



IndiaWilds Newsletter

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Inside this issue:

TSR Subramanian Committee report : Worst threat to Wild India since the British	1
Flying Water Tankers	10
Conservation News	13
Book Review - Elephant Gold - P.S. Stracey	16
Equipment Discussions	19
Natural History	21
Image of the Month	25
Wildlife Photography	26

TSR Subramanian Committee report : Worst threat to Wild India since the British:

The High Level Committee report is for the industry, by the Industry.

The MoEF&CC had set up a High Level Committee (HLC) headed by TSR Subramanian to review various laws. The committee has now given its report, suggesting a complete overhaul of the laws specifically in areas related to environmental clearance to Industries.

While reading the preamble of the Subramanian committee report, one may get hope as it makes some right noises, but soon suggests the exact opposite:

“In the race for development, which ideally ought to improve the quality of life of the citizen, the relationship with environment is often lost sight of. That environment is sacrosanct; that the knowledge and application of science warrants harmonious use of natural resources without destabilising the cycles of nature; that the purity of air, water and land has been inherited by a generation in mortgage for children of tomorrow; that it is implicitly imperative for each generation to leave the environment to the next generation in a better state than they found it”. (page 7)



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TSR Committee Report: Last Nail in the Coffin of Wild India



The efforts of the Committee were primarily focused in line with the philosophy as spelt out above to secure the transfer to the maximum for future generations. (Perhaps the committee doesn't understand that the transfer of maximum is completely intangible and hence a bogus idea. A profligate man hell bent on consuming all his income as well as present assets is not going to leave much for his child. He can very well argue that he tried to leave the maximum for the future generation which is absolutely nothing. When the committee uses such weird logic, the outcome of their report can be easily guessed. Nevertheless read on to learn more...)

Free For All:

The committee believes that *“All the Acts under review of this Committee fail the litmus test. Either penal provisions are lacking, or not sufficient, or not proportionate; or the criminal justice system is not appropriately aligned”*.

Once the weakness has been identified, we expect that the committee would have proposed to plug the loopholes and remove the weakness.



Criminal justice system lacking: Lion electrocuted by farmer in field in Gujarat

Instead, the committee in its infinite wisdom has proposed to abolish all checks and balances and depend on self-certification.

“A new concept of ‘utmost good faith’ has been inducted, through a new legislation, to ensure that the applicant for clearance is responsible legally for his statements, but would be severely penalized, as prescribed, for any deliberate falsehood, misrepresentation or suppression of facts. While this would throw the responsibility primarily on the project proponent, this would also significantly reduce ‘Inspector Raj’.”

The committee has prescribed increased levels of penalty if you are found guilty. However, how the NEMA or SEMA (the new bodies which would replace the CPCB and SPCBs respectively) would find the guilty is yet to be established.

The HLC report says “The special environmental courts designated under this Act shall take cognizance of the serious offences only on a complaint by the officers authorized by the NEMA or SEMA, as the case may be. A member of the public may also file a complaint provided that the complainant satisfies the court that the authority concerned failed to act on his complaint lodged during three clear working days before approaching the court and provides credible evidence of his bonafides”. (page73) Hence it primarily boils down to the authorized officers to track the guilty.

Even if there were a system of checks, then the officers will not follow a strictly random sampling, which has statistical validity, but will follow an accidental sampling. Under statistics, a random sampling system means each sample has an equal probability of being caught. So if you are doing a survey with random samples, means say every first house of a row is taken as a sample or every 5th house of every row. On the other hand, most of the times though the word random is used, accidental sampling is done. For example, instead of surveying say every 1st house of a row, one goes and surveys wherever a respondent is found in whichever house.

Now there would be enough incentive to the “game the system”. So most likely these officers will go and check industries on their whims and fancies. Which means the guilty with the collusion of these officers will not be checked and hence will continue to go scot-free.

When there are large corporates like Enron folding up due to fraud, how the committee is able to think of “utmost good faith”? Which corporate entity in India are you going to believe? Remember that Reliance was raided by orders from non other than the BJP’s Shri Lal Krishna Advani and its senior officials jailed as confidential documents under OSA (Official Secrets Act) were found. 2G case where the losses to the Government were estimated to be 1,76,000 crores by CAG is still going on with some corporate head honchos arrested and now under bail. Related to this case, the Honorable Supreme Court had found the CBI Chief to be complicit in this case and had ordered his removal from this case. The Coal Scam is being investigated and majority of the mine allotments have been cancelled. The reputed Birla group as well as other group like Jindal is being investigated. In another case the Honorable Supreme Court is aghast that even placing the owner of Sahara group in prison is not of much help as they are not depositing money with SEBI. So even a prison sentence is not a deterrent for some.

The social mores have been changing. No longer a Railway minister resigns when there is a train accident like Lal Bahadur Shastri did. Today ministers are corrupt and are ready to falsify even their academic credentials. No longer heroines fear to take the vamp role. In fact, porn stars have been accepted as Bollywood stars. So in this ethical vacuum, placing faith in the “utmost good faith” of corporates is either stupidity at its worst or simply a case of ushering an era of “laissez-faire” where corporates are free to do as they wish.

And if there is a huge blast like the Bhopal tragedy before any random or accidental check as mandated by the benevolent TSR Subramanian committee then who is going to be responsible?

