IndiaWilds Newsletter

Vol 6. Issue IV Apr 2014

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River Linking – A colossal blunder:

The heat and dust raised by the high voltage campaigning in the Indian elections sees many promises to undertake future projects which are supposed to be the panacea of all ills afflicting the Indian economy. No experts care to raise their voice about some of these unscientific claims, perhaps due to fear of online assault by paid trolls or due to sheer indifference of the media to discuss anything issue based.

One such project which had caught the imagination of the previous NDA (National Democratic Alliance) Government is the River Linking programme which has come back to circulation again in this election.

Natural confluence of Zanskar and Indus River in Ladhak

Ever since Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's dream Golden Quadrilateral project of connecting the four metros and other road building projects appeared to give a fillip to the economy (apart from the side effects of fragmenting wildlife habitats), "Big is Better" is the mantra. Every body wants to announce a grand scheme which can catch the imagination of the voting public. Unfortunately the impact of inter-linking rivers on the environment is forgotten.

One of the major causes of death of rivers and their ability to heal is because of loss of water due to diversion of water through canals for domestic, industrial and agricultural uses as well as creation of artificial barriers like dams. With the industrial and domestic effluents continuing to get discharged into the rivers, the situation has become perilous and most of our rivers are so polluted that their waters are not fit enough for human consumption according to the current pollution control board norms.

In this scenario, when we decide to divert the water of the rivers through inter-linking with other rivers, the capacity of the original rivers immediately reduces. It thus impacts everybody who used to depend on this rivers, people and wildlife alike.

Impact on riverine ecosystem:

Each river has got flora and fauna which has developed and remains in a state of equilibrium due to the unique nature of the river, its origin, its nutrients, quality of water, the various creatures big, small and microscopic and their complex web of inter-relationships that have developed over the several thousands of years if not more.

The existing seasonal rivers have their flora and fauna that are adapted to the unique riverine ecosystem of that river. Their breeding cycles, creation of dwelling places for example digging holes/tunnels in rivers, laying eggs in sand bars of rivers etc are dependent on the volume of water flowing in the river in various seasons. When a seasonal river is linked with another through a canal and water flows in, this balance goes for a toss. Many flora and fauna are not going to be able to adapt to such sudden change in their habitat.

There are many species who survive on the turbidity of the river, floating sticks and other debris will find it difficult to survive when the water level suddenly goes up or when the water becomes still and deep due to construction of dams and canals. Migration of fish and other aquatic species will also be stopped.

The linking of rivers will also result in bringing in new species from another river that are alien to this river. This will result in sudden extermination of many species, some of them would be locally exterminated, and some may become extinct forever. With such extinctions the richness of our biodiversity is lost, there is imbalance in the entire ecosystem, the result of which would be felt by people. And worse, due to lack of research, we may not realise the cause and effect relation at all.

Flawed Premise:

The armchair experts say that inter-linking of rivers is like shifting water from one bottle to another and will be done based on need. So when there is floods in one river, the water will be diverted to the other river. However, these experts don't realise that when there is drought, it impacts most parts of the country and monsoon rains also hits most of the country around the same time. So it is never the case of one river having plenty of water and the other less. So it is surprising that the proponents of river linking are unable to use their common sense to understand that this premise of linking of rivers is flawed.

Silting kills dams:

Our farmers based on their traditional knowledge know that rivers when in spate, bring along rich nutrients and deposit in the flood plains. This enhances the fertility of our soils and gives

rise to bumper crops after floods. One who lives in sync with nature's rhythms, manages to make the most of it. Unfortunately, in our endeavor to "tame" the rivers, we have created dams.

Backwaters of Amravati Dam **Image Courtesy - Mohan Raj**

However, our planners didn't realise that if the river can't deposit the silt in our fields during flooding, then it has to deposit it elsewhere. And precisely that is what is happening. The silt is now deposited in our dams reducing their water carrying capacity as well as effectiveness. The cost of dredging of silt and maintain the effectiveness of the dams will be a massively costly affair. The loss of naturally deposited silt on our agricultural lands will reduce our agricultural productivity. Ofcourse it is another story that, the synthetic fertilizer lobby has moved in to sell their fertilisers and poison our fields and benefit from the massive subsidies given by the Governments.

