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Slow Poison: Pesticide Tea

Each one of us has a dream. We toil hard to make our dreams come true. We trudge along even in the face of adversity hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel. All of us dream of living our life to the fullest. For some the dream is to own fancy automobiles, for others a concrete structure in one of those high rises, designer clothes for few others, with all of them united in their love for savouring food and beverages of their choice. Food apart from being the connoisseurs delight is also a basic need without which we perish. Some brew premium tea handpicked and hand packaged at thousands of rupees a kg, whereas others can only savour the hot brew in roadside tea stalls in between their daily struggles to keep their hunger in abeyance.

Though both young and old, rich as well as the poor consume tea, the cost and brands stood apart maintaining the division between the elites and the masses. However, an unlikely deadly ingredient in this popular beverage has broken the class barrier. The tea that all of us consume is slowly poisoning us.

A recent study by Greenpeace has found deadly pesticide residues in various brands of Tea found in the market. <http://www.greenpeace.org/india/Global/india/image/2014/cocktail/download/TroubleBrewing.pdf>



Pesticides strayed on tea plantations



Out of a total sample size of 49 picked up from the market, 34 samples contain residues of atleast one pesticide and 29 samples ie. 59 percentage contained more than 10 pesticides. The concentration of the pesticide residues were high with 29 samples ie. 59 percentage of the total samples contained pesticide residues above EU (European Union) limits.



Pesticides mixed to spray on tea plantations in Valparai

Considering the fact that we drink tea many times a day and some of us even carry flask full of tea to our hides while documenting wildlife or to our places of work, the amount of toxicity that accumulates in our bodies would be pretty high. The pesticides found in the tea samples like Acephate and Monocrotophos affect the nervous system. When animals were fed acephate in their diets for two years, a greater number of them had liver or adrenal gland tumors. Mice that were fed high doses of acephate all at once had DNA damage in blood cells, although the damage was repaired four days after the exposure.* US E.P.A. classifies Acephate as “possible human carcinogen”**. Acephate is also toxic to bees and affects birds in reduced eggs, lower fertility of eggs and hatchlings and it disrupts the migratory patterns.

Monocrotophos another pesticide found in the tea samples can cause blurred vision, nausea and vomiting, convulsions, coma and death. Monocrotophos also results in many bird deaths.*** In 1996 in Argentina, researchers documented atleast 14 different incidents of hawk kills. The number of Swainson’s hawks killed varied from a few to more than 3,000 at one site. There have been other reports of Franklin Gulls, doves, quails, warblers, sandpipers and other birds found dead in US in fields sprayed with Monocrotophos.

Tebufenpyrad, which was found in one sample, is a pesticide which is illegal in India and can impact your liver. Highly toxic DDT and Endosulfan were also found in some of the tea samples.

The pesticides that are found in the tea samples also find their way into the ecosystem by polluting the streams and lakes, polluting ground water by leaching into the ground, and bio-accumulating and impacting various wild species .

Unfortunately we can't distinguish which brand is safe as there is no traceability to the tea gardens from where the leaves were plucked or cut. So even after we are aware of the fact that a majority of the tea produced have pesticides, we can't distinguish which tea is good as all the brands have pesticide residues. The tea factories purchase tea from various gardens, however, on the packs there is no mention of tea garden the leaves were plucked from. So even if you know that a particular garden sprays deadly synthetic pesticides, there is no way of avoiding tea from that garden. The consumer has the right to know and such information has to be made mandatory.



Tea Estates: Deceptive Greenery

The Government has to also step in to make a much larger intervention in stopping the use of synthetic pesticides. The Government has to earmark large landscapes where only organic farming is done. Tea estates and other plantations being in mostly ecologically fragile areas, it makes sense to start the process by declaring all plantations and areas above 800 meters as organic farming zones. The money that is now spent as subsidy towards Pesticide and fertilizers can be diverted to these areas. Government can also consider other forms of support wherever necessary.

This is not an impractical idea as a few years back Ministry of Environment and Fertilisers had initiated trials of neem based pesticides in tea gardens in Valparai. This had given excellent results not only as a pesticide but also helped in regeneration i.e. when the neem based spray fell on the ground it acted as fertilizer. Unfortunately, the results of those trials were never followed up. If such organic pesticides like Neem based pesticides are given prominence through subsidies and legislation, then the existing synthetic pesticide lobby will be hurt. In the opaque world of today where such lobbies and politicians are hand in glove, I wonder if this NDA Government would be interested in setting up exclusive organic farming zones by including all the plantations. Before becoming the Prime Minister of this country, Mr. Modi had raised a high voltage campaign setting up Tea parties titled “chai-pe-charcha”. Having worked as a tea seller before reaching the pinnacle of his career as Prime Minister of this country, I am sure he would squirm at the thought of people being poisoned via a cup of tea. Recently the Prime Minister had spoken about making North East an Organic farming area. So I hope if we raise our voice, we will see positive action in this front.

Action:

Unfortunately, this incident too is going to be forgotten like the proverbial storm in a tea cup and we will continue to get pesticides in our tea and foods unless we raise our voice. So I would urge you all to kindly shoot a letter or email to the following requesting them to take action:

Shri Narendra Modi**Hon'ble Prime Minister of India**

South Block, Raisina Hill, New Delhi – 110011

<http://pmindia.gov.in/en/interact-with-honble-pm/>

Email: pmosb@pmo.nic.in

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References:

*National Pesticide Information Centre (<http://npic.orst.edu/factsheets/acephagen.pdf>)

** EPA: US Environmental Protection Agency

*** New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

Supreme Court stops all decisions of the NBWL -

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has stayed all the decisions taken by the newly constituted National Board of Wildlife till the next hearing.

