



# IndiaWilds Newsletter

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## Conservation and Prevailing winds in politics

The recent assembly elections in five states have proved to be disastrous for the Congress party as it could only win the Mizoram elections. Out of these five elections, it is the elections in Delhi that has seen some tectonic shifts in Indian Politics with the spectacular debut of the Aam Aadmi Party.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led by Arvind Kejriwal, is an offshoot of the mass protests led by Anna Hazare in 2012. The mass protests by Anna Hazare had galvanised the nation by bringing young and old to the streets. Not many people believed that these protests would have any value other than making the Government sit up and take notice. When one group led by Arvind Kejriwal decided that they have to form a political party, it was believed that they will not make much of an impact in the elections. However, in Delhi, the congress party has been routed and Aam Aadmi Party is now the second largest party in Delhi Assembly. With the outside support of the Congress Party the Aam Aadmi Party is going to form the Government in Delhi. Their brand of politics has stunned all the political parties. The Vice President of Congress, Rahul Gandhi was candid enough to give credit to the Aam Aadmi Party saying that they could connect with the common man better and promised that the Congress Party too will reboot their political structure and processes.

This is a time of big change. The cynical brigade of politicians of all parties are now grudgingly going to listen to the common man. In this scenario we hope to make our voice heard.

The general elections will take place in 2014. Every political party will now write their manifestoes. Earlier political parties used to write a manifesto as one of the routine chores. However, in this age of intense media scrutiny and debates, the manifesto will be taken seriously.

Today Manifesto of all our political parties are devoid of any reference to conservation issues. Unless we bring our issues to the mainstream, wildlife conservation community will remain isolated. We have decided to send our wish lists to all the political parties to include conservation issues afflicting India. We invite you all to kindly send us your suggestions so that we can create a robust set of Conservation Guidelines for Indian political



parties.

This is a proactive measure to seek inclusion of our demands to protect the fast vanishing wilderness and wildlife of India. In the second step, after the General elections, we will again send our demands to the winning party/coalition ruling the Centre for inclusion in the budget during May/June. I hereby request our scientists, naturalists, activists and people interested in nature and wildlife conservation issues to kindly spare some of their time to pen their thoughts on the issues that ought to be part of the national agenda and send it to us.

## Crocodile Intelligence:

In a stunning study on crocodilian behaviour, Vladimir Dinets from the University of Tennessee found that muggers and alligators use twigs as a bait to catch birds. In the past we knew that the crocodiles can lie motionless for several hours at a stretch and after sometime its prey forgets the crocodile's presence and mistakes it for a log. When the prey comes closer the crocodile moves swiftly to capture it. The crocodiles are also known to predate on bird chicks that fall from the nests. However, Vladimir Dinets's study shows that crocodiles not only lie motionless in shallow water but also use twigs as bait to capture birds that are actively looking for twigs to build their nests.



The crocodile lying motionless below tree with nests and not bothered by bird droppings on its head. The droppings camouflage it better

These crocodiles were observed to have collected twigs and position those close to their snout and wait for an unsuspecting nest building birds to come close to collect the twigs. This behaviour shows us the level of intelligence of the crocodiles.

It is interesting that this behaviour has been observed in muggers in India as well as in alligators in USA. How much of this behaviour is transmitted from the common ancestor and how much individual learning plays a part in this is yet unknown.

We human beings in our arrogance refuse to believe that animals have intelligence and instead describe it as instinct. In the past there have been many instances of hunters getting hunted after being hoodwinked by the tiger. I have had instances of tiger fooling me. <http://www.indiawilds.com/diary/tiger-intelligence/>

Similar level of intelligence is also displayed by elephants. One promising life was lost when he perhaps misunderstood the level of intelligence of an elephant. In a sad mishap in 1977, Mr. Rajasekaran Nair, Director of Wildlife Research and Education, Dehradun thought that he could dodge the elephant by running around a tree. The elephant instead of following him around the tree retraced its path and moved to the other side of the tree and he met his gory end. I strongly feel that animals display intelligence, which is at times more than man. Unfortunately, the scientific community will not believe these incidents unless proven other wise in carefully constructed experiments.

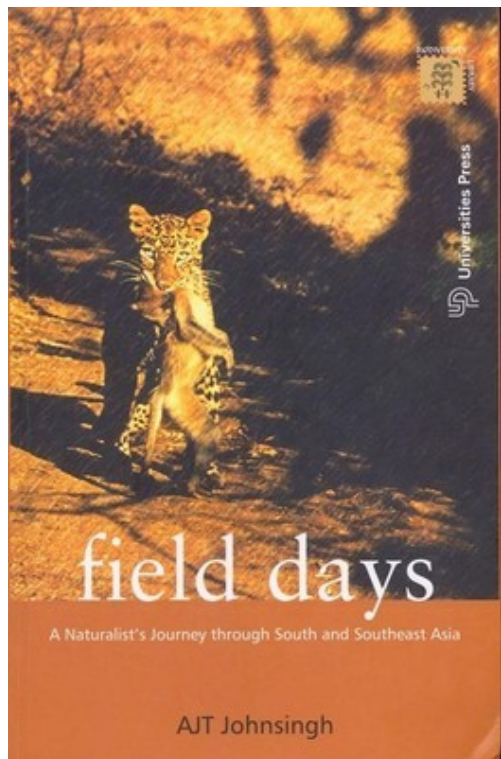
The researcher Vladimir Dinets had observed the behaviour of muggers in the Madras Crocodile Bank and not in some eso-