A cursory look at the efforts that has gone in since the British days to create many canals and dams to tame the Kosi river and the failure of all such efforts may prove to be illuminating to the proponents of inter-linking of rivers. In this era of rapid climatic events induced by global warming, the rains, drought and floods have become unpredictable. So the game of draining excess water from one to fill another, which appears to be a simplistic solution to the uninitiated, is actually going to be a colossal blunder.

Seepage, Evaporation and Distress:

The inter-linking of rivers will also result in lot of evaporation of water. There will also be lot of seepage. The seepage of water near human habitations and agricultural fields will bring in vociferous demands from the people to maintain those canals and pipelines. When our municipal authorities are unable to control water wastage from pipelines in our urban areas, controlling seepage from these canals and pipelines is simply an impossible situation. So apart from wastage of water, it has the potential to create unrest in many places.

Vulnerability to Terror Attacks:

Study of traditional chinese warfare theories throws up many examples of creating artificial bunds in streams and exploding those to wash away enemy soldiers during war. We can't rule out such a situation where similar terror attack can cause massive impact on lives and property. So it would be a tall task to monitor such places. Do we have the money, ability and will power to do it?

Salinity ingress impacts agriculture:

Rivers meet the sea and the flow of fresh water balances the ingress of saline water inwards. When the flow of water is diverted from one river to another, the quantum of discharge into the sea is reduced and hence there is more salinity in the water further upstream. This impacts not only the wildlife species surviving in the riverine ecosystem, but also impacts the crops in the agricultural fields. Without any fault of theirs these farmers are now going to be heavily impacted and would be ruined. Unfortunately, no one will realise that because of our folly of inter-linking rivers, a big population of people downstream will be devastated. This will cause migration to cities there by increasing the problems of our already creaking and groaning mega cities and will cause social unrest. A large part of India today is under the influence of terrorists proudly calling themselves as Maoists. Social unrest is an easy way to increase their sphere of influence. No country can prosper when there is social unrest. So do we further fuel unrest by such grandiose river inter-linking schemes?

Inter-linking of rivers and Global Warming:

To link two rivers, one needs to create big canals by digging, blasting and dredging the existing few portions of the landmass that is not already under human occupation. So these canals are more likely to pass through existing wilderness. So the habitat of existing wildlife species will be fragmented and this causes a huge stress on the wildlife by isolating some of them and creating closed gene pools and some of wildlife species may get locally extirpated, if not go extinct. The already rapidly dwindling forest cover will get further decimated in one stroke. Our forests act like our lungs ie. they help in carbon sequestration. With reduced forest cover, the overall capacity of our green areas towards carbon sequestration will be reduced thereby further contributing towards global warming.

Dams and canals result in forests being submerged

Cynical politicians and bureaucrats may think that they are not impacted by this global warming as they live in air conditioned houses, travel in AC cars and rarely step out of such comforts. However, according to IPCC, such global warming is leading to climatic variability and increases our exposure to heat waves, droughts, flooding, wildfires, diseases etc. The

global warming is also negatively impacting our agriculture due to crop failures and increasing pest attacks. Heat related mortality is going to impact communities that had never faced this situation before. According to IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), In Africa, extreme weather and climate events including droughts and floods have significant impacts on economic sectors, natural resources, ecosystems, livelihoods, and human health. The floods of the Zambezi River in Mozambique in 2008, for example, displaced 90,000 people, and along the Zambezi River Valley, with approximately 1 million people living in the flood-affected areas, temporary displacement is taking on permanent characteristics. Inview of this, do we take actions like Inter-linking of rivers which will exacerbate climate change?

Modern India is moving away from its roots and is increasingly disbelieving and discarding its traditional knowledge. In the olden days, kings used to dig big ponds and water tanks to hold water. These used retain water even in drought situations and helped satiate the needs of the local populace. It used to make them self-sufficient as the water in these tanks was enough for their bathing, drinking as well as agricultural needs. These tanks used to also help in retaining rainwater and improving the ground water level. Rain water runoff used to also feed these large tanks and lakes. With indiscriminate and unplanned housing constructions the natural slopes of the land is changed and hence rain water runoff can't reach these lakes, reducing their capacity.

Further the cropping pattern practiced in the fields used to be in sync with the climatic conditions of the area. Today, the soil loses its water holding capacity due to improper cropping patterns. With trees being indiscriminately felled there is increased desiccation. All this impacts and accentuates drought like conditions and turns them into full-blown droughts in many situations.