The Government had on July 22nd 2014 notified a truncated board without the mandatory number of members. Instead of nominating 5 NGOs, the Government choose to nominate GEER (Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation). Infact GEER is a Government of Gujarat entity and hence is not an NGO. The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002 mandates that 10 persons would be chosen by the Central Government from amongst eminent conservationists, ecologists and environmentalists. However it had decided to select elephant expert Sri Raman Sukumar and Sri H. S. Singh a retired forest officer from Gujarat cadre. The Central Government is also required to select a representative each from 10 States and Union Territories by rotation, however it choose only 5. This newly constituted board had cleared more than 100 projects in two days meaning they would have taken couple of minutes to clear each project. In short the NBWL acted as a stamping authority to grant permissions without any deliberations.

The Supreme Court bench headed by Justice J S Khehar and comprising Justices J Chelameswar and A K Sikri while staying the more than 100 project clearances by this newly constituted board said "We are of the view that the same (the notification altering the constitution of the NBWL in the impugned manner) was not issued in consonance of the Section 5A of the Wildlife Protection Act." Without disbanding the NBWL, they defanged it and said that the NBWL "may continue to function but shall not give effect to any order till the next date of hearing".

After the constitution of the NBWL, there were many people from Gujarat who were happy that with GEER foundation, a retired officer from Gujarat being in the board and with the PM as the Chairman of NBWL also being from Gujarat, all projects from Gujarat were going to be cleared and the reconstituted NBWL would delay the lion relocation project for years, if not completely scuttle it. There is no smoke without fire. This Government has come with a massive mandate and had promised great things like "Zero Defect, Zero Effect". Unfortunately though a majority of the Indian industry is far away from achieving zero defect manufacturing but still can achieve it, there doesn't seem to be any truth to the slogan of "Zero effect" ie. no pollution or no environmental footprint while doing our business.

India's wilderness areas and along with it it's wildlife is vanishing at a rapid pace. Unless we take steps now, there will be no tomorrow.

Wake-up Call to Save a Paradise -

Amidst the enveloping dusk, the teeming flocks of spotted ducks and Egrets were a delight to watch in the magical village of Naguvana Halli. Situated in Shrirangapattana Taluk in Mandya district, this small village is a part of Mysore division and is located at 32 kms toward west from District headquarters of Mandya and 3 kms from Shrirangapattana which is 137 kms from the Karnataka's Capital Bangalore.

I set my journey to Naguvana Halli, a 3-hrs drive from the capital city, which is slowly making a mark on the birding map of India. Inhabited with nearly 46 species of birds, I found the bee eaters had excavated their nesting tunnels on the earthen bund counting close to 60 to 70 active nests. I could see the bee eater, an exquisite little bird with bright emerald green plumage actively soaring. The little green bee-eater can be identified by a narrow black stripe on its throat, known as a 'gorget', as well as a black 'mask' that runs through its crimson eyes. Also distinctive are the two central, long, narrow, bright blue tail streamers.

Like other bee-eaters, this species are slightly larger than the common small green bee-eater. The sexes are not visually distinguishable. The entire plumage is bright green and tinged with blue especially on the chin and throat. The crown and upper back are tinged with golden Rufous. The flight feathers are rufous washed with Blue and tipped with blackish. The iris is crimson and the bill is black while the legs are dark grey. The feet are weak with the three toes joined at the base. The wings are green and the beak is black. The elongated tail feathers are absent in juveniles.



With bee in its beak

Sexes are alike. Adult males and females are similar in appearance but can usually be distinguished by the difference in body length and by the fact that a female's tail-shafts are shorter, thicker and have broader tips than those of a male. These can also be identified from the way they collect their prey. Their typical hunting methods are noteworthy.

We formally began bird watching and photography by 8.00 am. Our first bee-eater was smugly perched on a twig, and glancing on all sides, as if admiring the landscape. It detected a dragonfly about 100 feet away, where no human eye could reach and took to air in a jiffy. In mid-air it clicked its pointed beak over the winged insect, fluttered for a moment, cart wheeled and sallied back to its perch. In no time, it battered the dragonfly on the perch and took it to the nest to feed its chicks. The bee-eaters at the nesting colony were maintaining contact with each other, with their pleasant unmistakable jingling tree-tree-tree and teerp-teerp-teerp calls, all day long.

And just across the river lay a barren stretch that had nearly hundreds of blue tailed bee-eaters swarming around in the air and were perching almost at ground level! Not to be very metaphorical.. but it was almost as though we came across an oasis in the midst of a desert! I was ecstatic!



Blue Tailed Bee Eater toosing insect in the air

The blue-tailed bee-eaters are rare, colorful birds and feed on dragon flies and bees and are found in grassland, thin scrub and forest often quite far from water.

To make sure this was no mirage, we proceeded towards this patch - crossed a small canal, got all muddy, before realizing we have another track that can lead us straight to this patch by road, and yes this place was for real! We settled down and were awestruck at the sight – The ‘blue-tailed green bee-eater’ supposedly to be strongly migratory and seen seasonally in much of peninsular India and finding these slender, richly colored birds in the midst of a dhobi ghat (quiet literally) was definitely like a paradise!

Many bird watchers have a special love for the bee-eaters—there’s just so much power and personality packed in that tiny bundle of feathers. These bee-eaters are migratory – they migrate to breed and are found only in parts of peninsular India. The place is known for breeding of many small birds like white breasted king fisher, pipit, Common Blue Kingfisher, bushchat etc.,

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Paradise of a different kind – why do I say so?

Well... it is a paradise because, of the sheer number of these birds are found here and the joy true nature enthusiast's experience up and close with them. On the flip side, these birds – choose sandy banks or open flat areas as their nesting grounds and unfortunately this particular site is a dhobi ghat often used by villagers, who make the banks as colorful as the bird itself by littering it with plastic and other harmful wastes. Also, these birds frequent this area by March to breed and abandon nests by end of April and since it's the breeding time – the birds often face a lot of disturbance due to the dhobi's who let their donkeys loose to graze which often scare and disturb these birds from their nesting ground.