teric location. It is perhaps our failure to conduct systematic studies which results in we not being able to learn it. The other learning from this is that it is not just important to have facilities and expect scientists from this country to take advantage of it. Grants to pursue pure scientific research would be of help as well as a keen eye to observe a phenomenon in nature. I hope there can be more grants for research studies so that there can be more of talent flowing to the wildlife and conservation biology sector.

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## Book Review : Field Days - A Naturalist's Journey through South and Southeast

“Field Days, A Naturalist’s Journey through South and Southeast Asia” by AJT Johnsingh is a collection of writings by AJT Johnsingh, who needs no introduction among the researchers and naturalists as he has trained several hundred forest officers and researchers. Written in a first person account about his travels through various forests, undertaken during his stint with WII (Wildlife Institute of India) as well as his field visits in his research days, it is an easy read. The style makes the reader feel as if he/she is his fellow traveller, making it easy to read from start to finish at one go. However, to digest the plethora of information, one needs to revisit this book many times.



In the foreword of this book John Seidensticker writes “There is more to Dr Johnsingh’s records of his journeys than simply documenting change and lamenting loss. Modern conditions and future responses in a landscape can only be interpreted in light of the history of those landscapes. We need base-lines to know from where we have come and where we are going. Dr Johnsingh’s stories, besides being entertaining and informative in their own right, provide about the best ecological baselines we have for the most of the areas he has visited and studied”.

There are also interesting incidents mentioned in his book. One of those is about Dr Salim Ali, renowned ornithologist being part of a team involved in tranquilising an elephant. In another incident, Dr Johnsingh has mentioned about an elephant tranquilising effort gone wrong with the darted elephant collapsing on the edge of a nullah on her chest and dying. Unlike other biologists who completely deny that their tranquilisation efforts has resulted in charismatic animals dying, Dr Johnsingh readily takes the blame. The reader thus gets a sneak peek into the values and integrity of Dr Johnsingh.

Fans of Jim Corbett would also be excited to see that the small hamlets mentioned by Jim Corbett during his efforts to kill maneaters of Chowgarh, Talla Des etc also find a place in this book as Dr Johnsingh has retraced Jim Corbett’s path to assess the state of wildlife and make a comparison. However, that excitement would soon turn into despair when one comes to know about the devastation of those places. “Standing in the shade of an oak tree, and listening to the incessant chirping of cicadas, we imagined Jim Corbett on his four-day march from Nainital to Kala Agar, culminating in the stiff climb of over 3,000 feet. He would have found it difficult, as we did, to believe the changes that have taken place here in a span of seven decades. All along, Corbett would have found only degraded habitat, devoid of large mammals, and rivers empty of mahseer. He would have discovered that he could walk the distance without a rifle and the fear of any animal ambushing him”.

He not only documents the degradation but also offers suggestions to arrest the degradation of our mountains. He opines “Degradation can only be arrested if the ecological role of mountain forests (as catchment areas) is given greater importance than their economic role (harvesting timber). Massive afforestation of the denuded mountains, using native species, should be taken up on a war footing. Total control over poaching of ungulates is required to enable sambar, barking deer and goral to stage a come-back. An intensive and extensive education programme to make children and adults realise the importance of forests and wildlife should be launched immediately”. If only these suggestions were understood and implemented by the Government then we would have seen far less devastation during the recent Uttarakhand landslides.

In all the chapters he has analysed the situation of the places he visited from a conservation point of view.

Analysing the situation in Sariska Tiger Reserve after all the tigers were poached and answering the question whether tigers should be reintroduced in Sariska, Dr Johnsingh writes “..we do have the technological capability, but our political capability remains questionable. A thumb rule for re-introduction to take place is that all negative factors that led to the demise of the species in the area are either totally removed or brought under control before the species is re-introduced. Although poaching has been attributed as the reason for the sudden disappearance of tigers in Sariska, population modelling studies carried by Qamar Qureshi, a colleague at WII, clearly indicate that tigers in the reserve were gradually falling victim to growing pressures from human habitation, traffic and the pilgrimage to Pandupole temple. Qamar has stated that, without appropriate management interventions, with or without poaching, the population would have perished in the near future.

We can think of re-introducing tigers in Sariska only when at least four villages (Kiraska, Haripura, Umir and Kankwari) are resettled, both state highways are diverted, and pilgrims are asked to take the Bharthari-Kiraska-Pandupole route outside the reserve”.

