



IndiaWilds Newsletter

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Highway to Oblivion:

Highways have integrated various regions and have helped in economic development. Till date Sher Shah Suri is remembered for constructing the *Sadak-e-Azam* which later became the Grand Trunk Road. Much later in Modern India, when the then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced his plan for the Golden Quadrilateral and East-West-North-South road building projects, there was much derision. However, within a few years time the benefit of the road building became apparent. Unfortunately, no one had visualised that these roads will be the cause of destruction of Wild India.

Just like a tool designed to enhance productivity can also cause destruction due to improper use, our ill-planned highways have become the cause of not only killing wildlife but also fragmenting their habitat. There have been many scientific studies which have given clear proof of habitat fragmentation leading to reduced genetic diversity and resulting in loss of ability of a species to cope up with the changing environment and facing extinction in the long term.

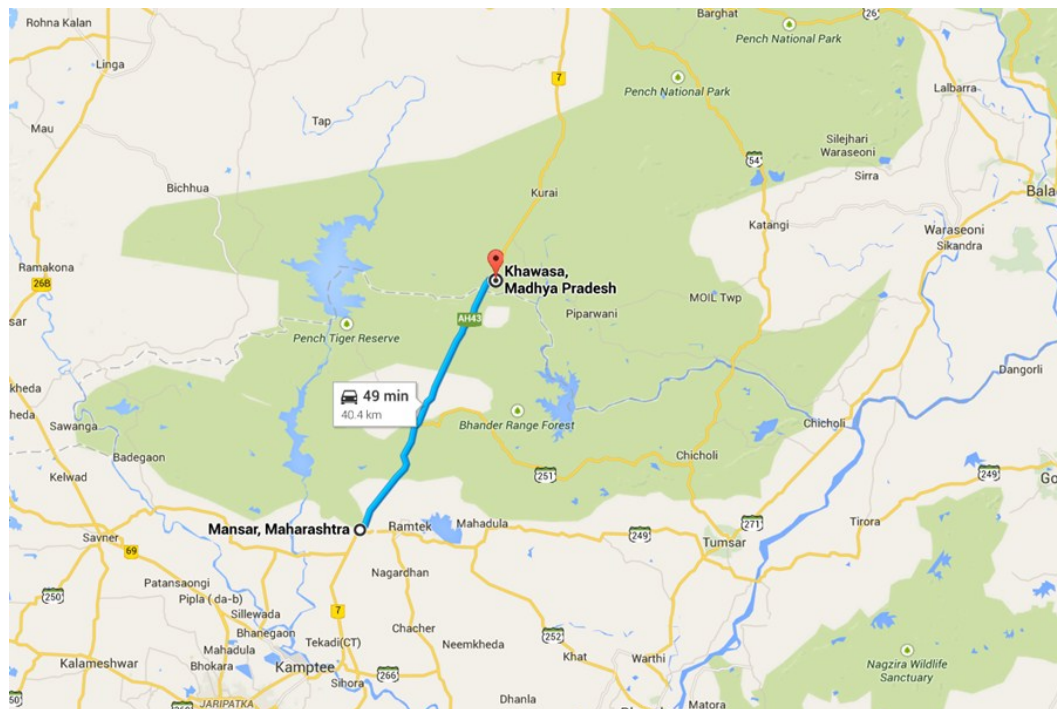
Our economic planners and Government officials very well understand the meaning of contiguity. Sometime back a SEZ (Special Economic Zone) project of a well known corporate was rejected as it was divided by a linear infrastructure. The Commerce Ministry didn't allow a bridge over it to classify the areas as contiguous.

So when a National Highway passes through prime tiger habitat obviously it would be understood by the Government that the habitat is fragmented and no longer contiguous. However the Government, including MoEF&CC - the arm which should be the guardian of Wild India – seems to be oblivious to the impact of roads on our wildlife. In a meeting to discuss widening of NH-7, even overpass and underpass suggested by experts to connect both the sides - so as to help wildlife pass to the other side - was not only junked by NHAI but the Hon'ble Minister for MoEF&CC called it "impractical and un-executable", clearly showing scant regard for our wildlife and our precious bio-diversity.