Behaviour and ecology

Like other species, bee-eaters predominantly eat insects, especially bees, wasps and ants most of which except the later are expertly caught in the air by making sorties from an open perch. Before swallowing prey, a bee-eater removes stings and breaks the exoskeleton of the prey by repeatedly thrashing it on the perch.

These birds are somewhat sluggish in the mornings and may be found huddled next to each other on wires sometimes with their bills tucked in their backs well after sunrise. They sand-bathe more frequently than other bee-eater species and will sometimes bathe in water by dipping into water in flight. They are usually seen in small groups and often roost communally in large numbers (200-300). The birds move excitedly at the roost site and call loudly, often explosively dispersing before settling back to the roost tree. This behavior is generally observed between the hours of 7:00 and 8:00am, and after 4:00pm.

This species is migratory in nature and is seen in different parts of peninsular India in different seasons. It is seen in Naguvanahalli during its breeding season.



© Raghavendra Pattar/www.indiawilds.com

The breeding season is from March to June. Unlike many bee-eaters, these are often solitary nesters, making a tunnel in a sandy bank. Bee-eaters are seasonally monogamous, and some species are monogamous over multiple seasons. Migratory species however are thought to form new pair bonds each breeding season. The courtship displays of the bee-eaters are rather unspectacular, with the exception of the "butterfly display" (where the wings of both sexes are held out while calling). Most members of the family engage in courtship feeding, where the male presents prey items to the female, and such feeding can account for much if not all of the energy females require for egg creation.

Blue Tailed Bee Eater Male offering food to the female



Blue Tailed Bee Eaters Mating



Blue Tailed Bee Eaters Mating

Like almost all coraciiforms the bee-eaters are cavity nesters.

In the case of the bee-eaters the nests are burrows dug into the ground, either into the sides of earth cliffs or directly into level ground. Both types of nesting site are vulnerable, those on level ground are vulnerable to trampling and small preda-

tors, whereas those in cliffs, which are often the banks of rivers, are vulnerable to flash floods, which can wipe out dozens or hundreds of nests.



Bee eater flying out of its nest on a cliff

Bee-eaters may nest as single pairs, loose colonies or dense colonies. Smaller species tend to nest solitarily, while medium sized species do so in the smaller colonies and larger and migratory species nest in large colonies that can number in the thousands. In some instances colonies may contain more than one species of bee-eater.

Ethics: A note to photographers:

Please avoid going too close to the nest as this prevents the parents from taking food to the chicks inside the nest. Which means the chicks will starve because of you. Use a long lens and a hide. Even a makeshift hide made by hanging your green jackets and cloths will serve. Remember not to walk straight into the nesting area. Crawling in and out of the hide and keeping an in general lower profile helps in not scaring the birds. Remember that no image is more important than the welfare of the species.

Conservation Activity – Wake Up Call

Human activities can disrupt these green Bee-eater nests built in active mines or quarries. The local villagers visiting to the river bank to wash clothes have started drying their clothes on the ground or on the boulders, thus hindering nesting of the birds. Sand mining in the area too has led to the decrease in bird nesting. Following complaints about this from the local villagers, bird-watchers and wildlife photographers, Anil Kumble took note of the situation from the villagers and Gram Panchayat members.

Speaking to media persons, Kumble said that the place used to see birds numbering to thousands, which has now drastically reduced. If the same continues, the birds may stop migrating here.

Observing the clothes dried on the ground and on sand mining, Kumble had a discussion with forest officials about the measures to be taken to ban such activities. "Steps will be taken to fence around 7 acres of surrounding land where birds breed and a guard will be appointed to safeguard the place," he said.

APCCF Shivananda Murthy, Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary Forest Officer M. Shivappa, Village head Javaregowda and others were present during Kumble's visit. Unfortunately, there has been no measures taken at this point of time.

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Government seeks proposals for five new tiger reserves

14th August 2014

The Government has accorded "in principle" approval for creation of two new tiger reserves in the country and has sought proposals from states for giving status to five more protected areas, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said, according to a PTI report.

In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Mr Javadekar said that the final approval has been given to two others for declaring them as tiger reserves.

"In Principle approval has been accorded by National Tiger Conservation Authority for creation of 2 new tiger reserves - Ratapani(MP) and Sunabeda (Odisha)," Javadekar said.

"Final approval has been accorded to Bor (Maharashtra) Kudremukh (Karnataka) and Rajaji (Uttarakhand) for declaring as tiger reserves," he said.

He said that the state governments have been advised to send proposals for declaring 5 other areas as tiger reserves. The state governments were advised to send proposals on

Suhelwa (UP)

Guru Ghasidas National Park (Chhattisgarh)

Mhadei Sanctuary (Goa)

Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel/Megamalai Wildlife Sanctuaries/Varushanadu Valley (Tamil Nadu) and

Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary (Arunachal Pradesh).

Giving details of tiger deaths till August 6 this year, the minister said inside tiger reserves, a total of 24 cases were under scrutiny.

There were zero deaths due to poaching including seizure and 4 deaths due to natural and other causes.

Similarly, in terms of tiger deaths outside tiger reserves, there were 13 cases which were under scrutiny, 3 cases of poaching and other causes and zero cases of natural and other causes.

The recent initiatives taken by the government include implementing MOU with tiger states, special crack teams sent to tiger reserves affected by Left Wing Affected extremism, modernisation of infrastructure and field protection and launching Monitoring system for Tiger Intensive Protection and Ecological Status and others.

Javadekar calls for enhanced action by developed countries to tackle climate change

New Delhi- 8th August, 2014

Shri Prakash Javadekar while delivering the welcome address at the 18th BASIC Ministerial meeting on climate change reiterated India's commitment to sustainable development and efficient use and development of all resources including energy. He called for incentivising action and said that in this regard there is a requirement of enhanced response from the developed countries to fight climate change.