Blaming Judiciary & Stripping its powers on environmental issues:

The HLC opines “*The Executive, as pointed out has not covered itself with glory – indeed it has invited the attention of the judicial branch through lack of basic care. The statutes are primarily aimed at enhancing the environmental components, be it forest cover or wildlife population or keeping air and water clean. Who pays for pollution? Who suffers? Who enforces? Who monitors? Who punishes? The legislations are weak, monitoring is weaker, and enforcement is weakest*”. (page 8/9)

However, it then moves on to blame the judiciary by saying “*Continued lack of credible policy and implementation response by the executive has now seemingly rendered the judicial system appearing to intervene at the slightest and first pretext – appearing at first sight not to provide solutions but to complicate the issues further*”. (page 22)

With this belief of Judiciary over-reach, the HLC proposes to strip powers of any court to stop a project cleared by the environmental authorities.

*“Exclusive Power of the Environmental authorities: **Notwithstanding any judgment, decree or order of any court**, the subject of permission to cut trees or to deal with forest, forest product or forest land in connection with any project that has received environmental clearance under this Act, or in connection with road building or any other activity of public importance as declared by the Government and approved by the Cabinet specifically or generally, shall be dealt with only by the Environmental authorities concerned who shall decide the amount needed for compensatory afforestation and collect the same before granting permission. The decision of the authority, subject to the decision of the Government in revision, shall be final.”* (page 71)

First the Government throws a bill reined in the Supreme Courts to appoint judges. Now through this, they are trying to prevent the courts to hear environmental matters. So any forest can be opened up to a project in-lieu of compensatory afforestation. We can plant trees but cannot create a forest. We don't even understand the complex web of inter-relationships that exist between various species in a forest. This is far reaching changes which will put the last nails in the coffin of our wilderness areas.

Subjective Criteria- Intentional Loopholes:

The committee says that *“It is the view of the Committee that areas which are rich in biodiversity must be strongly protected and activity allowed in these areas only when there is an overwhelming advantage in terms of economic development”*.

When the Government wants it can always justify a project based on “overwhelming advantage”. The terms used by the committee like “**overwhelming advantage**”, “**utmost good faith**” are very subjective and appears to be designed to be used by the authorities in allowing various projects. We are appearing to be like China, decimating our environment and forests for industrial growth.

Denotifying designated forests – A way out for Compensatory Afforestation:

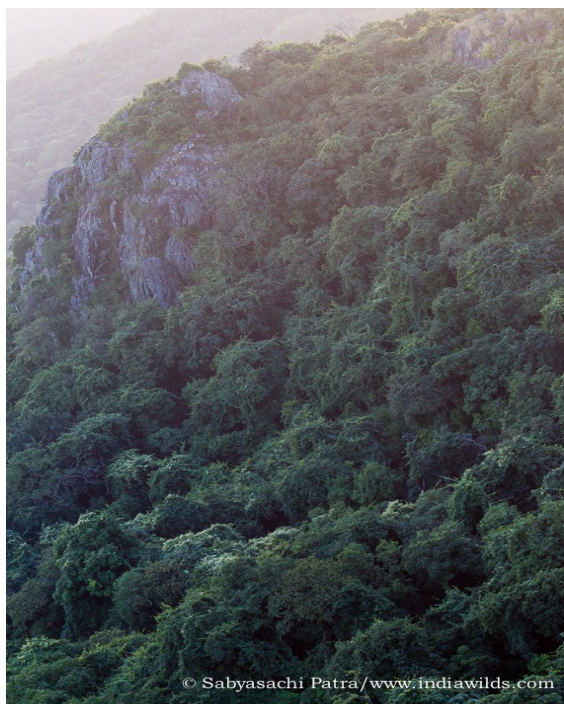
The committee wants to denotify all the plantations that were designated as forests, saying that these social forestry was done and the user departments in some cases had asked protection from felling of these trees by getting these places notified as forests. On the other hand the committee wants that large tracts of private land with tree cover be allowed to be traded to Industries who are required to do compensatory afforestation in-lieu of setting up a project in a forest land. So now the industries can easily buy back the plantations which were denotified by the Government and then they can handover these back to the forest department as part of their compensatory afforestation requirements. In one swift stroke, the committee removed all “pains” from industries. So they need not do even any compensatory afforestation. In short, everything is ready to be sold to the industries. A sad day indeed for our environment and wildlife.

Trashing Forest Conservation Act:

The HLC, has given a plethora of suggestions to trash the existing FC Act, 1980 in order to benefit the industry.

At the moment, proposals for diversion of forest land require certification from concerned authority to the effect of settlement of rights under Forest Rights Act. The process requires approval of Gram Sabhas.

The HLC argues that for linear projects like roads, gas pipelines, irrigation canals, transmission lines are generally for the benefit of the community at large so the villagers and other forest dwellers will benefit from this project and hence recommends to take away the need to seek approval from the gram sabhas. Unfortunately, nothing can be farthest from the truth.



Dense canopy cover at Meghasani in Similipal Tiger Reserve

Will the TSR Committee care to explain how a forest dweller will be benefitted when Reliance lays down its gas pipeline? If a transmission or power distribution company decides to set up a high power transmission line over a village, under TRS Committee's recommendation they will not be able to object.

In the name of Streamlining process?

In the name of streamlining procedures, the committee proposes self-certification.

"The present system is procedure-oriented, with insufficient focus on the need to safeguard environmental considerations. From the analysis of the data seen by the Committee, the average time taken for clearances works out to significantly longer than specified in most cases, whereas most projects sooner or later obtain approval; one analysis indeed indicated that the percentage of approved projects works out to 99.1% – clearly the focus is not on substance". (page 45)

Interestingly the Committee makes no mention of the data or the supplier of data on the basis of which it makes all these inferences. There is no mention of name of respondents in the Annexures.

The committee finds flaws with the existing system as to how the existing EIA is inadequate among other things. However, instead of strengthening the process, it makes a blatant attempt to completely do away with it.

