakmar Sanctuary census supervised by C.F. Bandhavgarh and Sanctuary Superintendent, S.S. Barganiya.

Source: Anurag Shukla, Nature Club, Bilaspur.

- **Tourism ruining Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve**

A growing number of serious wildlifers from India and abroad, together with Indian conservationists, are becoming increasingly concerned at the conversion,

by default, of Bandhavgarh from a Project Tiger Reserve into a tourist and film-making 'circus'. At least one hotel guarantees 'sighting of a tiger or no bill'! One so-called naturalist/guide for several years attached to another hotel, and who has now fortunately left BTR, began incentivising forest staff, including mahouts in charge of tracking elephants and apparently the trend has continued.

At least two independent reports have in recent months been handed over to Project Tiger; both are extremely critical of the 'fiasco that is taking place in the name of wildlife conservation' at a reserve that has been made an international star in recent years by wildlife film-makers and journalists, who have aided in the 'chase for the tiger' at BTR. As a result, the

majority of the estimated 15,000 annual visitors to BTR are now only interested in zoo like visits, rushing in to see the 'rounded up' tigers and rushing home again.

Vested commercial interests and their lobbyists in Bhopal and elsewhere are thought to be mainly behind what has happened and sincere wildlife officials can do nothing about it. Peter Lawton, Founder of Global Tiger Patrol, who visited the BTR in April, feels that Project Tiger should seriously consider de-registering BTR as one of their reserves unless wildlife values are adhered to and the local park management are enabled to proceed with the urgent needs of protecting the reserve. Lawton's view is that the present state of affairs is detracting from the real priorities that face all of India's tiger sanctuaries. 'The summer closure of the park is the time to act and clean up the mess, imposing a code of conduct on all those parties responsible for promoting the wrong kind of tourism at BTR.' 'Serious wildlife tourism can help in creating awareness of the problems facing wildlife conservation in India, but it has to be subsidiary to the main conservation processes, which are laid down by Project Tiger for their reserves,' says Lawton.

Source: Peter Lawton.

- **Substantial funding for NGO working around BTR**

According to various sources, a new NGO which is also associated with a hotel at Bandhavgarh, has received a significant tranche of funding. However, reports from forest officials at BTR state that so far little has been done.

It is hoped that hotels associated with trusts will at least set an example by being among the

Anonymous letters about Bandhavgarh

Letters received by Tigerlink recently indicate that there are many sincere people concerned about what is taking place at BTR. In one report, claims and allegations are made about poaching and the nexus between local commercial interests, politicians and certain wildlife officials. While we should be grateful for any information about transgressions taking place in any of our wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and other protected areas, anonymous reports that cannot be corroborated, are discouraged. Senior officials at Project Tiger or the central Ministry of Environment & Forests cannot take action unless reports are filed with evidence and specific details of people involved, places, times etc. The report mentioned above, claims that all the tigers save a few at Tala, have been wiped out by poachers at BTR. It also mentions abuses by documentary film companies, and the writer mentions the names of politicians apparently involved in poaching, including an ex Forest Minister.

A report in *The Statesman*, April 29, 2000, reports on the same subject and again names senior Bhopal politicians, who deny such complicity. The source of the stories claims to have photographs, videos and other evidence of criminality from timber extraction to poaching.

—Ed.

first around a wildlife reserve to use alternative energy and to dispose of its waste in an eco-friendly manner.

The hotel and tourism industry and their connecting 'NGOs' must self-impose a code of ethics in their behaviour at places such as BTR before their own kind of pollution brings the park to its knees.
—Ed.

• **'Credit where due, but no room for complacency'**

So says Hashim Tyabji, wildlife naturalist, NGO activist and resident at Panpatha, near BTR. In a brief report expressing his hopes and concerns, Hashim, a long term observer at BTR, mentions the recent decision by the government of M.P. to remove all staff employed after 1988 and to ban all fresh recruitment. The manning of observation posts, barriers and fire watching will suffer from these short-sighted decisions and all the good work done by BTR to improve training and tighten up the protection processes will be undone. Hashim requests all *Tigerlink* readers to write to the Ministers of Environment & Forests at the state and central ministries expressing concern about this decision.

Source: Hashim Tyabji.

Stop Press

The MoEF plans a 'lightening' visit to BTR over the next few weeks in order to investigate all of the problems that have come to light.—Ed.

Maharashtra

• **Solutions to fires in Maharashtra**

The Nature Conservation Society, Amravati, has sent a proposal to the

state government and the report may be of use in other protected areas. A copy of the report is available from Kishore Rithe, E-mail: ncsa@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

• **Melghat: state government changes the ground rules**

Kalpavriksh, the environmental action group, wrote to the Chief Secretary regarding apparent changes in what was being offered to villagers being relocated from Melghat Tiger Reserve. According to Kalpavriksh, the government originally promised that the villagers would continue to have their customary right to forest resources, since they were dependent upon these for their livelihood. In their letter to the state government, Ashish Kothari and Pankaj Sekhsaria stated that relocation could only be completed once a notice is issued with an admission that the villagers of Bori, Kund and Koha will have these rights.