He further said "We firmly believe that the issue of climate change and global warming is not country-specific but is inter-

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dependent in nature and requires cooperation among nations. **India has already taken a number of actions on a voluntary basis** with its own resources in pursuance of a sustainable development strategy. India has announced **a voluntary 2020 mitigation goal of reducing emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25% over 2005 levels by 2020**. Towards this, India has formulated its National Climate change Action Plan with eight missions, which are being strengthened. We have designed a low carbon strategy for growth and have set up ambitious renewable energy targets”.

The Ministerial group later released a Joint Statement. Following is the text of the Joint statement of the 18th BASIC Ministerial group on climate change:

- The 18th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change was held in New Delhi, India on 7-8 August 2014. The meeting was attended by H.E Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of State (IC) of Environment, Forests and Climate Change of India, H.E. Ms. Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs of South Africa, H.E. Mr. Xie Zhenhua, Vice Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission of China and H.E. Dr. Francisco Gaetani, Deputy Minister of Environment of Brazil.
- The Ministers noted that considerable progress has been achieved by their countries in reducing poverty. Despite the massive scale of development challenges still faced by them, the governments of all BASIC countries are undertaking extensive and ambitious voluntary mitigation actions to pursue low carbon pathways including through the development and deployment of renewable energy, improving energy efficiency through improved technologies, REDD+, etc.
- The Ministers reviewed the progress after the Warsaw COP and the way forward. Ministers stressed that the 2015 outcome to be adopted at the COP in Paris should be comprehensive, balanced, equitable and fair in order to enhance the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention. The Ministers affirmed that the BASIC countries are ready and willing to play their part in this process and extended their full support to the Government of Peru for a successful COP in Lima, which would be central to the 2015 outcome. They also stressed their full support to the Government of Venezuela for the Pre-COP to be held this year.
- The Ministers underscored the need for finalization of the elements for a draft negotiating text for the 2015 outcome by the COP in Lima. They reiterated that the six core elements for the 2015 outcome have been identified in paragraph 5 of decision 1/CP.17 and that these should be addressed in a balanced and comprehensive manner through an open and transparent, inclusive, party-driven and consensus-building process.
- The Ministers reaffirmed that the process and outcome of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) must be in full accordance with all the principles, provisions and structure of the Convention, in particular the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
- The Ministers emphasized that the developed countries should take the lead in addressing climate change in accordance with their historical responsibilities, the latest available scientific evidence on climate change trends and the IPCC AR5. They urged developed countries to implement their commitments under the Convention towards developing countries for provision of finance, technology and capacity-building support and highlighted the importance and relevance of Article 4.7 of the Convention in this regard.
- The Ministers concurred with the need for all Parties to communicate their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) as early as possible. The Ministers affirmed that the INDCs would include all pillars of the Durban Platform - mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer and capacity-building.
- The Ministers stressed that in accordance with the Convention principle of differentiation, the commit-

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ments of the developed countries to be included in the INDCs should be quantified economy-wide emission reduction targets for mitigation and provision of finance, technology development and transfer as well as capacity building support to developing countries for their mitigation and adaptation actions. They reiterated that the INDCs of developing countries will be in the context of their social and development needs and will also be premised on the extent of financial, technological and capacity-building support provided by developed countries.

- The Ministers emphasized that the information to be provided in the context of the INDCs would also need to be accordingly differentiated between the developed and developing countries in accordance with Article 12 of the Convention. The Ministers further stressed that the purpose of such information is to facilitate the clarity, transparency and understanding of the INDCs in accordance with the Warsaw decision.
- The Ministers reiterated that the Kyoto Protocol remains the essential and legally binding basis for addressing pre-2020 mitigation ambition. The Ministers called for the expeditious ratification of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and emphasized the importance of revisiting and significantly increasing ambition of QELROs in 2014 and in line with what is required by science, and comparable pledges in the same timeframe by those Annex I Parties, who have not participated in the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol till now. The Ministers expressed their serious concern on the low level of mitigation ambition of developed countries and called for necessary arrangements to be made for the 2014 Revisit for increasing the emission reduction targets by all developed country parties.
- The Ministers noted with concern that the pre-2020 ambition gaps exist not only in mitigation but also in adaptation and finance, technology and capacity-building support to developing countries. They reiterated that the contribution of developing countries to mitigation efforts is far greater than that of developed countries and could be further enhanced if developed countries effectively implement and significantly increase their commitments of providing finance, technology and capacity building support to developing countries.
- The Ministers underscored the importance of adaptation measures required to address the impacts of climate change, especially for the developing countries, which requires international support from developed countries on issues relating to risk reduction, management and resilience. They drew attention to the fact that since climate change impacts are global in nature, adaptation measures required also need an international response. The Ministers welcomed the Warsaw COP decision on setting up a Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.
- The Ministers called for the full operationalization of and close coordination between institutions established in the Bali process, including the Green Climate Fund, the Standing Committee on Finance, the Technology Executive Committee, the Climate Technology Centre and Network and the Adaptation Committee. Ministers called for the immediate and substantial capitalization of the GCF. The Ministers proposed that a part of the funds to be made available under the Green Climate Fund could be utilized to secure IPRs of relevant climate friendly technologies for deployment in developing countries.
- The Ministers expressed disappointment over the continued lack of any clear roadmap for providing US\$ 100 billion per year by developed countries by 2020. They urged developed countries to honour their obligations to provide new, additional and predictable financial support to developing countries in a measurable, reportable and verifiable manner. They reiterated that public financial sources should be the mainstay of climate finance and that private finances could only be expected to play a supplementary role.
- The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of multilateralism in addressing climate change in accordance with the principles and provisions of the Convention and reiterated their strong opposition to any unilateral measures such as in aviation or shipping.