"The Committee takes note of the elaborate laid down procedures for all the types of clearances and consents by various government authorities. There is overdependence on the information provided by the project proponents – it should be noted that in the current dispensation, the consultant is remunerated by the project sponsor, and has no incentive to bring out all the relevant facts, some of which may be adverse to the interest of the project proponent. The most important task of conservation of environment has been lost in the present approval process in GoI as well as at the level of SPCBs. Little effort is made to assess damage to environment; there is no prescription for environmental reconstruction; there is no costing imposed for environmental degradation and subsequent reconstruction programmes; the cumulative impact of the project output on depleting natural resources and/or polluting the environment is not taken into account in an integrated manner in the decision making process for project clearance." (page 48)

No Public Consultations for majority of cases:

The committee's suggestions is in sync with industries who have in the past tried to only limit participation in the consultation process and keep away NGOs and other people who are not agreeable to the project.

The committee recommends, *"The method of public consultation prescribed in the existing notification should continue with the modification that only environmental, rehabilitation and resettlement issues are captured in the public hearing. A mechanism should be put in place to ensure that only genuine local participation is permitted"*.

The TSR Committee says *"There is no necessity for public hearing in locations where settlements are located away from the project sites"*.

So in places like Ratnagiri where releasing hot water by the Nuclear Power Plant to the creek is going to impact the livelihood of the fishermen or in Gujarat where Adani's Mundra SEZ project blocked the access of fishermen to the sea, with the changes proposed by the TSR committee, these people will have no right to raise their voice.

The committee also wants to dispense with local consultations *"in respect of situations when it is reported that local conditions are not conducive to the conduct of hearing, or in the matters of projects of strategic importance and national importance"*.

So when the local stakeholders overwhelmingly don't want a project for example in Ratnagiri or in Odisha against Posco project, the MoEF can then term the situation as "not conducive to conduct hearing" and simply give approval to the project. The TSR Committee is making a savage attempt to break the democratic foundations on which Modern India has been built.

TSR Committee's priorities are clear. It wants to fast track projects in power sector, coal mining arguing that the power sector and coal mining which are the growth engines for national economy may be given a fast-track treatment through special procedures. It also wants to fast track laying of gas pipelines, transmission lines and transportation lines terming those as beneficial to the community at large. By and large these projects have the maximum impact on our fragile ecosystem. So fast-tracking these projects and silencing its opponents will be huge blow to our environment and wildlife and can only fasten the onset of climate change.



**Wild Elephant feeding below
High voltage power lines**

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Limitations of Science:

The TSR Committee believes that all environmental clearances should be done by the use of science and technology and doesn't appear to believe that there can be limitations to science or interpretations of the data. However, later in the report it talks about limitations of science and cautions the MoEF&CC about GM (Genetically Modified) crops. Though it is a welcome move that the committee has taken note of the adverse effects of GM crops and to the fact that European countries haven't allowed field trials of GM crops, the TSR Committee should have also been equally cautious about the complete dependence on technology to clear projects.

The committee believes that areas with 70% and more canopy coverage would be No Go areas. However, it doesn't take into account that not every place has got 70% canopy coverage. Only in very few places today, one finds such dense forests.



Without 70% canopy cover and close to border areas, these pristine places can be up for grabs

Also, simply getting data about canopy coverage may not tell us about the health of the place. For example a patch of forest can have lantana (an exotic plant that has been the bane of our forests) and they grow into tall and dense bushes and can give misleading canopy cover figures.



Grasslands don't have 70% canopy cover and according to the TSR Report can now be given to industries endangering the life of its denizens like this blackbuck

India is blessed with different bio-geographic zones and different forest types. A wetland or swamps, dry scrub forests, grasslands or high altitude montane ecosystems are as valuable as dense forests with 70% or more canopy cover. So suggesting “No Go” areas which are only limited to 70% canopy cover suggest either TSR Committee has no idea about India’s biodiversity and forest types or it just wants to do away with India’s natural heritage.



Migratory corridors for mega-fauna like elephants will be opened up for industries as these areas won't have 70% canopy cover. Human animal conflicts will increase

Bowing to Religious lobby:

Whereas TSR Committee talks about using science to open up India’s forests for allowing industries at another level, it disowns science to please a few religious fanatics. It proposes to permit people to enter into forest areas to pour milk in the anthills on Naga Panchami day. People mistakenly believe that snakes drink milk and on the day of Naga Panchami they pour milk and the poor snakes, who are poikilothermal ie cold-blooded, suffer when milk is poured over them. Some of them are able to escape through different exits. Some snakes are not so fortunate.

The TSR Subramanian committee has made a few other suggestions which appear more of an afterthought.

Ban Plastics:



Deer munching on a wafers packet dropped by tourists in Bandipur National park

Among other things the TSR Committee report also includes recommendation to include polythene bags and plastic bottles in the banned list of products under section 32 and stop visitors from carrying those into the PAs. I think they should have mentioned disposable plastic bottles as no one throws expensive bottles like that of Tupper Ware but only throws the disposable packaged drinking water bottles. The committee doesn’t talk about littering of wafers packets, aluminium foil food wrappers in the forests. Many animals love to lick the wafers packets to get the salt content and either die by getting hit by speeding vehicles or swallow and die a painful death. The Committee report doesn’t take those things into cognisance. So though banning poly-

these bags is a good idea, not including other items like wafers packets and aluminium foils in the ban list doesn't solve the purpose.

Noise Pollution:

The TSR Committee proposes to incorporate noise pollution as an offence in EP Act and talks about loudspeakers in religious places. Recently there has been demand of banning loudspeakers in Mosques citing that puja pandals are required to adhere to noise pollution. It would be good if noise pollution can be included as an offence and none of the religious places be it Hindu, Muslim, Christians or of any other faith, allowed to violate it. However, one wonders if that can be implemented.