Making rainwater harvesting mandatory for urban households and industries will ensure that the dependence on municipal water supply will reduce to a great extent. This will result our dependence on water being pumped and supplied from far off rivers. It is time that we dig deep into our traditional knowledge base to find solutions to our needs rather than indulge in grandiose hallucinations.

The politicians who are greedy about power may not bother about the ecological impact of such actions. However, can we agree to be a silent spectator to such ecological vandalism?

Climate change alters behaviour of fish

A study about the behaviour of reef fishes due to ocean acidification has found stunning results which tells us that global warming has far reaching consequences. The study titled "Behavioural impairment in reef fishes caused by ocean acidification at CO_2 seeps" (Muday et al, Nature 2014) has shown that reef fishes can be seriously affected by higher concentrations of CO_2 in the ocean as they show serious abnormalities in their behaviour. These fishes were attracted to predator odour rather than moving away from the predators. They did not distinguish between odours of different habitats and exhibited much bolder behaviour than other fishes. This study findings are consistent with studies of juvenile clown fish done under controlled conditions (Ocean acidification erodes crucial auditory behaviour in a marine fish, Simpson *et al*, Biology Letters, June 2011) which found that ocean acidification affects the auditory responses of fishes with potentially detrimental impacts on early survival.

These fishes could not get acclimatized to the higher levels of CO_2 concentrations in the water which may indicate that it is difficult to rapidly acclimatize to any climate induced changes within their short lifespan. So when ocean acidification due to higher levels of CO_2 becomes more prevalent, it may become a major catalyst in wiping out certain species.

Everest Tragedy & climate change

An avalanche hit the Khumbu Icefall on the way to Mount Everest and swept away Sherpas who are traditionally engaged by climbers to pitch tents, carry provisions and do other odd jobs. 13 of the Sherpas have been declared dead and a few more are missing and injured. This is one of the single deadliest event in the history of climbing Mount Everest. This area is prone to avalanches as the snow melts due to the sunshine and hence most of the climbing through this area is done in the darkness of night after 2 am and stopped at 5 am.

Climbers who have tried climbing Mount Everest multiple times over the years say that the ice cover in these mountains are becoming thinner every year. Ambient temperatures are rising and the ice becomes prone to loosen and avalanches are becoming common. In some areas the snow is receeding to expose rocks. When that is the case, climbing becomes inherently difficult with crampon which has multiple points or spikes and is strapped to shoes for ease of climbing on ice.

Climate change impacts the ice cover in our Himalayan peaks

Mountaineering legend George Mallory had clicked a photo of Mount Everest's north face in 1921. In 2010, David Breashears took a picture from the same spot and a comparison with Mallory's iconic photo is shocking as the Rongbuk

glacier has shrunk massively. Now there are very few ice pinnacles. Breashears has estimated that Rongbuk glacier has dropped by about 97 meters in depth. If global warming is having a toll even on Mount Everest, do we still ignore it and not take any action?

The recent IPCC report suggests that fighting climate change is not a costly affair as it was alleged by politicians and several Governments earlier. It says that the impact of climate change will cost only 0.06 percent of GDP and can be minimized if all the countries act together now. However with countries having their individual agenda, and our leaders continuing to remain as "climate change ignorant" cooperation can remain a pipe dream.

Conservation News

Dholes return to Jaldapara:

West Bengal is often in the news for the wrong reasons like straying of leopards in the tea gardens, killing of elephants in the rail tracks, man-animal conflict with gaur and rhinos and the recent poaching of a tusker in Buxa tiger reserve and conflict between forest department and the locals to name a few. However this time there is a really heart warming positive news from the duars region which can bring a smile on the faces of conservationists and wildlifers. A pack of asiatic wild dogs or dholes have been sighted in the region from jaldapara national park and there is photographic evidence to back it.

The economic times report (**http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/...w/33041078.cms**) claims that the dholes were sighted for the first time in Jaldapara. However, there were other news articles on reporting sightings of dholes from the said protected area.

A report in The Telegraph mentions that the first sighting was in 2011, although the very same paper reports of evidence of dholes with photographs and documentation of their treatment after rescue in as early as march 2009 (**http://www.telegraphindia.com/109030...y_10623869.jsp**.)

This time as the TOI reports a pack of dholes were sighted near the kodalbasti region of the national park,and the dfo states "There were four to five wild dogs in the pack and one of them was dragging a kill, a hog deer, into the bush when one of our forest guards managed to record the video on his phone camera placed near the site prior to the animal's arrival. They were sighted three months back in the area while crossing the road, but our forest guards couldn't manage to click the image then. It seems the same pack has settled in the area. And we hope they are breeding too,".