The NH-7 (National Highway 7) passing through the Kanha-Pench landscape through Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra is being widened to make it four lane so that high speed and container traffic can carry goods to our Industrial and commercial areas faster. Wildlife conservationists were alarmed when the Wildlife Institute of India had given the green signal to this fragmentation of habitat by this four-laning of NH-7 passing through



the Kanha-Pench landscape, albeit by suggesting some mitigation measures in form of overpass and under passes along the way. Unfortunately, not only this project is championed by the Highways and Transport minister Mr. Gadkari, the entire BJP Government seems to be behind it and the Minister for MoEF Mr. Javadekar, instead of thinking about the welfare of wildlife has termed the mitigation measures suggested by WII as “impractical and un-executable”.



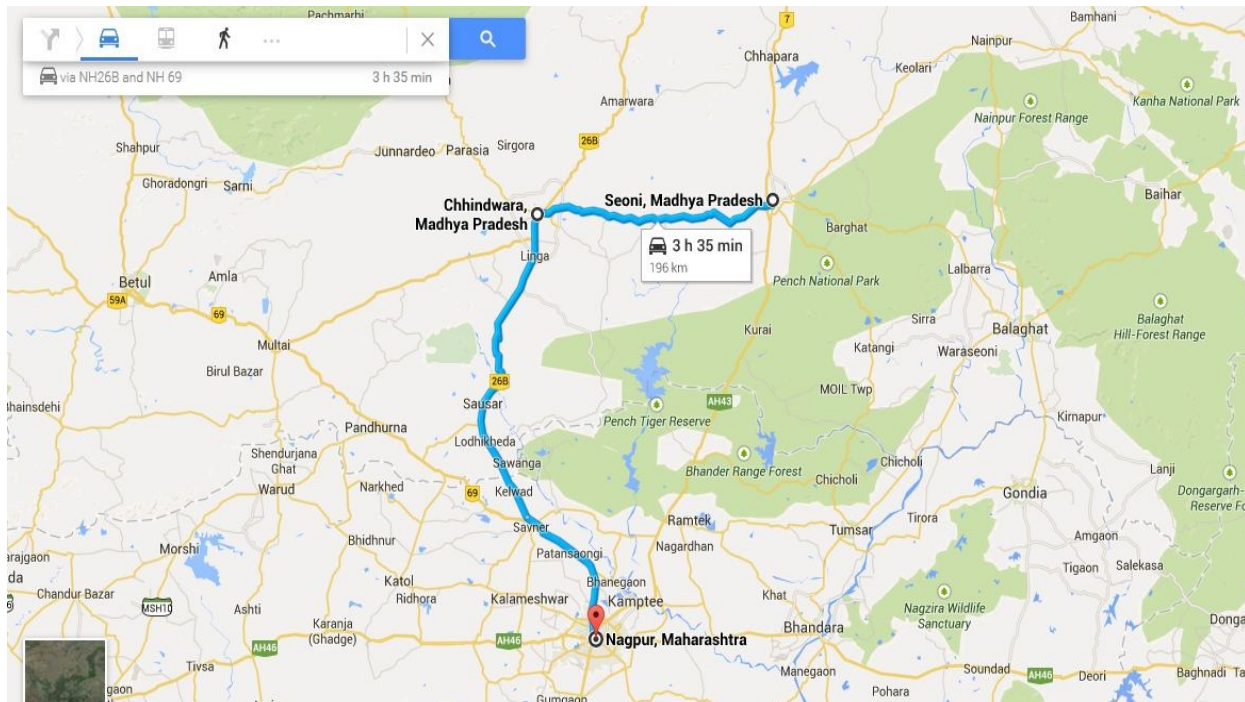
NH7 - Khawasa to Mansar stretch

In 2009, the Supreme Court appointed empowered committee (CEC) had clearly given their disapproval for this four laning project in both MP and Maharashtra side by saying “this is one of those exceptional cases where ecological security has to take precedence over developmental needs”. Interestingly at that time the NHAI had made a presentation that it was ready to spend 1125 crores of rupees to construct tunnels and elevated highways between Khawasa and Rukhad in Madhya Pradesh. However, the CEC had rejected the proposal due to the amount of disturbance that would have been caused by such constructions and had suggested an alternate alignment through Mansar and Seoni.