The TSR Committee has also made a few other suggestions in creating separate Environment and Forest services, generation of awareness of ecology and environment as well as Municipal Solid Waste Management and vehicular air pollution among others. However, even though they have talked about need for systematic Solid Waste Management, an area which is getting more interest from industries because of revenue potential, the HLC has failed to mention the need to implement the e-waste rules where the industry has an onus of taking back and recycling the electronic wastes. Clearly the thrust areas of this committee are as per the requirements of the corporates. So it won't be inappropriate if we conclude that the HLC report is for the industry, by the Industry.

Wild India in dire straits:

Till date the Britishers had inflicted the worst blows on India's natural heritage. However, this High Level Committee headed by TSR Subramanian will have an even deadlier impact on India's forests and wildlife. Ecologically fragile areas will be opened up to corporates to set up industries and will fragment the already fragmented wildlife habitats. Fragmentation of habitats leads to loss of genetic diversity and many species will become locally extinct. Already 24.8% of India's Geographical area is undergoing desertification. When we start declassifying existing social forestry schemes as forests and then by sleight-of-hand, hand it back to Industries to fulfill their compensatory afforestation schemes, the impact on forests and tree cover will be huge, which will further quicken the desertification process. On one hand the Government has rechristened MoEF to MOEF&CC which is supposed to give extra thrust to climate change, but on the other hand it undertakes efforts like this TSR Subramanian High Level Committee which aims to decimate our forests and quicken the process of climate change.

Wildlife and Environment had very few champions among politicians. With the opposition virtually decimated in the May 2014 elections the Government doesn't worry about-facing any challenges in the parliament to its efforts to change the various acts governing environment, forest, wildlife and pollution. Coupled with the fact that the environment and wildlife lovers by and large remaining quiet due to fear of persecution, the fate of India's Wildlife and Wilderness areas appears to have been sealed.

Flying Water Tankers

Indian's have become used to the sight of water tankers carry water to urban locations. The rapid urbanization and human population explosion has made our cities grow bigger and bigger with each passing day. From 6.2 crore people living in our cities in 1951, the rapid urbanization has resulted in 36 crore people living in cities in 2011. This has overstretched the ability to provide basic necessities of life to people living in the cities. Coupled with the unrestrained exploitation of ground water, the water table goes down resulting in wells becoming dry. The breakdown of municipal water supply due to creaking infrastructure as well as corruption has resulted in private water tankers supplying water to people. Rapidly these water tankers have become part and parcel of urban life. The importance of these water tankers have gone up so much that some of the water tanker owners have become influential and successfully transitioned into politicians.

However, till date we had never seen water being flown to a place using transport planes. Now the unthinkable has happened. India sent 400 tonnes of water primarily through its IL-76 “Gajraj” planes to Maldives through 10 sorties. The IL-76 planes of Soviet origin are used as transport planes and have been used earlier to transport rations to places impacted by natural calamities as well.



IAF IL-76 Gajraj planes carrying water to Maldives

Male, the Capital of Maldives faced massive water shortage due to a fire in the water treatment plant. This led to pitched battles in some parts of the city to grab bottled waters from the shops. Apart from sending bottled water to tide over the immediate crisis, INS Sukanya, a ship with desalination plant to convert sea water to drinking water was sent to Maldives. Another ship INS Deepak was later sent with around 800 tons of water. This effort was later augmented by a further 1000 tones of water from India.

The current problem may be due to a fire. However, this situation has brought into light the plight of the islands and low lying lands which would be the first to get impacted by climate change and get flooded. In such situations, the fresh water resources like ponds, lakes etc would get inundated and the water would not be fit for drinking. A tsunami like situation can suddenly wipe out the desalination plants as well as the ability of the neighbouring nations to help. Unfortunately, the bitter wrangling between the developed countries like USA, large emitters like China and the other BRICS nations of Brazil, South Africa, India trying to protect their own interests have resulted in mild climate change targets and the poor and low lying countries waiting to be wiped out as the initial mass victims of climate change.

However, there would not be any winners in this battle. We continue to remain profligate in our habits and are increasingly aping the materialistic high carbon lifestyle of the west. Civilisations have prospered as well as perished due to climate change. Our own Harappa, a once prosperous part of Indus Valley Civilisation was wiped out due to annual monsoon



India's High Commissioner in Maldives Rajeev Shahare handing over water. (Photo courtesy: MEA)

rains stopping for a continuous period of 200 years. Scientific studies have revealed the brutal reality of Harappa civilization being wiped out 4200 years ago.

(You can watch the short film "Fall of Harappa" by clicking on this link: - <http://youtu.be/sJw28lfNu2U>). Will we wake up to this reality and start mending our ways?

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>

Conservation News

Javadekar calls for IPR less collaboration to fight climate change

Dec, 2014

The Minister for MoEF&CC, Shri Prakash Javadekar delivered a statement as well as made an intervention to speak in the High Level ministerial dialogue at Lima and it appeared that he has learnt a thing or two in terms of play of words to create hype from his Prime Minister. He termed COP-20 in Lima as "COP of Hope". He said that as a minister lot of hope of our people rest on his shoulders, hope of achieving a positive outcome to the meeting which will set us on the path to an ambitious, comprehensive and equitable agreement at Paris next year.

Shri Javadekar reminded the conference of the sad fact that 1 in every 7 persons in the world today still lives in abject poverty. The number of poor people in the world is more than twice the combined population of Europe. All of them are in developing countries. He said that India is determined to ensure development to all these people and provide them with basic services of energy, water, sanitation, healthcare, education and employment.