Whether this is the first evidence or not is in doubt, however one thing is clear that jaldapara is a shelter for these highly endangered animals and if the reports are to be believed the population is either stable or breeding healthily over the last four or five years. And that definitely proves that the youngest national park of west bengal, jaldapara has much to contribute to the conservation of bio-diversity of the terai duars region as these part is a vital link between the indo and malay biomes.

Despite being declared as a national park only in the month of may 2012, jaldapara has always been important for the

rhino populations and its role in harbouring other animals like gaur, elephant and leopards and also bengal tigers. Even when it was not a national park, Jaldapara was a vital link between Buxa tiger reserve, Gorumara national park, Mahananda wildldife sanctuary, Chapramary wildlife sanctuary and the forests of Bhutan which traditionally suuported elephants and tigers.

Jaldapara has been historically the royal hunting preserve of the maharaja of Coochbehar. Along with its adjoining Chilapata reserve forest, Jaldapara comprises an area of 216 sq.kms. With the declaration of the national park the Chilapata reserve forest has been made an integral part of the National Park and is now a range of the park. it is this range that the dhole sightings have been reported from time to time. In the present instance, dholes were sighted in the kodalbasti beat in the chilapata range and this may indicate that the probability of the dhole packs being resident is higher.

Although presence of dholes is not new in the duars region with strong records of their presence in the forests of Buxa and Mahananda, and occasional presence of them in the higher reaches of Neora valley national park in Bengal and forests of Sikkim (I myself sighted them in the barsey rhododendron sanctuary in west Sikkim),now-a-days dholes has been extremely rare in not only the duars region but also in the whole of eastern India.

The dhole normally lives in forest habitats, but can also eke out an existence in the open steppes of Kashmir and Siberia. As the Latin name, Cuon alpinus suggests, the dhole is often found in hilly or mountainous regions. The dhole's historical range reflects this great adaptability, extending from India to Russia, and down through China to Malaysia and Indonesia (Java being the southern limit). In recent decades, however, there has been massive habitat loss within this region. Today, very little is known about the dhole's distribution, but restricted surveys indicate serious decline and fragmentation of the former range. The best remaining populations are probably to be found in central and southern India, but even their stability is in question. The urgent need for more information on the dhole's present distribution has been highlighted in the latest IUCN Action Plan for Canids.

Dholes once ranged throughout most of South, East and Southeast Asia, extending from the Tien Shan and Altai Mountains and the Primorsky Krai southward through Mongolia, Korea, China, Tibet, Nepal, India, and south-eastwards into Myanmar and Indochina, Thailand, Malaysia, Sumatra and Java.

During the last glacial period, they ranged across most of Eurasia, and are known to have once inhabited North America from a single fossil find in the Gulf of Mexico. A canid called the Sardinian dhole (*Cynotherium sardous*) lived on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia during the Pleistocene, but it is not as closely related to the living species as its name would imply.

However there are less than 2500 dholes left in the wild today, mostly in the southern and central India, featured in the IUCN red data list. Of this, the southern and central India still has a sizeable population, but the scenario in eastern india is grave. Dholes have been extinct from the forests of chhotanagpur, their status is unknown in the protected area of Saranda and Betla, which had a healthy population till late 80's. Orissa has a very small and dwindling population. The north bengal forests too portrayed the same dismal picture. Habitat destruction, fragmentation of corridors and in-breeding have put a huge question mark on their existence.

Therefore the news of a healthy and stable resident population of dholes from an hitherto unknown area is a reason to celebrate especially when the duars forest are suffering from a screwed predator prey ratio, with the lack of apex predators like the tiger (there are hardly any photographic evidence of tiger in the buxa tiger reserve and very few from jaldapara as well) and the huge pressure of herbivores over the grasslands and loss of predators like leopards to man-animal conflict. Hope these pack of dholes serve as precursors for good things to come in future.

Equipment Discussions -

New Canon Cine Servo Zoom CN7X17 KAS S announced

Canon has announced CN7X17 KAS S - a new cine servo zoom for Super 35mm sensor size cameras.

The world of TV production had always depended on a small 2/3 rd sensor size. With the popularity of Canon C300 with its broadcast ready codec, as well as C500 with 4K resolution and the C100 at the entry level of the cinema camera series being popular, Canon has specially created a servo zoom for this segment.