The Wildlife Institute of India for some inexplicable reason has watered down its own report about the mitigation plans and reduced the length of overpasses and underpasses. With favourable political masters, the NHAI now doesn't want to agree to the mitigation plans suggested by WII and wants to reduce its costs without any concern for wildlife. Now, the Government is going ahead with the Mansar-Khawasa stretch which falls in the Maharashtra side and has reportedly agreed to the NHAI mitigation plan instead of the Wildlife Institute of India plan so that an estimated 32 crores is spent instead of 244 crores by not agreeing to construct three overpasses two of which were 1 km long and one was 300m long. The NHAI plan is to only construct three underpasses of 50meters each.

The best mode of saving this tiger habitat is to consider alternate alignment Seoni-

Chhindwara-Nagpur. This will increase a distance of about 69km. When good roads are made, this extra distance of 69km can be very easily covered. Industry is interested in good and fast connectivity. 69kms is a small price to pay for saving our tiger landscape. This area has got a very good potential for revival and dispersal of tigers to other sanctuaries. If this landscape is fragmented due to such high-speed four-lane roads, it will act as a body blow for the tiger.



Alternate alignment Seoni-Chhindwara-Nagpur. This will increase a distance of about 69km.

Infrastructure development cannot be at the cost of sacrificing our wilderness areas. These pristine forests give rise to many of our streams and rivers. The trees in our forests also give up moisture which leads to rainfall. Our forests also work as our lungs

as they fix the atmospheric carbon dioxide through their chlorophyll and give up oxygen.

And interestingly our forests cannot survive alone without its wildlife. A research paper published in Royal Society of London's journal "Proceedings B" in Nov 2014 titled "*Loss of animal seed dispersal increases extinction risk in a tropical tree species due to pervasive negative density dependence across life stages*" (Caughlin T. T. *et al*) concludes that reduction of large herbivores have a cascading effect on the tree species. Habitat fragmentation due to roads not only has impact on the tigers, but also on other herbivores. The herbivores will be more cautious when suddenly their path is blocked by high speed vehicles and only small 50m wide underpasses are created. The herbivores would feel anxious and threatened to use such narrow passages and hence there will be a severe fragmentation of their population leading to inbreeding.

Photographs of Road kills



Insect



Common Indian Toad



Shield Tail



Green vine Snake

Herpeto-fauna find it very difficult to cross wide roads and many of them get killed while crossing the roads. Smaller carnivores also get killed, as creating three or four underpasses several kilometers apart is not going to help. A study by wildlife biologist R. Arumugam in the Chinari and Aliyari road in the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (<http://www.indiawilds.com/diary/road-kills-in-chinnar-road-and-aliyar/>) showed shocking number of road kills. Though our authorities only talk about the impact on tiger, herbivores as well as lesser carnivores, herpeto-fauna and other insects each play a role in the complex web of inter-relationships to balance our ecosystem and hence need to be preserved in its entirety.



Many lesser carnivores get killed by speeding vehicles

Preserving our wildlife and wilderness areas need will power. Unfortunately, that appears to be a very scarce commodity and is not often displayed by our politicians. The last such display of will power was by Mrs. Indira Gandhi when she banned tiger hunting despite tremendous opposition from the hunting lobby. At that time India didn't have much of foreign exchange reserves, however, she chose to stop the tiger hunting despite the hunting lobby citing loss of precious foreign exchange. Later Mrs. Indira Gandhi had agreed to start Project Tiger, thereby saving the tiger from extinction, at least till today. Unfortunately, hardly any other PM has shown the same will power in saving Wild India. The previous Prime Minister had the alibi of coalition compulsions. The present BJP Government has absolute majority in the Lok Sabha and hence the current PM doesn't even have that alibi. Will he show some mettle to save Wild India?