Source: Kalpavriksh, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411 004. E-mail: ashish@nda.vsnl.net.in.

• **Tiger death in Tadoba Tiger Reserve**

Found dying near Mudholi village of TTR, this tiger was apparently a very old male and missing a canine and a claw. The animal was taken to Chandrapur for treatment but unfortunately died.

Source: Atul Dhamakar, Green Pigeon Society, Shivaji Square, Chandrapur 442402.

Meghalaya

• **Balparkram National Park land acquisition scam**

In May 1999, environmentalists were sorely disappointed when the PIL on this controversial land case, was dismissed by the Guwahati divisional High Court. Not be

deterred, the Meghalaya People's Regeneration Front (MPRF), a local NGO, demanded that the PIL case be reopened. The Chief Wildlife Warden, S.B. Singh, was ordered by the court to conduct a survey of the area, which was then subsequently dismissed though the original chief petitioner, Heltone Marak, felt sure that the case would be referred to the CBI for investigation. Singh's enquiry uncovered a massive fraud that had been taking place for years and that involved local politicians, landowners and government officials.

Balparkram is a prime elephant habitat and whilst the state government had planned to extend the area to 500 sq. km, the official documents state that it is already 425 sq. km and Mr Singh's survey said it was only 169 sq. km.

Source: Nature's Beckon, Dhubri, Assam.

Mizoram

• **Tuvai Hydro Project**

Following Bittu Sahgal's visit to the site, a valley clothed in primary rain forest, environmentalists everywhere are waiting to hear whether or not the WII have been able to stop the project with a rapid survey. Without such an intervention the fear was that the project would get clearance and would be set in motion, destroying an area with a very rich biodiversity and a huge array of endangered plants and animals.

Source: Bittu Sahgal.

E-mail: bittusahgal@vsnl.com.

Orissa

• **Negative growth rate of tigers in Simlipal**

A 40 per cent rise in human population is cited as the main reason for habitat pressure and the

static number of tigers, at around 98. The numbers in real terms have gone up only by two since 1994. Local wildlife experts estimate that the number will decline to around 70 by the end of 2001. *More science should be used in these counts.* —Ed.

Source: *The Statesman*, December 20, 1999.

• *'Fearful Symmetry', in Orissa!*

In the 1989 census, the state's tiger count was 243. The latest report records 194 and of these 94 were counted at the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj. State officials point to the shrinking habitat as the main problem, with the reduction in prey species due to poaching being another major cause. Findings show that the forests of Nayagarh, Deogarh, Karanjia and Chandka, which once sheltered a large number of tigers, now have none, though leopards are found in many places. The Orissa report said that Satkosia Sanctuary sprawled across 800 sq. km. It covers forest areas of Nayagarh, Cuttack, Angul, Deogarh and Boudh districts and has only 12 tigers. The 600 sq. km Sunabeda forests likewise have only 12. Officials went on to deny that tiger poaching was one of the main causes of the fall in Orissa's tiger population.

Source: *Statesman*, 3 June 2000.

• *Three proposals to Project Tiger*

It is being recommended that three areas be considered for inclusion as Project Tiger Reserves in Orissa. The Orissa government has already proposed Narayanpata in Koraput district. WWF-India has additionally proposed Satkosia Sanctuary in Angul district (where according to local NGO, Krushak

Mahasangh, tiger and elephant were 'abundant'). Local NGO Krushak Mahasangh is also proposing Narayanpata-Kashipur area, covering both the districts of Koraput and Rayagada. According to the NGO, reckless development and depletion of forest cover in all areas will soon wipe out the tiger populations unless the recommended action is taken. The NGO recently conducted a survey of the area and have been monitoring events for some time. Resources are desperately short for patrolling and management, particularly human resources, transport and communications equipment. Adjoining Basipalli Wildlife Sanctuary has also great potential and has tigers according to recent observation. During their recent visit, and due to the quick reaction of members, a forest fire was averted.

Source: Sibaji Nayak, Chief Investigator, Satkosia Tiger Survey, Orissa Krushak Mahasangh, Parivash Bhawan, 14 Ashoka Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751 009. Fax: 0674 530222.

• *Gruesome murder of forest officials*

Two forest officials—Shri Sudarshan Altia and Shri N.K. Behera—went missing on March 7 in Tengeri Reserve Forest of Phulbani Forest Division. Following investigation, it was discovered that both men had been brutally murdered by tribal villagers who were caught by the foresters with illegal timber.

Source: Biswajit Mohanty, Wildlife Society of Orissa.

• *NGO involved in census at Simlipal*

From January 3–11, members of 'Wild Orissa', ably assisted officials at Simlipal with their annual census. At the end of the survey, recommendations were made to

the concerned officials that might help with anti-poaching. These included the provision of walkie-talkies and binoculars for forest guards, quick disbursement of ex-gratia payments, and the conducting of a tiger census in all areas in the state every two years. The NGO also suggested that only petrol driven vehicles be permitted inside Simlipal.

Source: Wild Orissa, O.U.A.T. Colony, Gopabandhu Chowk, Bhubaneswar, 751001. Tel: 0674 458784.