With a best-in-class focal length of 17-120mm, the lens is tailor-made for camera operators in traditional broadcast environments, whilst retaining the benefits of Canon's renowned cine lenses for movie productions where a more fluid shooting style is required.

Canon Cine Servo Zoom CN7X17 KAS S

This new cine-servo zoom lens has been designed to impart a distinctive "cinematic look" to the videos created with this super 35 mm sensor cameras while providing the traditional functionalities of pulling focus as well as iris changes in fast paced situations.

This lens will come in EF mount (CN7x17 KAS S /E1) as well as PL-mount (CN7x17 KAS S /P1).

This lens is designed to provide 4K quality. The 7x zoom range of 17-120mm gives the shooter ability to immediately pull from a wide 17mm to a medium 120mm focal length.

The maximum T- number is T2.95 so that one can shoot in low light.

There are modes for high speed as well as low speed zooms to choose from depending upon the situation and the effect needed. So during run-n-gun situations one can quickly shift from one end of the zoom to the other by engaging the high speed zoom. On other times one can use the low speed zoom to slowly either zoom in or zoom out imparting that nice cinematic feel which we so often struggle to get in manual zoom lenses.

The servo drive unit is compatible with industry standard protocols for control from a number of lens controllers including Canon's standard broadcast lens controllers (ZSD-300D/FPD-400D) and multiple industry standard cinema lens control-

lers.

One good thing is the drive can be removed if needed and used in cinema style configurations. The lens has the focus markings in the barrel as well as gearing for focus pulls. It also enables 16-bit metadata output so that there can be connection to virtual studio systems.

As is expected this is meant for high end professional application and the price is $31,500 USD.

Equipment Discussions -

Zeiss announces new Cz.2 15-30/T2.9 Cine Zoom

This is a compact Cine Zoom catering to the wide end. Priced at $ 23,900 USD, this is aimed at the professionals. The earlier two cine zooms in the series had been well received. This lens is going to complement those.

These cine zooms cover the full frame 35mm sensor so can also be used with EF mount for stills for eg with cameras like EOS 1D C. The detailed press release is shared below.

Cheers,
Sabyasachi

OBERKOCHEN/Germany, THORNWOOD/USA, March 27, 2014
ZEISS is launching the Compact Zoom CZ.2 15-30/T2.9 at this year's NAB Show in Las Vegas from April 7-10, 2014. The third member of the Compact Zoom family broadens the cine zoom line-up in the wide-angle range. From August 2014, the lens will be available for € 17,900 or
US$ 23,900 (excl. VAT)*. The new zoom lens fills the wide-angle gap and complements the already available CZ.2 28-80/T2.9 and CZ.2 70-200/T2.9 lenses. It does not only offer extreme angles of view but also fulfills all the requirements for motion picture zooms: It stands out for its optical brilliance, as well as its distortion-free images.

The ZEISS Compact Zoom CZ.2 family of lenses sets new standards only experienced with fixed focal lengths from ZEISS. Equipped with this set of three zoom lenses, cinematographers can master an enormous range of shooting situations without having to resort to frequent time-consuming lens switches. For sophisticated filmmakers, the ZEISS cine zooms open up new creative possibilities. When working with a zoom lens, you can move a lot more quickly because you don't have to change lenses and can make different shots from the same perspective.

The ZEISS Compact Zoom lenses are the only cine-style zooms in the world with full-frame coverage. All three zooms were calculated for the full-frame format of 36x24 mm. As a result, they are also compatible with image sensors larger than Super 35 (ex: image diagonal 31.5 mm) and therefore already ready to accommodate future developments in the field of growing sensor sizes. When the lenses are used on Super 35 cameras, users benefit from the positive "sweet-spot effect":

the image circle used by the sensor comes from the inner circle of the lens. As a result, the lens only uses that part of the illumination that has the highest quality in terms of sharpness, light and contrast. In line with the reliable and strict quality requirements that ZEISS lenses are subject to, all three representatives of the Compact Zoom family enable 4K capture.

The cine zooms from ZEISS are masters of flexibility whenever the goal is to achieve high-quality results with little lens changes. The optical balancing between ZEISS cine zooms on the one hand and ZEISS high-end cine lenses on the other fulfills filmmakers' highest demands, whether they are making big-screen, TV, documentary, music video productions or feature films. All three zooms have a consistent aperture of T2.9, also making them suitable for situations with less available light. And thanks to the established ZEISS color matching, the lenses can be used in combination with the existing lens families ARRI/ZEISS Master Prime, ARRI/ZEISS Ultra Prime and ZEISS Compact Prime, with no additional color grading needed.