He said that India is also at the frontlines of facing the impacts of climate change. Shifting rainfall patterns, recurring floods, stronger cyclones and droughts or soil erosion are exacerbating the challenge of poverty eradication and necessitate the allocation of scarce national resources for preventing loss of human life. Citing Green revolution as a practical example of how India managed global collaboration by developing hybrids to increase food productivity and the collaborative research to find the God particle, he called on the world to foster a similar spirit of IPR less collaboration to address climate change and further asked "Why do we want to profit from disasters?"

He felt that there is a need to address the genuine requirements of the developing countries by providing them equitable carbon space to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. Developing countries could do more if finance, technology support and capacity building is ensured. He called this to be a key focus of the new agreement.

The minister called upon the developed countries to urgently fulfill their legal obligations in the pre-2020 period. They must scale up their mitigation ambition now and urgently fulfill their promises for providing financial and technological support to developing countries. He said "an army marches on its stomach". Global climate action rests on the shoulders of the means of implementation, especially on finance and technology and he said that it has to be addressed on an urgent basis.

Acknowledging that some announcements have been made by some countries to contribute to the Green Climate Fund, Shri Javadekar termed the scale of these announcements remains inadequate and far from what has been pledged. He also said that INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) should include all elements including mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology and capacity building and stated that India firmly believes that the INDCs are to be 'nationally determined' and there shouldn't be any role for any ex-ante review in this process. Interestingly this view is similar to that of China which doesn't want to be questioned by anyone about its actions.

Oil Spill in Sundarbans

10th Dec 2014

A man-made disaster in form of an oil spill from a tanker has struck the fragile ecosystem of Sundarbans, the unique mangrove swamp forests which is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. An oil tanker collided with an empty cargo ship in Bangladesh-Sunderbans on 9th December 2014. A high alert has been sounded and forest officials along with other security agencies are closely monitoring the situation in the Sunderbans.

OT Southern Star 7, the ill fated oil tanker, was carrying approximately 350,000 litres of oil when it could not sight the empty cargo vessel due to dense fog. The oil tanker partially sunk after the collision and much of its oil has spilled.

“The oil spill will mainly affect the avifauna including migratory birds, the dolphins, otters, Olive Ridley Turtles and crocodiles. Many could lose their lives especially where rivers meet the sea. This is the time when migratory birds including those from Siberia frequent the Sunderbans. This is also the time when Olive Ridley Turtles come close to the beaches to lay their eggs,” said S B Mondol, former head of the state forest department.

According to Bangladesh forest authorities the oil had spread along a 40 km (25 mile) section of the Sela River and has also affected portions of Passur river. Indian forest officials are, however, hopeful that the spill won't affect the Indian side as each individual river drains into the sea.

Though till now there have been no reports of the oil spill reaching the Indian part of Sundarbans, due to the contiguous nature of the ecosystem, it is likely to happen in a few days time when the tide pushes the oil to different parts of Sundarbans.

It has been reported that the villagers in the areas near the disaster site have been trying to manually scoop the oil through sponge as well as jute and clothes and depositing it in the river bank. The tanker company to encourage this effort has announced to buy back the oil, even though it would be unusable. Given the magnitude of the oil spill these human interventions by the local villagers is not going to make much of a difference. The authorities are discussing use of chemicals but are not sure about the impact of these chemicals on the ecosystem.

The Sundarbans ecosystem has been reeling under the impact of unrestrained population explosion, land reclamation, increasing salinity due to reduced flow of fresh water in the rivers and poaching. These man-made disasters like oil-spills pose a severe threat and it may take a long time to recover.

Forest Department decides IIT-madras & Raj Bhavan shouldn't be home for deers. Shifts all deers outside protected areas to zoos in Chennai

Born Free to Zoos, these deers and blackbucks are now condemned to a live in captivity

The Tamil Nadu forest department has started catching spotted deers and blackbucks from IIT-Madras, Raj Bhavan and Anna University, adyar and relocating them to Vandalur Zoo and to the Guindy National Park. According to the forest department, any deers outside the protected areas would be caught and released in the Zoo.

According to the forest department this move is to stop the death of deers either from road accidents, gangs of street dogs as well as possible poaching. "They usually feed on food waste dumped in garbage bins. Some of them eat the plastic with which the food is wrapped. The plastic eventually kills the deer," said additional principal chief conservator of forest and Arignar Anna Zoological Park director K S S V P Reddy. "We have found balls of plastic in their intestines during autopsy."

According to an estimate there are about 500 spotted deers in and around Chennai, outside the protected areas. At one point of time, around 50 years back the spotted deers were found in most of the places in Chennai. Slowly with increased urbanization and felling down the trees and bushes, the habitat of the deers decreased and now they were restricted to few places like IIT-Madras, Anna University, Raj Bhawan, Adyar, Tambaram etc where they used to provide great joy to the people. The state government has allocated Rs 44.73 lakh to translocate and rehabilitate them. Officials plan to relocate at least 150 more deer by the end of March 2015.

Personally I had much joy photographing a leucistic black buck in IIT-Madras. Presence of these herbivores along with many birds in these places were sufficient to inculcate love and appreciation of our wildlife. Unfortunately, the forest department is putting an end to that.