• *Tigers sighted in Berbera Reserve Forest and Athamallik Forest Division*

On October 10, 1999 and January 2, 2000 respectively, tiger sightings were recorded at these two places by foresters and range officers. What is of particular note is that the sighting in Berbera came after a gap of 10–12 years and in the case of Athamallik, after 2–3 years. Both areas are close to Satkosia Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary and could become extensions of the same.

Source: Wild Orissa, Bhubaneswar.

• *Zoo tiger escapes and attacks two people*

Another possible casualty of the disastrous Orissa cyclone has been the upkeep of zoo animals in the state. On 13 February, a zoo tiger named Nabin was able to escape his cage and attack two people, killing one person and seriously injuring another. The animal was restrained by tranquilizer gun. Serious budgetary constraints mean that many animals in zoos in Orissa are suffering cramped and cruel conditions. **Zoo populations of tigers at crisis point?** Continuing the debate about the terrible conditions suffered by zoo tigers, it has long been debated as to whether or not wild cubs that

could be rescued should in fact be left to the forces of nature. Perhaps this would ultimately be less cruel than subjecting them to years of 'penury' in the poor excuse for zoos that are often a reality in India. According to many experts, zoos are still not subject to strict scientific principles and management and animals in the long run are the ones that suffer.

Source: Biswajit Mohanty, Wildlife Society of Orissa.

E-mail: Biswajit@cal.vsnl.net.in.

• *Vehicles required urgently for Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary*

Local NGO, 'Wild Orissa', have sent an urgent plea for two 4wd patrol vehicles for the above sanctuary, in Nawapara district. Pressure has already been put on the state government to request the sanctuary to be declared as a tiger reserve. The local DFO, Mr Murgesan is facing acute handicaps in trying to protect the tigers in the sanctuary. The NGO is also engaged in the tiger census, assisting at their own cost, in Mahanadi, Padmatola and Hatidhara Reserve Forests and Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary. The operation was completed on May 13, 2000. The NGO is particularly keen that other NGOs should join with them in providing assistance outside tiger reserves, where a large number of tigers require methodical monitoring.

Source: Monalisa Bhujabal.

E-mail: sbhujabal@satyam.net.in.

Rajasthan

• *World leader encourages tiger conservation*

U.S. President Bill Clinton made a lightning visit to Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve on March 23, 2000. During his few hours at RTR, tiger

expert and former Field Director, Fateh Singh Rathore, and current Dy. Field Director, Mr G.V. Reddy, guided him around the park. He also met tiger experts gathered at the helipad on his departure, including Director of Project Tiger, Mr P.K. Sen, Valmik Thapar of the Ranthambhore Foundation and Project Tiger Steering Committee, and Belinda Wright of WPSI. The President was urged during their discussions to help in declaring the tiger a world heritage.

Source: Belinda Wright, WPSI.

E-mail: blue@vsnl.com.

• *Ranthambhore problems*

Even though things at Ranthambhore have shown signs of improvement, there are still many problems, according to recent visits by experts and a report from **the Dy. Dir. of the park**: illegal grazing and the entry into the park of woodcutters, and even people with guns roaming the park. The recent strike has caused many problems and staff vacancies are quoted as being another relevant factor. In another **report by Valmik Thapar**, he talks about the nightmare that is tourism management, with many transgressions by drivers and guides and the gossip, lies and politics that has taken over among tour operators, hoteliers and others involved in the tiger race. Reports on transgressions are never filed, due to collusion between travel folk and the reception staff and there is still no interpretation centre, years after recommendations were made for one to be constructed. There should also be a special tourism enforcement cell. Drivers should be banned and heavily fined if they violate rules inside the park. 'Ranthambhore is once again a high profile park, and following President Clinton's visit

it is attracting more publicity and endless visitors will make the 'pilgrimage'.

Much criticism is also levelled at the current system of patrolling; laxity is now prevailing and there are no regular daily briefings of forest staff.

Following his recent visit to RTR, **Bittu Sahgal**, in congratulating the Field Director, Rajeev Kumar Tyagi, on his stalwart conservation efforts, made various recommendations. The relocation of villagers that are keen to move from Khatooli, Padra and Mordungli, should be pushed with the state government; the relocation of chowkis on to the periphery of the park; the deployment of spare staff to locations inside the park on regular patrol duties; and, the training of forest guards in scat analysis, perhaps using the skills of the Bombay Natural History Society. Bittu also suggested the mobilisation of local school children in a combined rubbish collection exercise near the fort (where there are shops) and educational visits into the park. This would revive the excellent work earlier conducted under the aegis of the Ranthambhore Foundation.

Sources: Bittu Sahgal,

E-mail: bittusahgal@vsnl.com;

Valmik Thapar, Dy. Conservator, RTR.