Similarly analysing the situation in North East, Dr Johnsingh writes “Wildlife Conservation has suffered a massive setback in India’s northeastern states due to shifting cultivation, excessive hunting, insurgency and the fact that the forest department has very little control over the forest land. For example, Mizoram has roughly 88 per cent forest cover, which translates to 15,935 sq km, and of this, only about 7,127 sq km is under the forest department. Similarly, in the state of Meghalaya, the forest department controls only 12 percent of the 8,514 sq km of forests, while the rest is under the control of village communities and district councils. The rapid degradation and disappearance of village and community forests in these two states over the last few decades, due to shifting cultivation and uncontrolled illegal logging, forces conservation planning to be restricted only to the reserve forests and protected areas already established. This also highlights the fact that the forests can be protected only when they are under the strict control of the government. People, who are divided into many factions and have varied interests, cannot, by themselves, save the forests bestowed to them.”

The conservation challenges in all the places he visited have been nicely summarised and the solutions given. Only if there is someone to implement those!

There are some suggestions which can be easily implemented. For example he has given emphasis on the “forgotten art of walking” in the forests. “We may not be able to create new protected areas. We may have problems translocating villages and establishing forest corridors. But the one thing we can and must do, with our existing resources, is control poaching. Our staff needs to be motivated and taught the art of locating and catching poachers, gathering information on poachers from villagers, walking silently and waiting in ambush for the criminals, and also intercepting the mafia that finances most of the poaching. In this regard it becomes crucial that young forest officers revive the forgotten art of walking in the jungle, which many of their predecessors excelled at”.

These days a lot of forest officers consider themselves as administrators and I have heard the forest staff complaining that these officers hardly step down from their jeeps. Unless one walks in the forest, he/she is not likely to learn much. The sound of the vehicles drown the sounds of the animals and birds and a part of the experience of wildlife goes away if one is only confined to vehicles.

The book has a detailed list of vertebrates with their scientific names as well as a bibliography which will help researchers peruse the original references cited.

Field days with 339 pages spread over 37 chapters was published by University Press in 2005. My copy was priced at Rs. 375/- however, I find that the recent price is Rs. 475/- . This book is highly recommended for naturalists, conservationists, researchers, policy makers as well as the general public. Considering that the price is less than a family Pizza, even if you may not have the habit of reading books, buying this book and placing it on the drawing table may help people discover it.



## Conservation News -

### Amur Falcon positions as on 25th Dec 2013

The three Amur falcons which were trapped in Naga, Wokha and Pangti and realeased after radio collaring are now in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively. The latest positions and the track followed within Africa can be seen in this map. The Red dot denotes the position of the Naga Amur Falcon, the orange dot represents the position of the Amur falcon from Wokha and the yellow dot represents the Pangti Amur falcon.



Flight path from Nagaland, India. Major part over the Bay of Bengal

## **Conservation News -**

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### **Jayanthi Natarajan removed from MoEF, Petroleum minister gets additional charge of MoEF**

#### **Veerappa Moily's new green suit riles environment activists**

Veerappa Moily's appointment as the new union minister of state for environment and forests (MoEF) despite his eco-hostile track record even when heading other ministries has led to strong ire among the green lobby in the country. "Under Jayanthi Natarajan, the MoEF's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on river valley and hydroelectric projects never rejected final environment clearance to any project. Even in the two cases the EAC declined clearance, the MoEF simply asked developers to come back with reformulated proposals for reconsideration. Now, if she is being called a roadblock then you can imagine the kind of eco-unfriendly projects the UPA wants to unleash with its new appointee," said Parineeta Dandekar of South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers and People. "Is this how much the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance has learnt from its Delhi election debacle?"

Moily has battled all along for controversial hydel power projects. In September 2012, his hurry in laying the foundation stone of an 85-MW Mawphu Stage II hydel project in Meghalaya is cited by many. "He laid the foundation stone of the project being developed by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited without a single statutory clearance from MoEF," points out Dandekar.

In the same year, he urged the Arunachal Pradesh CMO to "fast track" hydel projects such as 2000 MW Lower Subansiri Project in a letter though this is being strongly opposed even by Congressmen from downstream Assam given the huge amount of displacement it will cause.

In 2011, Moily actually wrote to the MoEF against expanding boundaries of Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary in Dakshin Kannada, Karnataka saying people from affected regions will lose homes and livelihoods. Environmental groups allege that the pressure against expansion has been coming not from people but from the powerful hydel and timber lobby which is causing serious environmental and social impact.

Moily's support for the controversial Netravathi diversion project for his constituency of Chikkaballapur in Karnataka has also been under the spotlight. It has tried to escape environmental clearance from MoEF despite plans to build eight dams inside the eco-sensitive Western Ghats region affecting protected areas. "Despite studies showing it being economically and technically unviable, Moily has been aggressively pushing for this project," pointed out Dandekar.