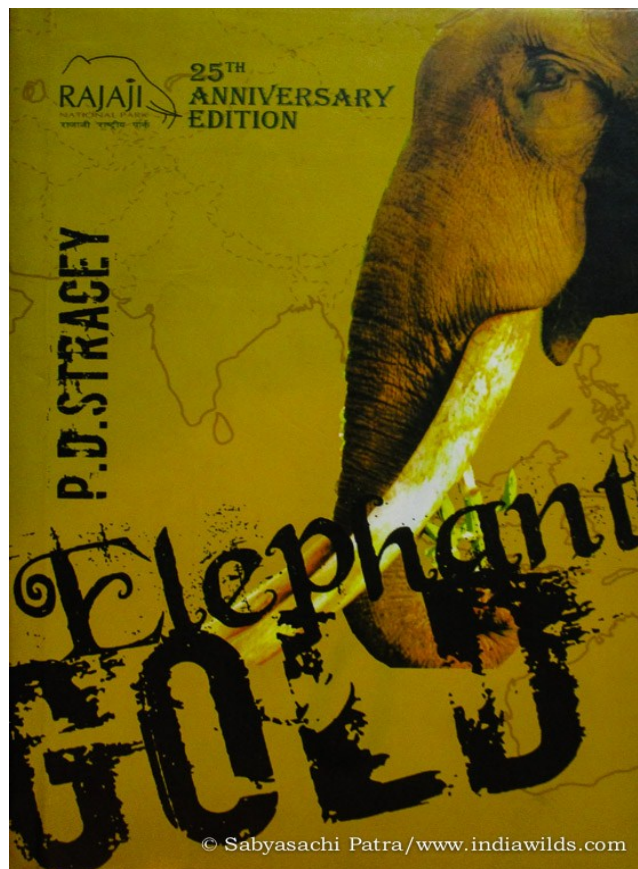
Leucistic black buck photographed in IIT-Madras

Deers multiply fast, if there is no poaching. These deers have been living for generations together in these places. They were born there and living for a long long time. If some of them died due to consumption of plastic wrapped food, then there should have been a cleanliness campaign. Why these deers have to be made homeless and forced into prison because people throw garbage?

Book Review

Elephant Gold by P. D. Stracey

As the name suggests, “Elephant Gold” by P.D. Stracey is a gem of a book giving us an unique insight into elephant behaviour from an Anglo-Indian man who started his career as a Khedda Officer in the Assam Forest Department in the pre-independence India.



In those days when the human population was low and large swathes of India was blessed with pristine wilderness, some wild-life like tiger, large deer stags and gaurs were seen as trophies to own and others like elephants were captured for their help in logging, engaging in difficult tasks as well as for religious and prestigious possessions by the wealthy. In such times, he was among the initial ones and his efforts have been detailed in the chapter “Pioneer Elephant Catchers”. He has given very detailed accounts of all aspects related to elephant catching and those are found in the chapters Theories and Facts, Capturing Elephants, Noosing Elephants, Elephant Drives, Handling and Training, Doctoring elephants etc.

However, his book is not just a monotonous description of the process to be called a manual. This book shows his keen sense of observation while he was learning the craft from the local elephant catchers known as “phandis”.

He describes in detail the behaviour of the elephants while noosing, in the stockade, their spirit as well as some quirks.

He delves into various methods of elephant capturing used in different places from India as well as in other Asian countries and it is an interesting read.

In the chapter titled Theories and Facts, he looks into the myth of a secret common natural burial place of elephants in the wild as well as whether elephants choosing a river to die etc. He examines the topic of maximum age of elephants, height of elephants as well as the musth phase. His observations regarding musth are interesting.

He says “ the Indian term for any unexplainable behaviour on the part of a man or animal is ‘pagla’, meaning mad and I do not think the term should be applied to animals, even in the case of a musth elephant, as the various forms of true insanity are confined to *Homo sapiens*. I believe, however, that all cases of assaults and sudden killings by domesticated elephants are either associated with the condition of musth or must be attributed to some provocation”. (page 58)

“The persistence of a large male elephant in musth is beyond belief....on one occasion we met a very large makhna or tuskless elephant, his cheeks pouring with musth fluid. He had in tow a small cow elephant which he had abducted from a neighbouring garden; her leg chains were still on and could be heard distinctly as she walked. As I was on a male elephant, we gave the wild makhna a wide berth; but he persisted on following us, with his little companion trailing behind, and in spite of our shouting he got closer and closer. I did not know exactly what his intentions were, but it was obvious that he resented the presence of our male elephant which he took to be a rival. Eventually the mahout got so nervous that I had to fire my gun”. (page 60)

The author believes “except in a fight, an elephant is definitely handicapped by really long, heavy tusks, particularly when negotiating thick forest. This is one reason why tuskers are not used in the noosing of wild elephants in mela shikar, nor are they popular on shooting excursions, where a staunch female is hard to beat”. (Page 61)



Tusker

Regarding sexual acts of elephants he says “It is wrong to belief that only an elephant in musth demands or is capable of sexual congress. Musth is a sign of sexual maturity, but it is the female which comes into season and decides the matter. There are no obvious signs, except that the males will start paying attention to a particular **cow, who makes little twittering noises** and behaves in a peculiar manner which is revealing only to those who have experience of elephants”

P.D. Stracey recounts an interesting incident where his male elephants tried to mount on a cow elephant without any fight among themselves. “One by one the big koonkis attempted to mount the cow and without any show of haste, violence or anger. It was surprising to see that some of the males in apparently good condition were unable to complete the act, whereas one of the Miri-owned koonkis, Kansira Goonda, who at all times was an animal of comparatively poor condition and looks, proved the most effective”. He further says that while this incident was being played out in the middle of the depot, “with all the men silent spectators but standing back in the shadow of the huts. This was surprising to me – the dignity with which the men witnessed the act, matching that of the animals which participated in it. The mating of dogs or horses or cattle invariably excites ribaldry and laughter among the spectators, but not this”.