• *Anti-poaching and field protection at Ranthambhore*

The Empowerment Committee visited RTR between February 5-9, 2000 and one of the members, Valmik Thapar, reported his findings to the Forest Secretary of Rajasthan. It was estimated that at least 1000 people were entering the park daily for wood, grass and other minor forest produce. Live-stock including cattle and goats were seen and direct evidence of at

least 26 violations of the Wildlife Protection Act were observed. According to the R.F.O., there had been no violations for 40 days, nor had the Range Forest Officer recorded any violations! The Ranges are in a pitiful state and Range Officers have been posted to their 'homes' during the strike that has hit RTR. Between Anantpura and Chiroli there were two cow and one camel kills, all the work of tigers, and one dead vulture found near one kill. Since there is a red alert across the country about poaching and poisoning, Range Officers have to monitor their ranges on a daily basis, and burn any carcasses they find. According to reports, tigers and leopards are preying on dozens of livestock each month. Meeting revealed that only 25 per cent of the staff are fit to protect the TR and 75 per cent are unfit. Old age and alcoholism were reasons given for this. Thapar observed woodcutters forcing a tigress and three cubs to flee from a spot, while they endeavoured to catch and kill a wild boar piglet. The entire range should be protected, especially when there are mothers and cubs around who should suffer no disturbance.

Two illegal jeeps were caught, one with a sambar carcass. Several traps and spears were seized in the town.

Source: Valmik Thapar, January 2000.

• **Concern about vulture deaths at Ranthambhore TR and Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary**
Rajasthan State Forest Secretary, Shri S. Ahmed, has written to the Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Central Government, voicing his concern and outlining required action in the investigation of many reported

deaths from disease of white-backed and long-billed vultures. Scientists have reported that various species could become extinct, with serious ecological implications, if the disease is not halted.

The state has recently initiated a vulture-watch campaign, a report of which will soon be circulated.

Source: Copy of letter to Valmik Thapar from Secretary Forests, Rajasthan.

• **Sariska NGO galvanising community action**

Local NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh have started a wildlife protection programme as part of a new initiative to protect Sariska Tiger Reserve. Local communities, schools and forest staff are all involved in this challenging venture. Tarun Bharat Sangh is known for its groundbreaking work on water conservation, and the wildlife community is delighted at this new venture. Global Tiger Patrol has provided an initial grant to the NGO.

Source: Tarun Bharat Sangh and GTP.

• **Ranthambhore NGO train forest guards**

In a massive exercise, forest guards at RTR have been trained by experts from all over India, including WII, at Ranthambhore. The experts conducted the training for all the guards and on completion they were all given jungle kits and uniforms. Tiger Watch funded the programme.

Source: Tiger Watch.

Tamil Nadu

• **Tourist hooliganism threatens Nilgiri tahr**

Disturbing, to say the least, are continuing reports from Eravikulam National Park, of bands of weekend tourists from nearby urban areas cruelly attacking tahr

and even causing serious injury. In one recent case, a tahr was blinded by drunken youths pelting stones at the defenceless animal. When a local watchman confronted the youths, he himself was severely beaten up. The same youths then, with the help of influential friends, brought a case against the watchman for attacking them. It is hoped that an educational campaign involving local school children might help to protect the park and the rare tahr, 50 per cent of the known population of which lives in this area.

Source: *Indian Express*, Cochin, April 12, 2000.

• **Poaching camps in the forests of the western ghats**

On a recent 30 km walk across the southern end of Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh of the WII found evidence of poachers inside the Reserve. The poachers had constructed a hut for their 'nefarious' activities. Dr Johnsingh recommends that a corridor be created across the Ariankavu pass and ungulate poaching brought under control. He estimates that there may be 50 tigers in the area and another 50 could be supported, with good protection.

Source: Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh, WII.

E-mail: wii@wii.gov.in.

Uttar Pradesh

• **Ban tented camp on boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve**

Ban tented camp on the boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve, argues Ashok Kumar in a plea to R.L. Singh, Chief Wildlife Warden of U.P. WPSI's Vice President goes on to say, 'Under no circumstances should tourism and commercial development be allowed to

reach this ecologically sensitive northern boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve.' This issue, now becoming a recurring theme around many of the more popular Tiger Reserves, has to be tackled by Project Tiger and the state environment and forest authorities before the priorities of conservation work are severely eroded.

The Indian Wildlife Act should perhaps be urgently modified to place a ban on tourism development sites being located closer than at least 5 km from a park boundary. Furthermore, those involved in tourism should establish their own code of ethics for such important issues as wildlife-friendly behaviour in and around wildlife sanctuaries and reserves, rubbish disposal, use of alternative energy and a complete ban on campfires unless the wood comes from their own plantations.—Ed.

Source: WPSI, New Delhi.

• **Corbett road goes black top**

Wildlife lovers and environmentalists were aghast at news that 62 hectares of land near Corbett had been denotified. According to the central Ministry of Environment & Forests, the area is to be used to black top and widen a road that already connects Ramnagar and Kotdwar. The Forest Advisory Committee, MoEF, that includes Corbett's Honorary Wildlife Warden, Brijendra Singh, in September 1999 (though it appears that he was not informed about the agenda) had cleared the road. Apparently, a certificate from the Chief Wildlife Warden of U.P. stated that the road was vital for patrolling and anti-poaching activities for Corbett Tiger Reserve. Further, the area is Reserved Forest category and not denotified.

Source: *Indian Express*, May 21, 2000.