Rajesh Krishnan of Coalition of GM-free India also echoed this sentiment raising conflict of interests, since projects from oil and petroleum ministry also come for environment clearances.

"His track record and his appointment at a juncture when the ministry is seized with several decisions on mega-projects which threaten forests and ecology will be seen as capitulation to industry."

Environmental activist Shripad Dharmadhikari of Manthan too called Moily's (whose appointment as petroleum minister in place of Jaipal Reddy had come in for sharp criticism as a sop to one corporate group) additional charge a quid-pro-quo. Repeated attempts to reach Moily for his response drew a blank.



## Conservation News -

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### Coast Guard launches 'Operation Oliver' to save rare turtles

KENDRAPARA (Odisha): As part of its annual mission to ensure the safe mid-sea sojourn of breeding Olive Ridley sea turtles in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary area of Odisha, the Coast Guard has launched 'Operation Oliver'.

In a joint coordination with the forest department, the turtle conservation programme is in full swing to keep watch and vigil on illegal fishing along the turtle concentration zone, said deputy commandant (Operation) of Coast Guard J V Paul.

With round-the-clock vigil, the coast guard is trying to provide adequate protection to the endangered species.

Besides its fleet of ships, CG has also pressed into service a dornier aircraft for operation oliver to keep a tab on illegal fishing in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary. The coast guard has organised interactive sessions with fishermen communities to sensitise them on the legal embargo on fishing during ridleys' nesting season.

"The patrol exercise for surveillance on trespassing sea-worthy trawls is in full swing as turtles perish in large number after getting hit on trawl propellers. Besides, breeding animals get entangled in fishing nets and are asphyxiated to death," said deputy commandant Paul.

As the turtles have begun arriving en masse for mating, an aircraft is being pressed into service for easy interception of illegal trawling operation along the marine sanctuary water zone.

"The coast guard is always on alert to check trespassing of vessels. The patrol vessels engaged by forest and fisheries department often seek CG ship assistance in the event of exigencies. The operation to save turtles is being carried on in a coordinated manner," he said.

A state-of-the-art CG ship is maintaining round-the-clock vigil along the coastal shoreline. The CG patrol in turtle congregation sites would remain in force till the marine turtles finish laying eggs on nesting beaches, added CG personnel.

There is an increase in awareness level among fishermen communities. As a result, unlawful sea fishing activity has dropped considerably this year. One trawl has so far been intercepted for illegal fishing since the prohibition was clamped on sea fishing from November 1 within the 20 km radius of Gahirmatha marine sanctuary.

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## Conservation News -

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### Odisha plans webcasting mass nesting of Olive Ridley Turtles

PTI | Dec 6, 2013, 01.12 PM IST

BHUBANESWAR: The Odisha government is exploring possibilities of webcasting the annual event of the mass nesting of Olive Ridley Turtle in the Odisha coast.

"It is expected that webcasting of this rare scene of the nature will bring world wide reckon to Odisha as Olive Ridley is a pride possession of Odisha", a senior official said after a review meeting presided over by chief secretary J K Mohapatra on Friday.

"The mass nesting scenes are ethical and aesthetic in the perspective of wild life protection and promotion of ecotourism," he said.

Odisha houses 50 per cent of total world population of the Ridley and about 90 per cent of the Indian population of sea turtles.

With sea turtles beginning to reach the state's coast for mass nesting, the state government has taken a series of steps for protection and conservation of the rare animal.

Reviewing the progress, Mohapatra directed officials to involve local communities, community based organizations and NGOs in the conservation and protection activities.

"It was decided in the meeting that regulated eco-tourism activities would be permitted during the nesting season at selected sites," they said.

Keeping in view safety of the visiting turtles, the state government has already imposed ban on fishing within 5 km from the coast by mechanised boats or trawlers.

As a result of protective measures, the number of mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles in Odisha coast has increased constantly over the years from 35,000 in 2001-02 to 4,65,000 in 2005-06, 5,13,000 in 2009-10, 6,94,000 in 2012-13.

The year 2010-11 recorded a sudden rise of nesting to the level of 7,24,000.

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## Equipment Discussions -

### Samsung Galaxy NX - Hands on by Rajan Kanagasabai

Hands on with a Samsung Galaxy NX

A cousin landed in from the USA today and had with her a Galaxy NX camera. I did play around with it for a few hours today and here are my views on the same.

It looks large. I placed it next to my 5D M II and with the 5D M III, it is slightly wider and taller, but width wise it is short. The rear is completely taken over by the mammoth 4.77 inch screen which carries the same resolution as a Galaxy S3 (1280 x 720) which is almost a 2800 dot resolution – maybe a lot better than any other camera in the line today.

It runs the Android Jelly bean OS (ver 4.2) and does pretty much what a smart phone with that OS can do, which includes mail, games etc, but mails on this is a joke for anything more than a line of typing will test your patience. There is a special application that controls the operations of the camera, which is quite easy to use.