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

NGT puts up roadblock to Tree felling for linear projects

The Central Government's blatant push to trash the Forest Conservation Act and allow tree felling for linear projects like roads, canals, gas pipelines etc after in-principle approval has hit a roadblock in form of NGT (National Green Tribunal). The NGT has ordered that non-forest activities be stopped unless a final order has been passed by the State government.

The NGT issued the direction that such orders be put in the public domain as per the Forest Conservation Act. It also given its verdict that such orders issued by the State Government are appealable.

“No non-forest activity in the Forest Area that is covered under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, will be permitted and carried on in any manner whatsoever, unless an order has been passed by the competent authority of that State government and put in the public domain by putting it on its website and complying with the other requirements in accordance with law,” said a Bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar.

“As the law has already been stated by the Tribunal, that it is only an order passed under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, that is appealable under Section 16 of the NGT Act, we direct that appeals will lie against such orders to avoid difficulty to any litigant/ aggrieved person from approaching the Tribunal in accordance with law,” it said.

The Bench led by Justice Swatanter Kumar was hearing a petition filed by wildlife biologist Milind Pariwakam, who had challenged the validity of two communications dated August 8, 2014, and January 15, 2015, by the Centre. These two communications had virtually done away with the forest clearance for felling of trees for linear projects like highways, allowing felling and commencement of work right after in-principle clearance.

The National Green Tribunal has said: “The legal position undisputed before us is that permitting use of the forest area for non-forest activity can only be permitted under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, by the State Government in whose jurisdiction the forest falls. It is also undisputed before us that MoEF has intended to provide guidelines for expeditious granting of consent to the linear projects which are amongst others of national importance and necessary for the development of the country.”

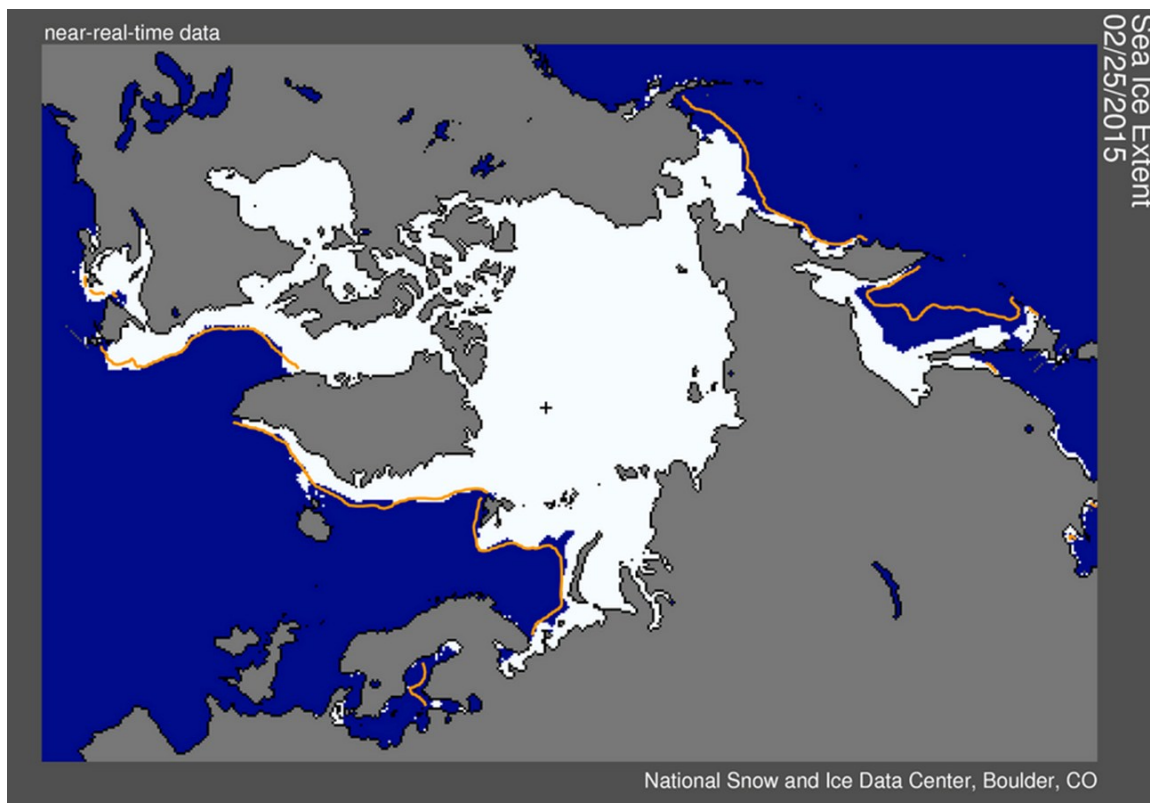
The Union Government has been trying its best to bend, circumvent, modify and even do away rules that are seen as hindrance by the industry, irrespective of their impact on our bio-diversity. The Minister for MoEF& CC, Shri Prakash Javadekar said the details were yet to be finalised by his ministry on acceptance of the TSR Subramanian Committee recommendation for enactment of a new umbrella law 'Environment Laws (Management) Act'. He said that every recommendation of the TSR Subramanian Committee may not be accepted by the Government. For details of the Subramanian Committee report and its possible impact, one can check here:

<http://www.indiawilds.com/diary/indiawilds-newsletter-vol-6-issue-xii/>

Climate Change: Warm winter in Arctic:

There have been horror stories of sudden snow storms and car accidents with many cars crashing onto each other in the highways in United States due to the cold winter. However, farther to its north, in the Arctic where the winter should have been more severe, it is a different story. During winter there is formation of heavy layers of sea ice

in the Arctic Ocean which takes time to melt during the summer. However, this year the sea ice formation in the Arctic ocean is the smallest as per the satellite records of NASA.



Orange line shows mean based on data from 1981-2010. The + sign is the Geographical North Pole. Sea ice data Photo: NSIDC

According to the analysis done by NSIDC (National Snow and Ice Data Centre) at University of Colorado, which is supported by NASA there have been several major variations this year. The peak of the winter ice cover was reached on 25th of February which is roughly 15 days earlier than the average date of March 12th based on data from 1981 to 2010. The enormity of this incident sinks in when we hear that, only once in 1996 the peak winter ice cover was attained before March 12th and that was only one day before March 12th as opposed to 15 days this year.

This year the peak winter ice cover was 14.54 million square kilometers. The previous lowest peak ice cover was in 2011 and this years peak winter ice cover was a massive 1.1 million square kilometers smaller.

Our earths climate is a result of a complex play of various factors, natural and man-made. With the massive increase in green house gasses due to industrial activities, huge reduction of tree cover which reduces carbon sequestration, the ambient temperature has been steadily increasing. The massive reduction in the winter ice cover in the arctic is a major sign that not everything is well with our mother earth. Though politicians world wide may be oblivious of this fact and keep on wrangling with each other as to who needs to spend more to combat climate change and to protect their narrow interests, climate change has become a reality.

The first to sink into oblivion would be the majestic polar bear. They need the winter ice to move from one place to other in search of food. Without ice cover, they would be stranded without food. Though the Polar Bear being a charismatic species like the tiger and we immediately think about it's fate when the polar ice caps are lower, it is not the only species at risk. The Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*), an endangered species according to IUCN Red List, is also impacted by the sea ice. According to an article titled "Annual Movement Patterns of Endangered Ivory Gulls: The Importance of Sea Ice" by Spencer NC *et al* published in PloS ONE on December 31, 2014, not only the timing of formation and recession of the sea ice but also the extent of the sea ice plays a large role in the distribu-

Conservation News -

tion and migratory timing of Ivory Gull. So one or two warm winters like that of 2015, can cause severe stress on the polar bear population, along with other denizens of the arctic.

With the ice cover reducing, it also impacts the various jet streams and the climate around the globe. After all even though we may categorize each other as black, white, brown and yellow, the survival of all of us is at stake. I hope this incident is given due importance by the United States of America and the other developed countries and the relax a bit from their rigid stance. The BASIC block of countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) who are leading the negotiations for the developing countries should also realise that the aping the high carbon life-style of the developed countries shouldn't be our goal. I hope these complex negotiations end soon, else we will continue to miss the 2020 and 2050 targets and these negotiations may lose their meaning. Pragmatism and statesmanship is the need of the hour.