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- The Ministers looked forward to the upcoming Summit on Climate Change to be hosted by the UN Secretary General in New York on 23 September 2014 for generating political momentum on climate action.
 - The Ministers welcomed the Outcome Document of the Santa Cruz Summit of the Group of 77 and China held in June 2014 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Group. They noted the achievements of the Group, in articulating the concerns and interests of the developing countries in various fora , including the UNFCCC, over the last five decades and expressed the confidence that the Group will continue to work for an equitable and successful outcome in Paris. In this regard, the Ministers extended their full support to Bolivia during its current Chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China.
 - The Ministers also welcomed the 3rd International conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) scheduled on 1-4 September 2014 in Apia, Samoa and reiterated their traditional solidarity with the SIDS countries in their efforts to adequately meet their unique development challenges and vulnerabilities.
 - The Ministers welcomed the offer by South Africa to host the 19th BASIC Ministerial Meeting during the third week of October, 2014.
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India's first jellyfish lake discovered

According to a PTI report, Marine biologists have discovered a jellyfish lake in Gujarat.

"This is probably the first jellyfish lake to have been found in India. The concentration and density of jellyfish is very high here. You can even see them from outside during low tide and when the water is clear," WTI scientist BC Choudhury said.

His team recently discovered this jellyfish habitat during a field visit to Arambada, a town in Gujarat. They found these jelly fish spread over an area of about 5 to 6 hectares in the lake floor and interestingly these jelly fish were found to be swimming upside down.

"They position themselves on their bottom side to receive maximum sunlight as they harbour photosynthetic algae called Zooxanthellae, which have a symbiotic relationship with jellyfish similar to corals," explained marine biologist S Goutham. Another unique feature of the lake is that these jellyfish are present all around the year unlike other places where they are reported to be seasonal.

It may not be appropriate to brand it as India's first jellyfish lake, as one can find Jelly fish in Chilika lake in the eastern state of Odisha, India.

Mangrove in Sunderbans losing capacity to absorb CO₂: Study

PTI, KOLKATA, AUG 4:

According to PTI, a recently conducted study has found that the vast mangrove forest in the Sunderban, locally known as "hental ban" is fast losing its capacity to absorb carbon dioxide which is one of the main greenhouse gases, from the atmosphere due to rise in the salinity of water, rampant deforestation and pollution.

The mangrove forest, marsh grass, phytoplanktons, molluscus and other coastal vegetation in the world's largest delta are

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the natural absorbers of carbon dioxide (CO₂), according to the study.

The stored carbon in the plants is known as “Blue Carbons”. The absorption of CO₂ is a process which contributes to reduction of the warming of the earth and other ill effects of climate change.

The research study, “Blue Carbon Estimation in Coastal Zone of Eastern India — Sunderbans”, was financed by the Union Government and headed by noted marine scientist Abhijit Mitra.

The report took three years to prepare and it was submitted to the government last year.

“The situation is quite alarming, especially in the central part. The capacity of the mangrove forest, especially the Byne species, to absorb carbon dioxide has eroded to a large extent. This will effect the entire ecosystem of the area,” Sufia Zaman, a senior marine biologist who was a part of the team, told PTI.

According to Mitra, the study was conducted mainly on the Byne species of mangrove. There are 34 other species of mangroves found in the forest including Keora and Genwa.

Mitra said, “In the central part of Sunderbans near Matla, the capability of Byne trees to absorb carbon was 22 tonnes per hectare, whereas the scenario is a bit different in the eastern Sunderbans where the capacity of Byne to absorb carbons is near about 35 tonnes per hectare.”

Third run of Science Express to raise awareness about biodiversity

An advertising campaign is to be launched to popularise the Science Express, an innovative exhibition on wheels. This train aims to raise awareness amongst masses in general and youth in particular about the exceptional biodiversity of India. It is a flagship venture of Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ministry of Science and Technology and Indian Railways and was jointly flagged off by the respective ministers today from Safdarjung Railway Station.

Speaking at the occasion, Shri Javadekar, Minister for MoEF & CC said in order to evince interest amongst the people, an advertising campaign would be initiated so as to sensitize and educate the masses on the nuances of the rich biodiversity of the country. In order to take the issue associated with biodiversity forward, society needed to base its foundation on the rationale of scientific temper. It was important in the backdrop of India comprising 2.5% of land mass on earth, 17% of world population and yet being home to 8% of world biodiversity. Terming the Science Express as no ordinary train, Shri Javadekar said that it is a journey of learning, spreading the message of Bio diversity conservation and telling people that even in these modern times, we still have to depend on bio diversity. The train covering a span of 194 days at 57 locations is expected to benefit 30 lakh students.

Highlighting the importance of the initiative, the Minister mentioned that the train was in fact the brand ambassador of the COP 11. It showcased the rich biodiversity of India to delegates from over 190 countries. For this the train was stationed at Secunderabad in October 2012 to facilitate visit of delegates to the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity. Indeed, there were quite a few records and milestones that we believe this train has achieved. It was perhaps the world’s most visited train exhibition. Within India, it had gone to the highest rail track possible for broad gauge, and also covered some extreme locations in the north, south, east and west.

The present run of the train is in the 3rd Phase. In this phase, the train is envisaged to cover 57 locations on Broad Gauge network of Indian Railways across the entire length & breadth of the country. Of the 16 coaches of the Science Express-

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Biodiversity Special, 8 are solely dedicated to showcasing the myriad biodiversity spread across all the bio-geographical zones of India through a variety of interactive exhibits, short films & videos that are shown on Plasma & LED TV screens, large format displays, kiosks and back lit panels. The remaining coaches have interesting & informative exhibits on Climate Changes, Energy and Water conservation and other topical issues.

The current decade (2011-2020) has been declared as the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity and United Nations Decade for Deserts and Fight against Desertification. The 'Science Express – Biodiversity Special', therefore, primarily addresses the theme 'biodiversity'. The state-of-the-art exhibition aboard SEBS aims to create wide-spread awareness on the unique biodiversity of India, Climate Change, Water, Energy Conservation and related issues among various sections of the society, especially students.