• **More brave men**

Rajesh Singh, a forest guard posted at Sonaripur Range and a 'Born Free' NGO volunteer, spotted and alarmed two heavily armed poachers on November 5, 1999. The poachers unfortunately escaped. Reporter, Sunil Jaiswal, a WWF committee member from Avadh recommends awards for both men.

Tigerlink takes this opportunity of commending both men for their vigilance and bravery, and adds to this the unnamed hundreds of forest guards, rangers and others in U.P. whose determination and bravery is on the line daily.—Ed.

• **Recommendations to help in conservation effort at Dudhwa National Park**

Sunil Jaiswal has listed immediate action required at Dudhwa following a recent visit: grassland management to prevent wildlife migration to places where they are vulnerable to poaching; speeding up of compensation for livestock predation; improved fire management; improvement in water availability in hot summer months; extra patrolling during the monsoon months; census of prey species; and, timely wildlife veterinary capability.

Source: Sunil Jaiswal, Member, Avadh Divisional Committee, WWF, P.O. Box 22, Palia (Kheri), U.P.

• **'May God save the paper tigers of the State!'**

So said Dr Rakesh Tomar, former Vice-Chair, U.P. State Wildlife Board, in an interview with the *Pioneer* regarding the U.P. State Forest Department's recent tiger census for 1999. Dr Tomar says that the presence of 472 tigers in U.P. is just not possible considering the estimated numbers of prey

species, size of tiger territory and other factors. Quoting the late Kailash Sankhala's estimations of prey-to-tiger ratios, Dr Tomar also pointed out the discrepancy in the census figures that states that male-female ratios in tigers are ordinarily more or less equal, though in their own data they record 187 males and 231 females. The census also states that Sohalewa Wildlife Sanctuary has recorded 34 tigers, despite the fact that the sanctuary is almost devoid of prey. According to local observation, there can be no more than four tigers in the area.

Source: Rajesh Singh, *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, 12 January 2000.

Riding the Tiger

The legendary Billy Arjan Singh has recently provided Tigerlink with a copy of his article on the reintroduction of a captive-bred tiger to free living conditions in the wild. This theme has been much debated over the years and though we do not have the space to publish his summarised report, it is available to anyone who would like a copy from Billy Arjan Singh. Billy is constantly in touch with senior wildlife officials in the U.P. and central governments proposing ideas and reporting on his observations. Thanks again Billy for keeping us on our toes and for your continuing efforts to help protect Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.—Ed.

• *Support for Corbett*

In their annual report for 1999, the Corbett Foundation states that they spent Rs 25 lakh on their activities around Corbett Tiger Reserve. Reflecting on their achievements, they highlight the medical outreach programme that visits local communities, awards to forest guards, the setting up of an ecological research centre in Kutch, and patrolling around CTR. Source: Dilip Khatau, The Corbett Foundation, A-3 Geetanjali Enclave, New Delhi 110017. Tel: 6861194.

• *'Milk & Tigers'*

In order to assist the Gujjar community that is being resettled outside Rajaji National Park, a local NGO has requested help on dairy development. They quote from Goverdhan Singh Rathore's Ranthamhore Foundation 'Milk & Tigers' document but would like others to share with them ideas and data that would assist in the welfare of this community.

Source: Samir Ghosh, Friends of the Doon Society. Ebd@vsnl.com.

West Bengal

• *16 persons killed by Sunderbans crocodiles and tigers in first four months of 2000*

According to PTI, there were a total of 16 tragic deaths of honey collectors, fishermen and cane cutters in and around Chandkhali, Chamta and Jhila jungle areas up to April 2000. Last year only three persons died during the season.

Source: *Free Press Journal*, 12 May 2000.

• *Gangetic dolphin successfully rescued and relocated 150 km away*

Thanks to expert and rapid work done by the Wildlife Wing of the W.B. forest department, aided by

local villagers, scientists and NGOs, one of two stranded Gangetic dolphins was saved. The rescue is of particular significance for two reasons. The first, since this is the only successful rescue on record, and second, the fact that the dolphin, a female was probably heavily pregnant. Much effort was expended as she was gently captured, lifted and then taken by truck, under supervision, to Panagarh after a tough seven-hour road journey. En route, the two technical assistants Subrata Palchowdhury (Wildlife Wing) and Neelanjana Ghosal, (from Pugmarks), kept the dolphin cool and well-bathed with water.

Source: Arin Ghosh, Chief Wildlife Warden, W.B.; Urmila Ganguli and Smaran Ghosal, Pugmarks. 27 January 2000.

• *International Seminar on tiger a great success*

Organised jointly by the Nature, Environment & Wildlife Society, together with W.B. Forest Department, this one-day workshop included participants from government and non-government agencies and top tiger and wildlife experts from India and abroad. Amongst a variety of technical and management issues discussed, it was agreed by all that the tiger, once thought to be safe in the Sunderbans, is now under acute pressure from poachers and smugglers. The participants all recommended fresh government initiatives and assistance from international agencies to tackle the problem.

Sources: Nature & Wildlife Society, E-mail: biswas@mailexcite.com. Arunyan Sharma, *The Telegraph*, 21 November 1999.