He also gives an account of the cruelty involved in the training methods as well as the prevailing practice of killing adult males who get into the stockade as they can't be tamed. It also gives a peek into the psychological stress brought on elephants during the capturing and taming process. “Large male elephants are by no means welcomed by elephant catches because of the impossibility of handling them with the available koonkis and because of the damage they inflict on the smaller elephants in the stockade. A group of captured elephants is a group of frightened wild creatures; huddled together head to tail, the picture is a pathetic one. In the pushing, seething mass the adolescents bear in towards the centre, trying to hide their heads like ostriches under the adults. The larger elephants are more dignified, but the strain and tension tells on them too and occasionally they burst into furious assault on each other. Tusks are used freely to push aside those elephants which get in the way, while tails are bitten and maknas and females open their mouths wide and use their tushes to bear

downwards on head and shoulder”. (Page 113)

The author recounts an astonishing incident of a female elephant captured after 14 years of it escaping from the camp. “A party of mela shikar koonkis were hunting when they came on a cow elephant with two calves at heel, one of them a suckling calf. When she displayed no fear but stood looking at the tame elephants, one of the mahouts instinctively felt that she was an escapee. Taking a chance, he shouted loud and commandingly to her, ‘Baito! Baito!’ (Sit down! Sit down!) And to the astonishment of everyone the elephant sat down! The phandi immediately jumped from his kookin and running up to the elephant, caught her by the ear and scrambled up on to her neck. The bigger of the two calves ran away, but the little one followed at her heels as she was ridden back to the depot in triumph, the centre of admiration and the butt of jokes of the elated men, who jeered at her stupidity in being recaptured so easily”.

This incident shows that an elephant once subjugated and trained by its trainers is so broken psychologically that it can never overcome the training and truly escape.

This book is packed with many such interesting incidents that are not only thought provoking but also serve as great learnings for a student of natural history.

This hardbound book with 227 pages was first published in 1963. Its first Indian edition was in 1991 by Natraj Publishers. It is priced at 495 rupees but is available much cheaper online. In Amazon you can find it at only Rs. 306/- where as in flipkart it was available for Rs. 470/-.

Equipment Discussions -

Vitec Group buys SmallHD

The Vitec Group which owns most of the major brands in the photography and filming world like OConnor, Sachtler, Vinten, Manfrotto, Gitzo, Anton/Bauer, Litepanels, Katta, Petrol Bags, Teradek etc has announced that it has acquired SmallHD, a company which was well known by videographers and filmmakers for its high quality on-camera monitors.

SmallHD became an instant hit when they made available field-monitors which were of high quality as well as rugged to withstand the rigours of professional use in the field. The company was well appreciated for its collaborative approach with filmmakers and was open to their suggestions. Its customer support was excellent.



With the rapid increase of independent filmmakers and videographers, the need for quality, high-performing, end-to-end solutions has never been stronger,” said Vitec Videocom CEO Matt Danilowicz. “There is definite synergy between SmallHD and Vitec Videocom, especially given that their pioneering drive matches our own. The acquisition enables us to offer another set of professional and innovative solutions for the production workflow, and takes us a step closer to fully addressing the needs of this expanding and exciting market.”

“We are looking forward to joining the Vitec Group of companies,” said Wes Phillips, founder and CEO of SmallHD. “It’s exciting for SmallHD to be included among the great brands that they represent. We have aspirations to continue to build outstanding monitors, and Vitec not only encourages that entrepreneurial spirit but offers the support and expertise we need to move forward.”

Whereas it may have been good story on the part of the founders of SmallHD to sell off and encash on their investment, filmmakers mourn this as a loss because being a part of a large conglomerate often leads to loss of their strongpoints like round the clock responsiveness and also more focus on bottomlines resulting in slowing down of innovations.

The success of SmallHD can also be used as a case study for manufacturing. The founders of SmallHD Wes Phillips and Dale Backus. They created a spot advt. and entered the “Crash The Super Bowl” contest and won it. This helped them get many jobs for which they felt the need for better monitors. They started interacting with suppliers to get such a monitor

based on their specifications and the SmallHD line of monitors was born. Needing more money, they decided to enter the Super bowl challenge again and won a second time in 2010. The prize money helped them expand their business. SmallHD has also tried to raise money through Kickstarter for creating a hdmi /usb port protector for the Canon EOS 5D Mark III camera. So if one has the ideas, then sourcing the parts from China and Taiwan and creating a product for the local needs can help boost up the electronic manufacturing here in India.

Natural History -

Stalk-eyed Flies

Contributed by Abhishek Jamalabad

Among the enormous assemblage called the insects, the fly order Diptera is certainly one of the most fascinating, with a host of alien-like members, many of which are also worthy of recognition- the hoverflies are remarkable aerobats, and certain fruit flies from Hawai'i have their own elaborate courtship dances. One of the most weird and wonderful groups of flies, one that literally "stands out", are the stalk-eyed flies- Diopsidae.

There are not a lot of flies that one would add to a wish-list and strike off as a "lifer" upon a sighting- but the stalk-eyed flies are an exception. Not only are they amazingly unique to observe, they are not exactly easy to find.

The first time I saw stalk-eyed flies was on TV; they were featured in the natural history documentary series *Life*. Later, I encountered this fly (*Diopsis* sp.), quite by chance, twice in real life- the first time in Arunachal Pradesh, and then a second time much closer to home, in Karnala, Maharashtra.



© Abhishek Jamalabad

***Diopsis* sp. | Karnala, Maharashtra | Oct 2014**

What is perhaps most fascinating about stalk-eyed flies (once you grasp how weird they look) is the process by which their head develops into the shape that gives them their name. After emerging from the pupa as an adult, the fly actually pumps air into its head, expanding the sides of its head near the base of its eyes. Eventually, it pushes the eyes so far out that they stand out on very long stalks.

The second unique aspect is how the males use their bizarrely shaped heads for courtship. Firstly, the farther a male's eyes project, the more superior his genes, and hence, by natural selection, he is the one that gets a mate. Secondly, stalk-eyed flies are documented using their wide heads as battering rams, headbutting each other into submission. As always in the animal world, fights do not happen without adequate warnings, and the rivals raise their wings to signal their intent. These

Natural History -

flies are territorial, and they use these methods to safeguard their leaf (or other territory).