Over many years, ZEISS has been continuing to develop the bokeh – that special look of an out-of-focus area in an image. After all, bokeh is one of the most important characteristics of a lens. With special optical design and circular f-stop forms, ZEISS zooms here achieve a particularly harmonious result and depict out-of-focus highlights as circular without any bothersome artifacts. In addition, the Carl Zeiss T* coating – based on several layers in the nano field – ensures a visible reduction of stray light and reflections. The result: brilliant images with a three-dimensional effect.

A special protection against dust and spray water for rough use on the set underscores the high professional standard of these cine lenses.

The cine zooms from ZEISS deliver the well-known quality and performance for which ZEISS lenses have been known for decades. For cinematographers on smaller budgets in particular, it is critical to make safe investments in their equipment. On this point, the Compact Zoom CZ.2 lenses stand out strongly: due to the interchangeable mount system (IMS), with currently five different mounts (PL, EF, F, MFT und E), the lenses can be fitted without problems onto different camera mounts. As a result, the zooms can always be used on the latest camera models, and always in an optimal system mix.

All three lenses – the new Compact Zoom CZ.2 15-30/T2.9, the CZ.2 28-80/T2.9 and the CZ.2 70-200/T2.9 – will also be available as a complete set (without transport case) for € 44,999 € or US$ 59,900 (excl. VAT)*. As a launch promotion, ZEISS is offering in the United States and Canada an attractive financing program for the new cine zooms as well as the Compact Prime lenses: 0% interest for 12 months with a zero US$ down payment.

Equipment Discussions -

Sony has announced a new mirrorless A7s Quad HD camera

Salient features:

· Wide ISO sensitivity setting from 50 to 409600 and unprecedented dynamic range
· World's first full-frame sensor capable of full pixel read-out without pixel binning process for movie and 4K (QFHD: 3840 x 2160) HDMI video output
· Professional video functions including XAVC S Full HD recording at 50Mbps, time code and optional XLR audio inputs
· Improved Fast Intelligent AF performance in light as low as EV-4

Sony has announced the A7s, a mirrorless 4K camera (actually it is Quad HD) with a high ISO range going upto 409600. For movies the range is ISO 200 to ISO 409600.
This camera has a newly developed full frame 35mm Exmor CMOS sensor. The data read out is from every pixel and it doesn't employ pixel binning technology. For example, other cameras with a higher Mega pixel sensor employ pixel binning technology to reduce the pixels while shooting video.
It is interesting to note that this camera cannot record 4K video internally. It outputs the 4K video (actually quad HD ie. 3840x2160) from the HDMI connector with 4:2:2 colour sampling to be recorded in an external recorder.

The camera records Full HD internally with XAVC format at 50 Mbps to XDHC cards.

According to Sony, its BIONZ X processor reduces noise and increases the sensitivity to ISO 409600. So you can shoot lot of night scenes using these high ISOs.

Limiting the sensor to only 12.2 Mega pixel helps in the full pixel read-out. This is likely to improve the aliasing effects which is the bane of many a DSLR camera.

In APS-C crop mode, the α7S supports high frame rate shooting at 120fps or 100fps with HD resolution 720p.
The S-Log 2 is also available so that one can shoot in a flat picture profile which is good for editing.
There is an optional XLR Adaptor Microphone Kit available which can help in using XLR microphones for pro-style sound recording while shooting video.

Other features familiar to α7 users include a high-contrast XGA OLED Tru-Finder, Wi-Fi/NFC connectivity.
This camera is likely to be available in summer 2014.

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'The Brahminy Kite'

The Sunday Statesman: 16-March-2014 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

"AN elderly gentleman from the borders of Hyderabad (Deccan) who has lived as a gentleman should, spending his ample leisure in open-air pursuits, assures me that he has known the Brahminy Kite successfully used in falconry, that, properly trained, the bird can bring down middle-sized quarry both in the air and bush.