At the heart of the device is a 20.3MP APS-C sensor along with a DRIMe IV Image Signal Processor with a crop factor of 1.54x which means the 18-55mm kit lens works like a 28-85mm equivalent.

The connectivity is impressive with a plethora of options. The first option is the Wi-Fi, the second a 802.11n , but for connectivity on the go, it needs a SIM and a data package, which in turn supports 3G and when it becomes available LTE 4G for fast speeds.

When connected the Galaxy NX backs up every shot to a Dropbox, which comes bundled with a 2 year 50GB account. Video mode is 1920 x 1080 at 30fps, or 60fps if you drop down to 1280 x 720. The device offers an imposing range of ISO, which peaks at 25,600 but I found the shots on it very decent until and upto 2000 after which it the grains started to show

Samsung Galaxy Camera NX key features

20.3MP APS-C CMOS sensor (same as NX300)

18-55mm F3.5-5.6 kit lens

ISO 100-25600

4.8-inch 921K LCD with capacitive touchscreen with Gorilla Glass

SVGA electronic viewfinder with diopter control

JPEG, RAW, RAW+JPEG capture

Movies 1920x1080@30fps, 1280x720@60fps

Built-in GPS +GLONASS (A-GPS supported)

16GB Memory, 2GB RAM

MicroSD card slot supports up to 64GB

1.6GHz Quad-core processor

DRIMe IV imaging processor

Android 4.2 (Jelly Bean)

4360mAh battery

Enhanced voice commands

Advanced Hybrid Autofocus: 105 points on-chip phase-detect; 247-point contrast-detect

Focus peaking

WiFi a/b/g/n 2.4GHz, 5GHz

Bluetooth 4.0 (LE)

NFC

4G LTE/3G HSPA+42Mbps cellular data

Bundled with Adobe Lightroom

1/6000 second top shutter speed

8.6 fps

This actually allows the Canon lenses to be mounted on the Samsung body. I reluctantly tried the basic 70-300 Canon lens and it returned a perfect fit. However, like some of the TC's the Autofocus and a few other functions were a casualty and only manual mode ops were possible.

I'm told it retails over ONE LAKH INR in India. Personally, I would rather spend that kind of money on a Canon body.

## Wilderness Updates -

### **The Bor Wildlife Sanctuary by Shyamala Kumar**

It is 120 sqkm of densely forested region situated about 70km south west of Nagpur. From Nagpur one takes the NH7 upto ButiBori ,then MSH3 on the Wardha route to Seloo, then north to Hingni where Bor is located. The only options for staying are the forest guest rooms which may be booked online on the MTDC site. The accommodation and food is very basic and no hot water was supplied to us in the month of Nov. Hospitality and friendliness was more conspicuous by absence.

That aside the biodiversity of the place is impressive. Besides the Bor reservoir there are streams, rivers, pebbled beds, teak forests ,bamboo thickets, lush plateaus, hills and hillocks. The safari trail is only 20km which is very short compared to others in Maharashtra. You are allowed to take your vehicle inside though gypsies are available for hire. Bor boasts a diversity of flora fauna-12 tigers leopards ,bears,wilddogs,sambhar nilgais wildboars, pangolins innumerable species of birds and reptiles.

It performs the role of a satellite WLS for the much large Pench and is proclaimed to be a breeding ground for tigers.



The colours are vibrant and the contrasts boggles the imagination.



## Wilderness Updates -



He sat perched on a tree rising from the river below practically level with the road. It was fascinating clicking him practically on level with our vehicle.

There were different species of parakeets gorging on wild tulsi and the air resounded with the calls of innumerable birds. Our trip was all in all a fascinating tryst with nature.



Towards the end of the day final quenching of thirst before retiring to the fields for the night.



## Wilderness Updates -

### Pakke Tiger Reserve | A Trip Report

#### A brief introduction to Pakke Tiger Reserve:

Pakke Tiger Reserve (referred to as PTR for the rest of this article) is a tiger reserve in the East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. At almost 862 sq km, it is quite an expansive reserve, with an equally large altitudinal range of 150-1500m asl. The northern part of the reserve, called “Pakke Kesang”, borders Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in the neighbouring West Kameng district. The type of forest here is generally referred to as Assam Valley tropical semi-evergreen forest, although one can find a significant variation in the dominant flora between regions. Several large and small streams are scattered throughout the park. The river Pakke is the dominant river in the region.

The park is open throughout the year. The weather during my visit was fairly chilly at night and hot during the day, with a moderate level of humidity throughout (much less than what I expected).