© Abhishek Jamalabad

***Diopsis* sp. | Seijosa, Arunachal Pradesh |
Nov 2013**

Stalk eyed flies are found mainly in humid forests, most commonly by stream sides, on leaves during the day and 'roosting' on exposed plant roots and stalks at night.

This fly's biology is a wonder in itself, but also turns one's attention to another, bigger wonder- the extreme lengths to which life evolves!

[Pictured in the following frames are the two stalk eyed flies I have encountered. Both were found close to streams, on short vegetation. Both were about 6-7 mm long.]

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'THE GAIANT SQUIRREL'

The Sunday Statesman: 23-November-2014 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

" The Malabar Squirrel, in spite of its name, is by no means confined to Malabar. It is found in the Ooty area and in Mysore, in Karwar and in the foothills of the Himalayas - in many places in India where there are forests, especially semi-deciduous forests. Away from tall trees growing fairly close together, it is useless looking for Giant Squirrel (as it is much happily named), for it is highly arboreal creature that rarely comes down from the treetops.



Malabar Giant Squirrel

The way it can race along the forest top, leaping from tree to tree, clearing the intervening air with easy grace, and deftly balancing itself on thin twigs, is truly amazing. It can hang upside down from the toeholds of its hind feet, and its great bottlebrush tail, which is fully half the length of the yard-long squirrel, is flung up as a balancer when it jumps from bough to bough.

When frightened by a too-close approach, it usually panics and bolts, and one has little chance of catching up with it again. But at times, when the sun is hot and it is not feeding or resting, it does not flee from scrutiny but climbs to the topmost boughs and hides in the foliage.

It can be comical in its concealment. As a rule, it is quite efficient in hiding, putting so much leaves between itself and the watcher that it is no longer visible. But occasionally it hides merely by stretching itself flat on its belly along a bough, and poking its head into the cover of leaves — the fluffy, conspicuous, white-tipped tail hangs down like a banner, and the rich brown body is clear against leaf and bark, but having buried its head in the foliage, it feels secure! The Giant Squirrel can beat the Ostrich of the legend.

Most of the time, though, it is watching you, although its immobility might suggest you that it has gone to sleep - it peeps at you through chinks between leaves, and should you try to get close it will bolt. The best way to look at this handsome squir-

rel is to scout around and find a tree in which it has built its football-sized nest of woven twigs and leaves and fibre.

This nest is more often used for siestas than for the security of the next generation, and you often find several nests in the same tree. Provided and unhurried, casual and totally non-furtive approach is made, one can sit down (much better to sit down when watching wild things - somehow this serves to reassure them) not far from such a tree and study one's squirrels at leisure.

Giant Squirrels are often found in the same tree with the Common Langur, both animals being extremely tolerant of each other. I have seen a baby Langur, no bigger than a kitten and still clad in dark fur, playing about on a bough on which a Squirrel lay comfortably stretched, while the mother Langur sat in a crotch nearby, exhibiting not the least concern for her progeny.

The voice of the Giant Squirrel is in keeping with its size, a loud, metallic, rattling call, clearly audible a furlong away.

Sometimes the call is abbreviated to what corresponds to a cheep or two of the familiar striped squirrel, but recently I was surprised at the sustained silence that these big rodents can maintain when they want to be silent. In a week spent in forests where there were plenty of Giant Squirrels, I saw dozens but never heard one, they fled in silence at my approach, or else hid in the treetops, but not once did they sound their alarm. I remember how loud they were in their alarm calls, on previous encounters. I wonder why all the Squirrels of the area were so silent this time - I can think of no likely explanation."

-M. Krishnan

*This was first published on 4 May 1958 in The Sunday Statesman.

Image of the Month -

The honour for the Image of the Month November 2014 goes to the image titled "Hangman" Small Tree Frog (*Rhacophorus lateralis*) by **Abhishek Jamalabad**.

This image transports me to a bygone era. Simply love it. Congratulations Abhishek!

The following is the original text by Abhishek:

I found this frog lying on a path in a coffee plantation I was surveying for amphibians. Fearing he would get trampled, I wanted to put him up on a shrub. However, when I approached, he leaped to a nearby reed, missed his footing, and narrowly escaped another fall by clinging on with two limbs. Curiously, he stayed in that position for quite some time.

I found this pose so amusing, it was hard to believe my eyes till I had a closer look. It was reminiscent of a Bollywood hero's pose on a film poster. 🍷

Canon 500D, Canon 100mm Macro USM

SS 1/200

Av 8.0

ISO 100

Minor crop

The reason I used Av 8 is to isolate the BG reeds from the frog. Undoubtedly the frog required more DoF, but narrower aperture settings made the BG distracting, rendering the frog hard to discern.



Wildlife Photography -

Leopard in Kabini by Mrudul Godbole



Jackal by Rajbir Oberoi



Wildlife Photography -

Alpha Male by Nishith Kumar



European Roller by Sucheth Lingachar



Wildlife Photography -

Steppe Eagle by Shyamal Kumar



Malabar Pit Viper by Abhishek Jamalabad



Wildlife Photography -

Two Worlds by Bibhav Behera



Starry Night by Jitendra Katre





I look forward to your inputs and support in preserving the last tracts of wilderness and wildlife left in our beautiful country. For other interesting articles and images check - <http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/>
To post in the IndiaWilds forums, you can register free of cost using your Full Name as user id at <http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/register.php>

If you are already a member of IndiaWilds and have forgotten your user id and/or password you can mail to administrator@indiawilds.com

Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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