Since its launch in 2012, the Science Express Biodiversity Special train has covered 114 stations and travelled across more than 37000 kms in the first two phases. Phase-I of the SEBS was launched on World Environment Day (5 June, 2012) from Safdarjung Railway Station, New Delhi. Phase-II of the SEBS was launched on April 9, 2013 from Safdarjung Railway Station, New Delhi. It covered 62 locations and over 22 lakh people, including 5 lakh students and 29000 teachers from 6005 schools, enjoyed learning in a fun filled way.

The present phase would culminate on 4th February, 2015 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat after covering 57 locations whereby the SEBS train would have covered most of the major stations across the country.

Equipment Discussions -

Canon Cinema C300 Dual Pixel AF Review

I got the dual pixel AF upgrade when Canon India offered it for a princely sum of 30k INR (equivalent of 500 usd) more about the price later. I tried the Dual Pixel AF in the city to see its limitations before taking it to film wild leopards in the jungle. The following is my initial impressions. The detailed video review will follow later.

Canon Dual Pixel AF benefits:

The DPAF is very helpful when I am searching for leopard sitting somewhere in a tree. Slowly panning the long lens helps in the C300 progressively locking into the subjects and I can immediately focus on the leopard. Any one who have used long lenses (over 600mm or 800mm optical focal length) will know how difficult it is to acquire focus on a subject somewhere. I found the Dual Pixel AF to be a big help.

If anyone of you have been shooting for two decades like me, then your eyes would not be the same now. :) So this DPAF will be a big help in locating far off subjects. In run and gun situations while you are changing your exposure the focus locks on and you are ready to shoot quickly. So full marks to the DPAF for making many shots possible.

I can now zoom in or zoom out smoothly on a subject while the dual pixel auto focus remains locked on to the subject. This greatly raises the value of my footage. Earlier this was not possible without an assistant as one cannot simultaneously zoom the lens as well as fine tune the focus.

Similarly the dual pixel Af will continue to lock focus when I use a slider dolly and physically move the camera close to or away from the subject.

Limitations of Dual Pixel AF:

Our Canon long lenses have a feature of fine tuning focus points. However while filming with C300, the DPAF overrides any small correction of the focus point. I have found that it may lock on to the branch behind the leopard and it becomes tough to get it right. So after the initial focus acquisition it may be better to switch off the autofocus and get into manual focus mode.



The Dual Pixel AF is limited to the central part of the image. So when your subject moves away from the centre, the focus shifts. In the following two frame grabs from my C300, in the first the Canon C300 has locked into the trees in the background.

Out of focus: The Dual Pixel AF locks onto the background when the leopard is not in the centre of the frame

In the next instant when the leopard is more in the centre, the Dual pixel AF locks onto the leopard.



In Focus: The Dual Pixel AF locks onto the leopard when it is near the centre of the frame

If Canon would have provided us with the ability to move around the focus point, then it would have been great. When the subject is bang at the centre the composition becomes static. With the Dual Pixel AF we will see a lot of such sterile compositions with the subject at the centre. Hopefully this will change sometime later.

There is an AF (autofocus) Lock setting which I have programmed to the No. 7 button on the handgrip. One can technically use this AF lock while panning from one subject to another. When I am handholding the camera with a short lens this is useful.

However, this is limiting in certain situations. If you are using a 3 axis gimbal then you can't touch the handgrip as it would cause vibrations. One can technically bypass this problem by removing the handgrip and mounting it on the handle bar. However, Canon doesn't make an extension of the handgrip. There is one handgrip extension available from Zacuto, which I haven't used, so I won't be able to comment on it.

It is also limiting when I am shooting wildlife with long lenses. When I pan using long and heavy tele lenses, I don't use the handgrip of the camera to hold and pan. All of us use the fluid head pan bar. So now I have to move the pan bar to my left side and then use my right hand to lock AF and move from one subject to another. Definitely this is not a great proposition.

There are times when carrying my heavy Sachtler ENG 100 HD2 CF tripod and OConnor 1030HDs fluid head in long and arduous treks is simply not possible even with porters. Some of my wildlife subjects get easily spooked and in those situations I have to carry all the equipment along with my partner. At times the large tripod is too conspicuous or I am in a cramped safari where I take a photography tripod Gitzo GT3530LSV with a Wimberly V2 head or a manfrotto head. Unfortunately with such tripod and heads the tripod vibrates and I don't touch it when recording is going on. So AF lock in such a scenarios is not feasible.

I would be happy if Canon can create a touch screen LCD monitor to select the focus point. If it were to be a wired monitor

then long cables would be of help. Else a wireless monitor would be really cool.

Canon does have a WFT (Wireless File transmitter) and may be Canon can make it work with the DPAF and allow focus points other than centre point to be selected.

The Dual Pixel AF hunts if there is less light.

If the scene is dark then the Dual Pixel AF will appear jumpy and will move back and forth before focusing. When we increase the light or increase the ISO, the AF becomes smooth and snaps into focus easily. So now I have to be mentally far more alert and examine the scene carefully before panning. Else while panning if the camera comes across a dark object, the dual pixel AF starts hunting. That would look really amateurish and remind us of shooting with a handycam a decade or two ago.

In wildlife, I found that birds with black/gray feathers are posing a challenge to the AF. Please refer to the video for footage.

Price of Dual Pixel AF upgrade: 500 USD?

I never complain about price. However, 500 dollars or 30,000 Indian rupees for the Dual Pixel upgrade is a lot. For C300 owners this would be about 3.5%. However, for C100 owners the price of upgrade is close to 10%. That is huge, especially since the DPAF is limited to the centre point and we can't change the focus points as per our requirements. Nevertheless, I knew the benefits and updated my C300.

Some suggestions to Canon:

One big difference between professional setups using cinema lenses and focus pullers vis-a-vis one man bands is the shots without proper focus. With decent Canon still glass and this DPAF in many situations you can match the quality. It would be great if Canon can launch cinema lenses with AF and image stabilisation or create a line of L series lenses that are optically as good as the cinema. I won't mind if those lenses are costlier.

Canon has millions of users who use EF mount. If Canon brings out still lenses that are optically equal or superior than the cinema lenses of competition, then with the autofocus and image stabilisation technologies, Canon will become the defacto standard even in the cinema world.