• *Appeal to prevent nuclear power plant in Sunderbans*

An appeal has been initiated by noted intellectuals, environmentalists and artists, to prevent the West Bengal government from proceeding with a proposal to build power plants in this fragile area.

Source: Pradip Datta, Safe Energy & Environment (SEE), Calcutta.

E-mail: pakai@cal2.vsnl.net.in.

Peter Jackson, Chair, Cat Specialist Group, World Conservation Union, Geneva, E-mail: pjackson@iprolink.ch.

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Knowledge of English and Hindi essential. Housing and competitive salary will be provided.

Applicants please send their
CVs to:

Lucy Peck

C-49 Maharani Bagh
New Delhi 110 065

E-mail: dlpeck@bol.net.in.

• **Minister of Social Justice steps in**

Former Environment Minister and now Social Justice Minister, Maneka Gandhi, recently met with Union Minister of Home Affairs, Mr L.K. Advani and appraised him of the seizures of tiger skins and parts and those of other endangered wildlife. Ms Gandhi reminded Mr Advani of his September 1998 pledge to establish a Directorate of Enforcement for Wildlife Crime.

Valmik Thapar, in a comment to a UN Environment magazine regarding the seizures, stated 'We are already losing thousands of square kilometers of dense forest every year. We believe that at least \$12 billion worth is exploited from India's natural treasury annually. The skin market across the world is booming and the planet is losing the best of its natural treasures by the day. India's wilderness is heading for disaster. Can we hope for a global political will that brings effective international cooperation? Can we hope that human beings everywhere will act before it is too late to reverse the horrors that envelop us, not just in India but across the planet?'

U.P. seemed worse hit by recent seizures, but sadly the Chief Wildlife Warden went on record after the Ghaziabad seizure to say that the skins were coming from Madhya Pradesh, which was of course rejected by his colleague in M.P. U.P. suffered from a huge seizure of deer antlers—52 sacks full—from Najibabad town and it is believed that these had been poached since the antlers were still attached to their skulls. Then came the seizures at Khaga and Haldwani.

• **Assault, injury and death**

On April 22, timber smugglers in the main Chadaka bazaar assaulted Mr Lingaraj Otta, the D.F.O. of Nayajgarh Forest Division in Orissa. He and his ranger were both hurt but managed to escape serious injury.

Sudarshan Altia and N.R. Behera, forest guards of 48 years and 46 years respectively, were brutally murdered on March 7 by smugglers whom they had apprehended with an illegal haul of timber. Both tragic deaths leave behind two traumatised wives and children. Their husbands died bravely but will their deaths result in any action to prevent recurrences?

• **Election Commission bans abuse of wildlife sanctuaries resources during elections**

Thank god that at least some parts of our government machinery are alert to the many transgressions that impact upon the already fragile protection of our wildlife sanctuaries. Election Commission of India Secretary, Sharan Pal Singh, issued an instruction prior to the State Assembly elections this year about the abuse and use of vehicles and staff from wildlife sanctuaries during elections. As previously instructed by the Commission, Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Sanctuaries and Reserves are exempted in order to protect wildlife values. The secretary asked for acknowledgement confirming that this would happen.

Source: Election Commission of India, January 11, 2000.

Tigerlink would like to help in this matter and request all members to send in any proof of abuses that have taken place in their areas, with evidence such as vehicle registration numbers, names and any other evidence. We can then pass this on to the Election Commission for action to be taken. —Ed.

• **New WWF-India President elected**

Mr J.N. Godrej has taken over as President from the late Mr S.P. Godrej. He brings with him a strong industrial background and a long and close association with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Source: *The Hindu*, February 1, 2000.

• **Wildlifers or human rights activists?**

In a letter to Ashish Kothari, Bittu Sahgal points to the new breed of people who will be at the forefront of wildlife conservation—those that embrace people issues around protected areas, with concern for wildlife and its habitat. Goverdhan Singh Rathore, at Ranthambhore, and Rajinder Singh, at Sariska, both engage the trust of villagers through health-care programmes and other efforts, thus returning the security and dignity to the lives of thousands. 'We must find and project people like this who truly share common values,' says Bittu.

Source: Bittu Sahgal, January 27, 2000.

• **National Panel on Wildlife and Habitat Preservation**

The first meeting of the panel of experts was held on May 31 to June 2, 2000, in Bangalore. Its aim was to appraise the state of India's natural world and to provide a forum for open discussion on the options facing policy makers, officials, communities and individuals for the better preservation of that world. The panel will be time-bound and function for two years, during which time it will make recommenda-

tions and critically examine the issues and solutions, via the publication of 'Green Papers'.

Source: *Tigerlink*.

- ***Use of baits for Gir lion census illegal?***

Officials at the WII are surprised that they were not invited to participate in the lion census that was scheduled for May 17–23, 2000 at Gir. Wildlife experts received news that the state wildlife authority planned to use 200 buffalo calves as bait for the census with concern. The question has to be asked as to why the state was not keen to have any of the accepted experts on the Asian lion present at the census. The use of baits to count tigers is not permitted in India, so experts ask why did the Gujarat authorities think such practice was permissible for lion census?