One of the striking features of PTR is the degree of involvement of the local Nyishi tribe with the Forest Department, in carrying out or assisting wildlife research and conservation activities and managing camps & tourism in the park. The chiefs of the surrounding villages and hamlets formed the Ghora Aabhe Society (literally “village chiefs’ society”) in 2006 after they felt the need for coordinated efforts to conserve the Pakke forest and its denizens. This society administers most of the activities in PTR, conducts activities to sensitise local children towards conservation and also works in unison with the FD and other independent researchers to conduct wildlife conservation research, most notably the monitoring of hornbill nests. They also penalise deforestation, slash and burn agriculture and the traditional hunting of wild animals, activities that not long ago were rampant in the region.

#### Day 1: Arrival at Camp

This was my first visit to North-east India. The trip was organised as an eleven-member group birdwatching tour to Pakke from 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November. The departure to Pakke from Guwahati commenced by hired SUVs on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, and the almost 280km long (but by no means monotonous or boring!) journey brought us to Pakke Jungle Camp at around 5 pm, by when it was pitch dark.

Pakke Jungle Camp (also known as Pakke Eco-camp) is PTR's primary accommodation option, run entirely, solely and to a certain degree independently by the locals, and administered by the Ghora Aabhe Society. Accommodation includes traditional bamboo huts and small tents. The camp has a library decently stocked with field guides and books on the history of the region and its people. The food served is pretty good with a local touch to it. A watch tower is also present in one corner of the camp. There is an electric fence around the camp periphery- this is a feature found throughout the region owing to a threat of elephant raids. There is a great deal of bird watching to be done in and around the campus.

## **Day 2: Trails around Langka**

Wildlife watching in the northeast necessitates waking up early in the morning. The sun rises around 5 am, and in about an hour the light is bright enough for good photography.

We travelled by the same SUVs to a small hamlet (about a half hour's drive) towards the Langka area of PTR, which is mainly broadleaved semi-evergreen forest. The streams on the way are worth watching. We could effortlessly sight spotted and black-backed forktails, white capped and plumbeous water redstarts, and a few other passerines at pretty close range. Walking uphill from the hamlet for a short while (with many more bird sightings- several flycatchers, niltavas, warblers, black-headed bulbuls, great & wreathed hornbills etc.) brought us to the Langka inspection bungalow (or IB) and anti-poaching camp, which served as our base of activities for the day. The bungalow is on a cliff overlooking an extremely scenic part of the Pakke river. The cliff edge again serves as a great place to sight canopy birds at eye level; these include streaked spiderhunters, minivets and other passerine birds.

Near the IB is a path that goes a very long way into the forest and is a great place to go birdwatching. We sighted several birds here, and almost all were new to me. The path has dense shrubbery on its sides and that gave me a great deal of macro subjects as well. We spent the entire morning, until lunch time, on this walking trail.

Post-lunch, a few of us in the group chose to go down to the river and walk upstream (the river being very shallow, not more than shin deep, at this time of the year). The climb down from the cliff is pretty steep and slippery, but is short and certainly manageable with a little care. Not many birds to be seen here, but the dazzling array of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies would draw anyone's attention. However, I did see my first crested kingfisher here, another plumbeous redstart, and the maroon oriole, an initially elusive sighting that would later start happening around every corner in Pakke.

By sunset we were back at the hamlet where the vehicles had dropped us off, and returned to camp.

One word of caution when visiting the Langka area: This place is teeming with tiny bloodsucking insects called black flies, locally known as "damdum". I usually don't bother much about creatures like leeches and ticks in the vicinity, but these damdum delivered a lot of painless bites to my legs (I was wearing shorts), which after a few days turned into very itchy sores, a few others who had been bitten that day reported painful swelling lasting a few days. Later research on the internet revealed that these flies are even giving a tough time to the Indian Army in Arunachal Pradesh!

## **Day 3: Trails around Khari**

On the third day we travelled by vehicle to the Seijosa main gate of PTR. En route to this place, near Seijosa town, is a small dam on the river Pakke, which offers a few bird sighting opportunities, mainly kingfishers, sandpipers etc.

From the park gate, we walked into the park along the safari route towards the Khari inspection bungalow, with the vehicles trailing behind us at 20-25min intervals (this is a good option since the IB cannot be reached all the way on foot). The start of the trail itself gave us our first mammal sightings- a Malayan giant squirrel, a hoary-bellied Himalayan squirrel and a few minutes later a stunning sight of a young black bear climbing down a tree and rambling off into the undergrowth (I had always dreamt of a bear sighting on foot!). We also saw a good deal of birds- green-billed malkohas, orioles, several flycatchers and warblers again, blue-throated barbets, a great barbet etc. Certain sunlit clearings in the forest yielded a bonanza of butterflies.

After walking for a while, we proceeded to the Khari IB, arriving there around noon. Post lunch, we crossed the Pakke river near the IB and walked on into a distinct tract of forest characterised by a good amount of secondary bamboo growth. This area had us witness a few more birds at close range, including the mountain tailorbird and more warblers. Also found the pugmarks of a leopard and wild dogs alongside prints of deer and elephants.