In terms of AF technology this is version 1.0. However, I am sure the Version 2.0 would be great with touch screen focus point selection in wired/wireless scenarios.

Verdict on Dual Pixel AF in C300:

This Dual Pixel AF is a big help for my work and Canon should consider enabling this in the C500, 1DC and in any future cinema cameras. Highly recommended.

The video review of the Dual Pixel AF is in progress and would be uploaded later. If you have any questions, you can ask it in the comments section below and I will answer as soon as possible.

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: VOICE OF THE DUMB

The Sunday Statesman: 27-July-2014 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

"IN this loud world, silence is remarkable. It is not less so in the avian world, for birds are voluble creatures, much given to song and chatter and gesticulation. The mechanism of sound production in birds is peculiar; without going into the technicalities, it may be said that in them the voice-box is placed much lower down than in other animals. However, this does not affect their ability to produce a number of calls and churring sounds and songs - in fact, I doubt whether class of animals is so varied in its voice. Some birds, however, are laconic in the extreme, rarely coming out with any sound beyond a harsh croak, and some are practically dumb, their only recorded sounds being a grunt, usually indulged in during the breeding season, and a clattering together of the mandibles. Such silent fowl are usually water-birds.

During March and April this year, I spent quite some time verifying earlier observation on THE VOCAL EFFORTS OF TWO WELL-KNOWN DUMB WATER-BIRDS, THE SPOONBILL AND THE OPENBILL. At Vedanthangal near Madras, where I found opportunity to observe and listen to these quaint birds, there is a mixed breeding colony of over a dozen species, several thousand water-birds nesting in the half- submerged grove of Baringtonias in the village tank during the rains. I had to wait till most of the breeding birds had left and till the tank bed was more or less dry before I could get the verification I wanted, for the large mixed din of a large heronry can be most confusing, and in judging sounds it is better to get near and use one's ears than to rely on observation through binoculars.

It has been said of the INDIAN SPOONBILL that "a low grunt and a clattering of the mandibles are the only sounds uttered" by the bird. In a dozen books on Indian bird consulted, I could find no other call or sound recorded except for RS Dharmakumarsinghji's reference to a "soft whistling note" in his Birds of Saurashtra. Recording another call, which is neither a grunt nor a clattering of the beak, I should certainly like to describe in detail the seductive and so-far-unreported love-song of the Spoonbill, but a naturalist is limited, by a stupid code, to the bare truth. I cannot report anything better than a hiccup.



©Dr. Jitendra S. Katre

Spoonbills Image courtesy – Jitendra Katre

However, this hiccup is much the most typical call of the breeding spoonbill (in the South, at any rate); the bird does indulge in low grunts, especially at the nest, but this hiccup seem to be its call note. Since I am satisfied that some of the breeding birds at Vedanthangal (and elsewhere in the South) exhibit certain peculiarities of plumage and behaviour, I should add that the Spoonbills here are in no way different from those breeding elsewhere in India.

The full nuchal crest was very much in evidence, the adult birds had a yellow fringe to the broad tip of their spatulate bills, there was the collar of dull cinnamon at the base of the neck, and the chin, from the base of the lower mandible to the throat, was bare and yellow to orange-yellow, with a fringe of Chinese vermilion to this bare patch where it met the throat. The bare patch pulsed as the birds panted open-billed, as most birds do during the heat of the summer afternoon in the South - I draw attention to this bare, yellow chin-patch, as at the moment of calling the skin of this patch is not drawn in (as when the bird is at rest) but slightly puffed out.

I refer, of course, to the fully adult breeding birds. Infant Spoonbills look like nothing so much as miniature dodos - they have pink, hook-tipped bills, swollen in the middle like the bill of a nestling pigeon, and they cheep loudly at the nest, very much in the manner of pigeon squabs. In fact, I noticed even the young of EGRETS (birds known only to grunt when adult) had quite expressive voices, and uttered a loud, yickering cheep when urging their parents to feed them. The food-calls of the infant, like at any mixed heronry, are quite a feature of such places, and I shall not refer to them here.



Mrudul Godbole

Openbill Stork**Image courtesy – Mrudul Godbole**

The call of the adult Spoonbill is most completely described as a subdued but clearly audible hiccup, somewhat high in pitch - I fancy that a well-bred lady, trying ineffectually to suppress a hiccup in the party, would emit a very similar sound. The call has the same duration as a hiccup, and the bill is open at the time it is uttered, being closed immediately after. There can be no question of the sound being produced by any action of the mandibles as they are open when the bird is calling. The skin of the chin, as already said, is noticeable during the call. The birds call both from the perch and when on the wing. My photography of a perched spoonbill calling shows the bill almost closed, at the end of the hiccup; the flying bird was snapped in the middle of its call.

At first I was not sure if the bird called when on the wing - I could see the flying bird opening and then quickly closing its bill and the bulging of the chin-patch, I thought I heard the hiccup faintly high above me in the air, but so prone is the ear to hear what the eye sees, and the mind knows, that I was in doubt. Later I was able to hear the call from birds flying low overhead, and I am now certain that they do call at times, while flying.

The call of the laconic OPENBILL is even more remarkable. The only sound so far recorded of this stork is a clattering noise produced by the mandibles, the usual stork-sound. The openbill is not only the smallest of our storks but also the quaintest. The mandibles meet at the tip and the base but in the middle there is a clear gap between them. As in the spoonbill, the nestling has quite a different kind of beak - thick and wedge-shaped, with no gap in the middle. As it grows, the beak grows much longer, but the bill remains straight even when the young bird is well able to fly, and almost as big as its parents - it is a tapering wedge then, the gap in the middle and the consequent bi-convex contour of the outer edges of the coming with

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age.