Source: *Times of India*, Ahmedabad, May 8, 2000.

- ***Stop Press: Baiting banned***

On the 14th of June at the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Indian Board for Wildlife, it was decided to ban large-scale baiting as envisaged in the Gir lion census. This ban is with immediate effect. This, naturally, will also be applicable to tigers and other predators.

- ***India and Bangladesh joint project to save tigers***

The initiative hopes to raise \$3 million for a project to protect tigers in the Sunderbans. Increasing human activity in the area (estimated at 3.7 million), and honey and firewood collectors across the 10,811 sq. miles of mangrove forest on the India–Bangladesh border, are impacting upon the habitat of a dwindling tiger population, once thought to be a veritable 'fortress' for tiger conservation, due to its inaccessibility and inhospitability to humans. Arin Ghosh, Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal, wants this to be the first joint project on conservation. 'We want to reduce the dependence of local people on the forest.' Ghosh hoped that UNDP and other UN agencies would participate in a seminar in Calcutta during the second week of May to discuss the details of the project.

Source: Peter Jackson, Chairman, Cat Specialist Group, World Conservation Union, Geneva.

- ***Field Directors of Project Tiger call for greater political will***

The annual Field Director's meeting took place between February 26–28, at Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala. Reproduced below are the essential issues

from the concluding session of the meeting, summarised by Director, Project Tiger whilst welcoming the Secretary from the Ministry of Environment & Forests.

The Field Directors of Project Tiger realised that the following Project Tiger Reserves were in desperate straits: Srisailem, Manas, Valmiki, Dampha and Simlipal. The Directors of these parks described the plight of these areas vis-à-vis insurgency and criminal gangs. To these, Director Project Tiger added Palamau and Indravati.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of West Bengal, Mr Arin Ghosh, recommended the deletion of these reserves unless the situation can be rectified by both central and state governments.

Several Field Directors felt that one of the most critical problems faced was of vacant staff positions which could on average be more than 35 per cent of the total force, and in some reserves like Bandipur–Nagarahole, and Simlipal, had crossed 50 per cent. In addition, many of the staff have become unfit due to old age and protecting their beats is becoming impossible.

Wherever eco-development work is in progress, the state governments had committed additional staff, but in most cases the protection staff have been withdrawn from their strategic posts to facilitate village and allied work, thereby neglecting protection completely.

Strike forces to combat poaching of timber, minor forest produce and wildlife was regarded as an essential until such time as a proper forest protection force is created to serve the forests and deal with wildlife and forest crimes that have sharply accelerated all across our tiger reserves, protected areas and other forest tracts. It was also felt that infrastructure for protection was insufficient and required urgent strengthening. Forest officers felt that they required an order for the easier use of firearms.

Most of the states are holding Centrally Sponsored Scheme funds to improve their wage and means positions thereby causing serious delays in funding flow to the field and this has been detrimental for effective management. In some cases like Bihar even the basic salary has not been paid for 18 months in Valmiki, and for ten months in Palamau resulting in the staff succumbing to pressures of both poachers and smugglers, to make a living.

Interstate border problems and transborder problems are also accelerating and require urgent attention.

Specific requests from the field included the following:

1. M.P. and Orissa are facing 30 per cent cuts in field staff and labour that could have near fatal effects on some of our best areas.
2. In Assam's Manas Tiger Reserve, four armed companies of police have been withdrawn, causing an enormous problem.
3. In Kerala's Periyar Tiger Reserve, Rs 6 crore are urgently needed to buy out a private tract of land, 'Downtown Estate', which is very rich in wildlife and a vital artery of the park and corridor for Tamil Nadu.
4. It is essential to add Meghamalai Sanctuary in T.N. to Periyar T.R. thereby making the area an interstate reserve.
5. Akhand Shikar has become a menace across the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa—staff are in short supply and the Director is overstretched. Urgent remedial measures are required to prevent the declining status of this unique area. Communication facilities are also highly inadequate.
6. Training camps and awareness programmes were considered an immediate need for senior forest officers, government servants, police officials and other cadres to impart 'the significance and priority of supporting tiger reserves and protected areas'.
7. Relocation at Bhadra Tiger Reserve requires Rs 8 crore immediately before villagers can change their stand.

In conclusion, it was generally felt, taking all the above into consideration, that the situation has moved from bad to worse in at least half of all Project Tiger Reserves. If corrective measures are not put into place at the earliest we might be risking the loss of some areas while others could reach a point of no return. Urgent political and administrative will is required for corrective action and it may be necessary to hold high-level meetings in state capitals to prod senior people into action. It was also suggested that each Tiger Reserve hold two meetings a year to discuss and resolve problems by calling state and central government representatives. We are in a crisis and we require new and innovative mechanisms to resolve the crisis. Without these, the tiger has no hope.