As it approached sunset, we turned back and boarded the vehicles. We were half way out of the park and it was near dusk when we were blessed with another marvellous sighting- a red-headed trogon. The extremely eventful day couldn't have ended on a better note.

#### **Day 4: Trails around Khari (2)**

On the morning of day 4 we were back at Khari (after having seen a couple of oriental pied hornbills en route), this time covering those parts of the trail we had missed on the previous day when covering ground by vehicle.

This was another very fulfilling day in Khari. The sighting and photographing of a flying frog early that day really lifted my spirits high! This was followed by some difficult to photograph yet very fulfilling encounters with wreathed hornbills. Walking on, we came across a bat (later identified as a lesser hairy-winged bat) that was lying inconspicuously in the middle of the safari road, apparently dazed by daylight. It moved only after someone's foot missed it by a few inches. Fortunately there didn't appear to be any injuries; we put it on a shrub at the roadside after making a few images, from where it flew off.

Shortly after, we saw another charismatic species- a pair of pied falconets. Approaching the Khari IB, we were blessed with another mammal sighting- a troop of capped langurs. After arriving at the IB, a few of us decided to venture upstream of the river we had crossed on the previous day. Parts of the river bed were exposed, and this proved to be the ideal habitat to sight some more birds- a river lapwing, a black stork, a spotted forktail, a white-capped water redstart and a blue whistling thrush perched on an overhanging branch. The river bed was also a haven for tiger beetles which were literally all over the place.

We also saw some more wreathed hornbills around here.


Lunch itself was had late that day, and following this we headed out of the park as the sun began to set. Again, the place offered a dream sighting towards the end- a flock of six silver-breasted broadbills.

#### **Day 5: Other Short Trails**

Day 5 did not have any scheduled plans, so we used it to look around the camp premises, which should by no means be discounted as bird-watching spots.

We sighted another forktail in a small stream right outside the camp to get us going. This was followed by a falcon and several more passerines.

After breakfast at the camp, our Nyishi guide took a few of us willing people for a trek to a great hornbill nest that he monitors (being winter the nest was empty at the time). The trek was arduous at times with a lot of dense vegetation to

crawl through and a lot of ant nests to avoid . It paid off though- besides all the birdwatching along the way, the sight of a hornbill's hollow high up a rainforest tree with huge buttress roots is a sight to behold. I could imagine how much more majestic it would look with its owners around.

Immediately after this trek, a handful of us eager to make the most out of our last day chose to embark on a short trail up a small stream behind Vivekanand Kendriya Vidyalaya (VKV) in Seijosa town. This trail is overgrown with very dense vegetation- offering some interesting macro subjects. We also sighted one more forktail, one more maroon oriole and the elusive pygmy wren babbler here.

The rest of that day was spent at the camp, with a folk dance by the tribals followed by a long chat with two members of the Ghora Aabhe Society.

This brought the trip to a conclusion, and we left for Guwahati early next morning.

## Natural History -

### COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: ' TIGER, TIGER!'

The Sunday Statesmen 22-Dec-13 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

" The Indian Tiger is famed all over the world. When the people of other countries think of our wild beasts, they think of the tiger at once, and everyone knows this animal in our country. It is even to be found on our 10-rupee notes. But it did not always live here and there is good reason for believing that it belonged, at first, to the cold northern parts of Asia and came to India long, long ago.

Even now, after so many hundred years of living in India, the tiger does not like our blazing sun and lives in thick forests where it is shady and cool, and hunts by night. It is also very fond of water and is a fine swimmer.



Mrudul Godbole

### Tiger

However it has lived so long that we can rightly call it ours. It is also found in many other Asiatic countries, in Manchuria and Burma for instance, but there are no tigers in Ceylon.

It has been said that the magnificently striped coat of the tiger is useful to it when it goes hunting. The stripes, it is said, look so like the streaky, upright light and shade on the tall grass that the animals it hunts missed seeing it. I must say I have never thought this true. For one thing, the tiger hunts by night when the light is so poor that the pattern of its coat is not to be clearly seen and when there is no strong light and shade, moreover a tiger stalking its prey takes very great care not to show itself till it is near enough to pounce. Tigers have marvellously sharp hearing and good sight, especially at night, but their sense of smell is not so sharp.

There are no black tigers, but there are white tigers, near Rewa. These are not pure white, but very pale, with the stripes in pale brown.

And not for the important question. If a lion and a tiger fight, which will win? Honestly, there is no sure answer to that ques-

tion. A large lion and a large tiger are equally matched, but most people think the tiger will win, size being equal.

It lacks the protective mane of the lion, around the throat, but it is more agile. An American professor has tried to answer this question by going into all cases where the two beasts have fought, in captivity, but it is not a fair way of answering it. We do not know that in such cases both fighter was full-grown and in hard condition.