Now, the Brahminy Kite is powerfully built, more like an Eagle than a Kite, and if the size is the criterion, it is large enough to bring down a pigeon or a partridge. Moreover I went into the matter not only with my landed informant but also with his equally elderly, equally sporting tenants and there was good evidence that at least one local falconer has trained the bird

Brahminy Kite

successfully for hawking. Falconry is no longer practised in those parts, for the landlords are now preoccupied with deprriving legislation and their camp followers with that hateful thing, working for a living.

But in my many talks with these old-timers I felt satisfied that the sport has flourished there only 20 years ago. The country is ideal for it, being dead-flat and bush-clad Red-headed Merlins,, Kestrels, Shikaras, Tawny Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Harriers, a buzzard or two and an occasional passing laggar represent the local raptors, but I was told that in the old days Peregrines were imported, and a big, bold, peafowl-killing bird which, to judge from hearsay, was nothing less than the Bonelli's Eagle.

I am no falconer. In fact, my acquaintance with birds of prey from the other side entirely, that of a man who kept racing pigeons for years and so had to watch the skies anxiously and to get to know their killers. But thinking it over, it seems to me that heavily built as the Brahminy Kite is, it lacks the dash and speed of wing to provide anything more than novelty to the sport of falconry, especially when there are many nobler birds available.

Mind, I do not say it lacks the heart. The Brahminy has been called a coward by many ornithologists, a chicken-raider that will not face the mother hen, a snatcher of small fry from the basket of the fishwife. That opinion, I feel, is not scientifically sound. We rarely make allowance for avian values and individual variations in judging a bird's "character". Many of the eagles, which this kite resembles in miniature in build and flight, also live mainly by scavenging and piracy. Moreover, the Brahminy Kite may be quite aggressive on occasion.

Once, feeling curious about contents of their nest and trying to get a closer look, I was attacked with such determination and persistence by a pair of these birds that I had to beat a hasty and undignified retreat, though I knew I was critically watched by three small boys. Though it is true that this kite gets its living picking fish and other things off the surface of the water and by robbing successful but smaller hunters, it can and does kill snakes.I have seen one with a four-foot rat snake in its clutches, but it could be that the snake was killed by some villager and later picked up by the bird.

That brings to the question: Is this the Garuda (omit the terminal "a" for most North Indian languages and add "n" after the terminal "a" for Tamil), according to mythology, is the most feared enemy of the snake tribe, the bird whose very name strikes terror in the hearts of the denizens of the subterranean Nagaland. Throughout South India the Brahminy Kite is called "Garudan" and even in paintings (paintings of no great antiquity, say about a century or two in age) this bird is shown in depictions of mythological description of the Garuda. However, the Crested Serpent-Eagle, the Short-toed Eagle and some hawk-eagles are much more given to snake-slaying than this kite, and are much nearer iconographic descriptions of the Garuda.

Be that as it might, I find an unforced occasion for quoting here an old Sanskrit verse that has always appealed powerfully to me (in spite of my comprehensive ignorance of Sanskrit!), so tellingly does it expound the power of circumstances:

'Do not associate with the lowly;
If you must with the mighty, make
friends.
For the cobra, having Vishnu's
protection,
Inquired fondly after the Garuda's
health!' "

-M.Krishnan

(This was first published on 11 March 1956 in The Sunday Statesman)

Image of the Month -

The honour for the Image of the Month for March 2014 goes to the image titled -

'Rafter's Nightmare' image of Kaling Dai

This image of a rapid from Siang (Bramhaputra) river, wins because of its impact. Congratulations!

Image details as shared by Kaling Dai:

A close in view of wave normally seen in Siang river. We didn't take a plunge into it while rafting, wisdom dictated to keep aside. Clicked with Canon 5D Mark III and 24-105 lens. Camera was secured in a water proof bag but in the event of cap-size, wouldn't have saved.

Wildlife Photography -

Fawn in trouble by Rajeev Khanna

Glowering langur with baby by Manasi Chaphalkar

Wildlife Photography -

Touch down- River Tern Fishing by Sucheth Lingachar

Shikra with Kill by Roopak Gangadharan

Wildlife Photography -

Pied Bushchat by Mangru Minz

Barheaded Goose by Kaustuv Chatterjee

Wildlife Photography -

Seascape by Jitendra Katre

Flamingos in LRK by Mrudul Godbole

I look forward to your inputs and support in preserving the last tracts of wilderness and wildlife left in our beautiful country. For other interesting articles and images check - ***http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/***

To post in the IndiaWilds forums, you can register free of cost using your Full Name as user id at ***http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/register.php***

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Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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