Source: Project Tiger

• *Problems and constraints facing*

Project Tiger

A summary of the critical issues lists eight main areas of concern, they are:

- Inadequate staff; a survey indicates 550 vacant posts in PTRs and, though the GoI has expressed concern, the state governments have not yet taken steps to improve the situation.
- Delayed and non-release of funds to the field; time-bound problems are not being attended to due to these delays and often funds arrive in the last month of the fiscal year.
- Tiger Reserves infested with criminals and insurgents; this has been well covered elsewhere and action is now being taken.
- Need for habitat expansion; estimated tigers outside protected areas is one-third and there is a need to expand the PT network and link viable corridors and 'satellite cores'.
- Tiger poaching; the renewed threat of poaching for skins as well as bones and derivatives is fueling even more poaching, according to data analysed from recent seizures. Action is now being taken in this area.
- Man-animal conflict; the rise in human population and cattle populations seeking sustenance from the biomass is creating more interactions and thus poisoning for revenge.
- Trade; the porous border with Bangladesh and Nepal, particularly the latter, where most tiger parts are traded.
- Inadequate intelligence gathering and legal support; most of the states do not have adequate intelligence networks, and, forest guards are unprotected in case of encounters with offenders.

Source: 'Internal note of Project Tiger', May 2000.

• *E&F ministry holds meetings with state governments*

Under the Chairmanship of the Secretary, E&F, a series of meetings were held in February to discuss important wildlife issues **with Chief Wildlife Wardens and some Field Directors of National Parks and Tiger Reserves**. At the **U.P. meeting**, the important issues were: the problems of vacant posts in protected areas—all agreed that these need to be filled; the rehabilitation of Gujjars from Rajaji National Park and from Corbett Tiger Reserve; the improvement of funding flow to the field and the recycling of tourism revenue earned from the park, for management purposes; the use of tourism

elephants for patrolling during the monsoon season; cross visiting by senior park staff to other reserves and parks. **At the M.P. meeting**, there was discussion on the need for transparency in reporting mortalities and poaching cases in the aftermath of the Khaga and Ghaziabad seizures; the revival of the past practices of intelligence gathering; filling vacant posts; improvements in funding flow to the field; the violations of the Wildlife Act in connection with MFP collection; the need for sensitisation of the police and judiciary about wildlife issues. The issue of Khaga and Ghaziabad was again raised in the meeting with **Rajasthan** officials; the laxity of some range officers at Ranthambhore; and the improvement in mobility of flying squads. The meeting with **H.P.** covered similar subjects relating to poaching and seizures, funding to the field and the prosecution problems with poachers of endangered wildlife.

- **U.S. President's memorable visit to Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve**

Director of Project Tiger, Mr P.K. Sen, received a personal letter from Bill Clinton, thanking him for 'one of the most memorable experiences of my visit to India'.

Source: Project Tiger.

- **Assam NGO asks for help**

Bhawanipur Anchalik, an NGO working in Manas, have asked for assistance in the purchase of audio-visual equipment for Manas Tiger Reserve, to help with their educational programme for young people. They need equipment costing Rs 30,000 and it should be purchased and donated to the Field Director. The need is for a video projector and cassettes.

Source: Bhawanipur Anchalik, P.O. Bhawanipur, District Barpeta, Assam 781352.

- **Project Tiger Steering Committee Meeting highlights**

The 36th meeting of the P.T. Steering Committee took place in mid-May 2000, after a gap of almost 18 months. In the introduction by P.T. Director, P.K. Sen, he summarised the fiscal and management background of the Project by reminding members that since its inception, the central ministry has released Rs 8,374 lakh to various state governments and that from a beginning of nine reserves, there were 23 at the start of the 9th five year plan and the target was to add another six tiger reserves in the current plan.

Under the 100% central assistance scheme, the following new initiatives have been approved by the

GoI: Extending the area under P.T. from 33,000 sq. km to 40,000 sq. km by the creation of six new tiger reserves. Pench (Maharashtra) and Bhadra (Karnataka) have already been notified by the respective states and Pakhui-Nameri Interstate Tiger Reserve (Arunachal Pradesh-Assam), Bori-Satpura-Pachmari Tiger Reserve (M.P.), the inclusion of Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (U.P.) and the inclusion of Nagarhole National Park as an extension of Bandipur Tiger Reserve (Karnataka) are the remaining four.

In view of the deteriorating law and order situation and growing insurgency, and the increase in poaching and criminality, the central government has agreed to 100 per cent funding for the deployment of armed squads in:

Bandhavgarh	Rs 5 lakh
Bandipur	Rs 10 lakh
Kalakkad Mundanthurai	Rs 5 lakh
Kanha	Rs 5 lakh
Sariska	Rs 3 lakh
Indravati	Rs 15 lakh

Other key issues include the filling of vacancies at P.T. Reserves and the improvement in the flow of funds into the field.

OBITUARY

We were saddened to hear of the demise of Mr S.P. Godrej, described by the President, Mr K.R. Narayan as 'an exceptional human being' who brought several important issues to public attention, including environmental protection and ecological conservation.

Variously described as a pioneering industrialist and the symbol of the humanity of Indian industry, Mr Godrej was, for many years, the President of WWF-India and a tremendously generous sponsor of their work, as he also was supportive of the work of other NGOs involved in wildlife, such as the Ranthambhore Foundation and Tigerlink.

Till his last moments he was an intense supporter of tiger conservation and we will all miss him.

—Ed.