The lion and tiger have mated in captivity. The cubs are called ligers if their mother is tigress (the father being a lion) and tigons when the mother is a lioness and the father a tiger. The liger is even bigger than its parents when grown but there is nothing remarkable about it. It looks rather like a maneless lion with faint tiger marlings at places, and is wholly a man-made beast. That is why I have not drawn it for you in the tailpiece, but have given you a half-grown tiger cub instead.

That is only part of the reason. Here is the whole truth. When I had drawn the tigress in the bamboo jungle (in the headpiece-that is to show you the pattern of the coat mainly) I showed it to a fellow artist and he said many unkind thing about my tigress, how she lacked muscle and tigerishness and looked so like a striped cat. Stung to the quick by this, I have drawn a unique tailpiece for you - no one has dared to attempt a tiger (even a half-grown one) in this pose before. Here is a tiger catching a mouse! Tigers, when famished, have been known to eat frogs, and I don't think an young and inexperienced cub is above pouncing on a mouse. Moreover, my drawing will show you how a tiger (like all true cats) can turn its arms and pads inwards, and even upwards and grab all things with outspread claws. You may ask, "But where is the mouse?" No, it is not crushed into nothing between the tiger's paws. Being inexperienced, the cub missed the pounce and the mouse ran far away, well beyond this page."

-M.Krishnan

This was first published on 28 August 1955 in The Sunday Statesman

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## Natural History -

### Leaf bird collecting spider web for nest

by Roopak Gangadharan

At first I thought this female Golden fronted leaf bird was going after the spider, spiders are high on the menu of leaf birds.



But it didn't touch it, instead it kept flying into the web with its beak open, came back keeping the beak still open and rubbed it against the stem and then the wings, it took me a moment to realise it was collecting the spider web as nesting material.

It was joining the multiple strands glued to the open beak and wings, after flying into the web, together to form a thicker strand or mass to carry it to the nest.



It is common knowledge that birds use spider webs for reinforcing and as cementing materials in building nests but it is not often that one gets to see how they collect it. This bird made 3 trips in total was moving without a seconds rest and i completely failed to get proper focus.



## Natural History -

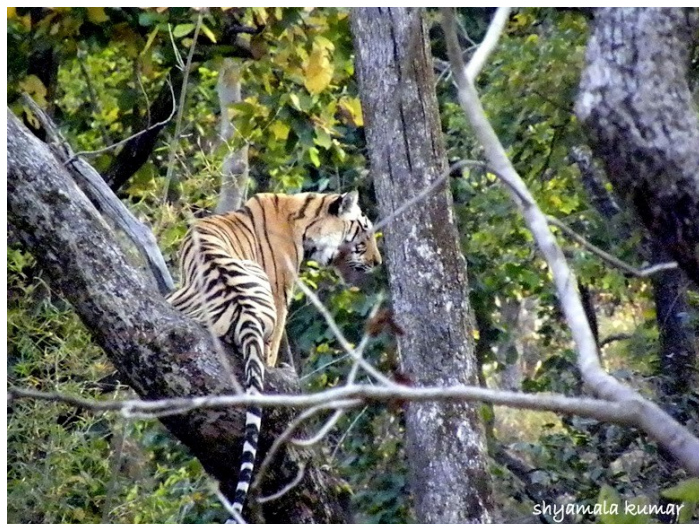
### The Tiger who went up a tree and couldnt come down-Kanha, march 2012

by Shyamala Kumar



I witnessed a rare scene in which a fully grown male tiger cub bounded up a tree growing on the side of a steep gully about 22 to 25 feet from the ground and remained stranded there right up till the end of our safari time. The mother it seemed had left this cub and his two sisters alone while she had gone hunting. His sisters prowled below growling upset why their brother continued to remain upon the tree. This incident took place last year in march and since it was too far for my DSLR I recorded it with my Nikon Coolpix p90.

He seems comfortable for the time being watching us triumphantly from his vantage point. The start of a little apprehension perhaps?



That was a close call. One tiger who bit off more than he could chew. A tricky turn has to be executed. Note the instinctive sense of self preservation.

A well deserved clap on the back for achieving an adroit turn. Where are my sisters by the way?



## Wildlife Photography -

### Snow Leopard Sighting by Sucheth Lingachar



### Snow Leopard—Dream Come true by Hymakar Valluru





## Wildlife Photography -

**Black panther sighting by Praveen Siddannavar**



**Jungle Cat by Roopak Gangadharan**





## Wildlife Photography -

### Eurasian Eagle Owl by Subhash Shrivastava



### Red breasted flycatcher by Jitendra Katre





## **Wildlife Photography -**

### **A Common Tailor Bird by Anand Madabhushi**



### **Blue bearded bee eaters by Mrudul Godbole**



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## **Wildlife Photography -**

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**The Rays by Punith Suvarna**



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**Russell's viper by Abhirup Dutta Gupta**





## **Wildlife Photography -**

**Flying Frog (North East) by Abhishek Jamalabad**



**Wild Gaur by Uday Kiran**





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,

**Sabyasachi Patra**

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