Openbill nestlings, clamouring for food, produce a distinctive noise that is midway between a Yap and a Yicker, the three-quarters grown young, perching on treetops, makes a similar sound when begging food from its parents, but at this stage the sound is much more a Yap than a Yicker. When they are grown and can fly freely, the young birds gather together in sub-adult parties and perch on treetops in between feeding expeditions. They are now almost on the point of leaving for their feeding grounds perhaps hundreds of miles away. While roosting in company, at times they Yap in chorus. And so do their grown-up parents, roosting on another tree.

At Vedanthangal, I found about two dozen young openbills late in April - right at the other end of the grove of trees, almost diagonally opposite, there were an equal number of adult birds (some of the breeding pairs of recently-ended season), also roosting in close company. At times, one or two of the older birds would fly across to join the junior set, but this was exceptional - most of the time the two generations kept apart. The young birds were yapping occasional, infrequent calls, usually produced by just one or two birds. But the older birds indulged at times in a sustained chorus of muffled yelps - a sound not wholly unlike a chorus of faraway puppies, if one was sufficiently imaginative!

I noticed, both while the old birds were calling and while the younger birds were, that the call was uttered with the bill open - I mean, with the mouth open, for the bill of the adult openbill is always open! So far as I could note, this yapping is only indulged in when the birds are roosting together and perhaps only when they are assembled together preparatory to departure from the breeding colony. The young birds were noticeably less persistent with this strange chorus than their parents."

- M.Krishnan

This was first published on 19 May 1957 in The Sunday Statesman

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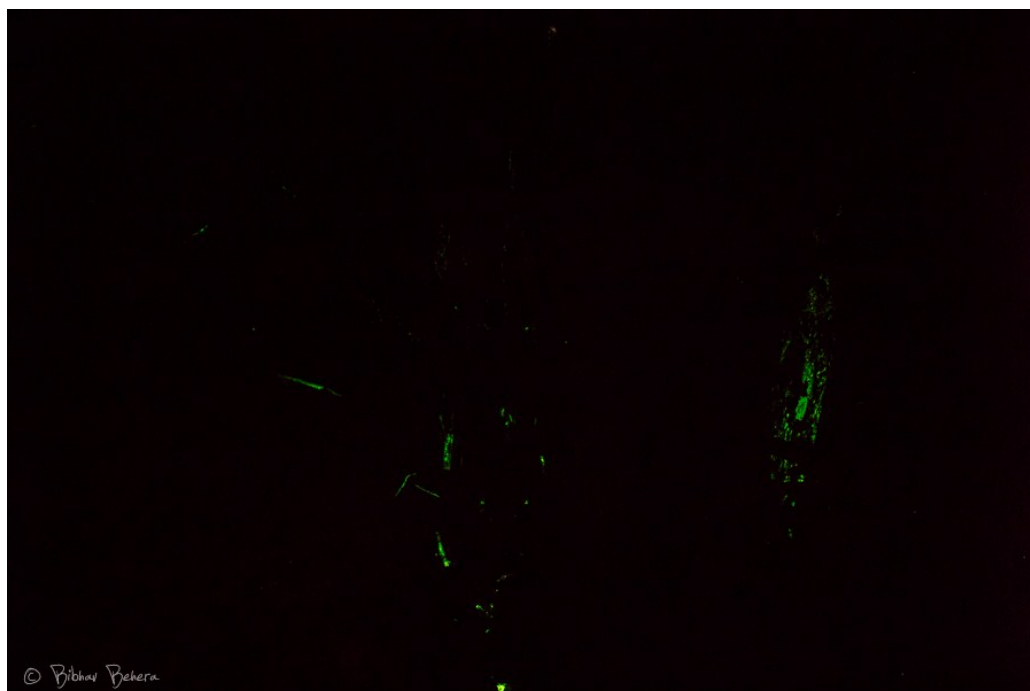
Bioluminescent Fungii by Bibhav Behera

This is an image of Bioluminescent fungii in Agumbe. In the night, we found an area where we switched off our torches and headlamps. In a matter of minutes, the place lit up magically as our eyes got accustomed to the darkness. These fungii grow in rainforests dead plant matter and on tree barks. They are virtually invisible to the naked eye and can be seen only once they glow at night.



I used a very long exposure s and was able actually capture the glow of these fungii.

I used the red LED (1 mm sized) on my camera trigger and that lit up the scene while the fungii were glowing and got this surreal image (a la Predator blood in the movie). The next image was taken in in complete darkness. However these images cannot do justice to the scene itself.



IndiaWilds App for Android Mobile

In India most of the internet penetration is happening through mobile phones. And the existing users who have access to desktops and laptops are becoming much more mobile then they used to be a few years ago. So to raise awareness and reach out to more people we need to adapt ourselves and make IndiaWilds easily accessed through a mobile phone using android OS.

Today, I am pleased to announce that we have created a mobile phone app so that people can access IndiaWilds anytime, anywhere without being tied to a computer. No need to type. One can access at the click of a button.

We have developed this app through Business Compass LLC a company based in Randolph, New Jersey, United States so that we create a good app.

Awareness is the first step before a person can become a champion of wildlife. I hope this will help us in reaching out to more people to raise awareness and make a real impact on the conservation landscape. If you have an android device then please download the app from this link:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.businesscompassllc.indiawilds>

Wildlife Photography -

Glandular Bush Frog by Abhishek Jamalabad



Celebrating Monsoon_ Snail in Yeoor by Anil Kumar Verma



Wildlife Photography -

Ghost Crab by Dr Hari Venkatesh K R



© ayurharivenkatesh (2014)

Ratufa indica centralis – NSTR by Subhash Srivastava



© Subhash Shrivastava

Wildlife Photography -

Tiger in Black and white by Vipin Sharma



Malabar Grey Hornbill and the Scorpion -2 by Shyamala Kumar



Wildlife Photography -

Stork-billed kingfisher by Jitendra Katre



Streaked Laughing Thrush by Prasad Dingankar



Wildlife Photography -

Pallid Scops Owl by Paramvir Singh



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/>

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Regards,
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