Quarries & Environmental Clearance:

In a shocking verdict, a division bench of the Kerala High Court ruled that no environmental clearance is required for existing quarries less than 5 hectares. The Hon'ble Kerala High Court said that only new quarries located in kerala require environmental clearance from MoEF. "In case where quarrying/mining lease which were existing on the date of issuance of notification dated 14/9/2006 or on the date of issue of the order dated 18/5/2012 by the Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests with regard to area less than 5 hectares, no environmental clearance with regard to extraction of minor mineral is required".

In the Deepak Kumar vs Union of India case, the Supreme Court's interim order in 2012 had asked for environmental clearance for quarrying operations including mining of minor minerals.

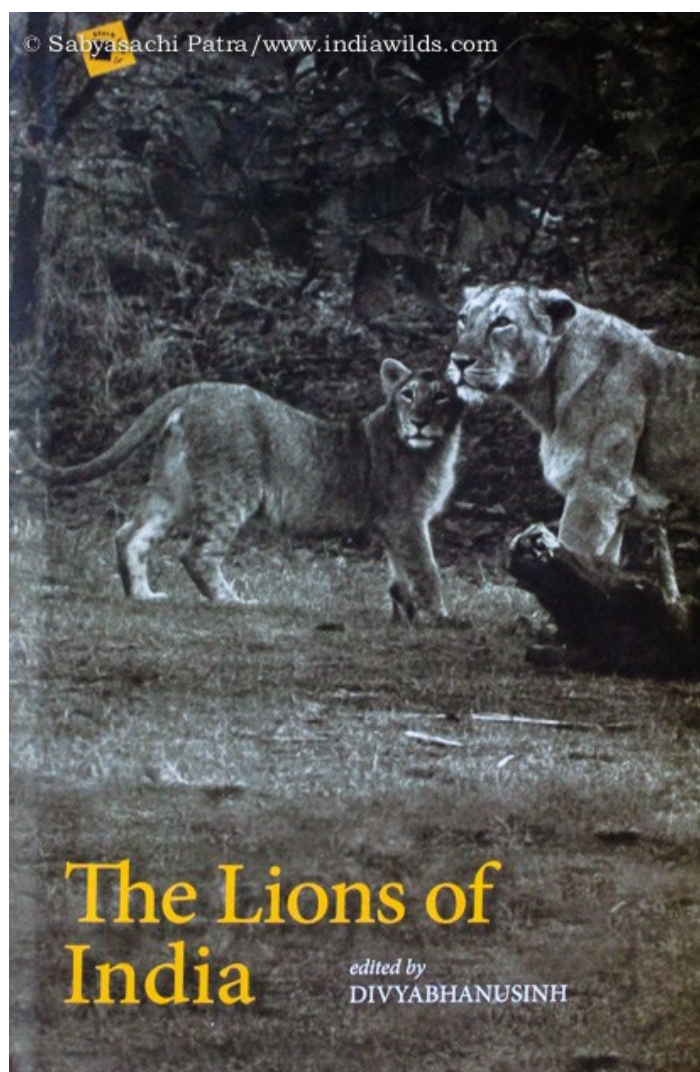
The division bench of the Kerala High Court has also said that without a mining plan in place the quarrying operations cannot continue.

These seemingly innocuous small quarries have pockmarked our ecologically fragile areas and no environmental impact assessments is done to consider joint impact of several such quarries in a place. It is time to be stringent with our mining activities.

Book Review

The Lions of India by Divyabhanusinh

The book “The Lions of India” by Divyabhanusinh is a thoughtful compilation of twenty-two articles from the late 1800s till 2008 by many authors. This book was published in 2008 and is of topical interest in view of the recent controversy about the origin of Indian lions, as well as the need to create a second home for them. From thoughts of British Army Officers who had mostly got information about the lions while trying to hunt them to the point of view of researchers, photographers, conservationists, this book has it all. The other quote, is among one of my favourites and is by T. E. Lawrence



The Contents is a simple listing page containing the author's name, title of article and the page number and it doesn't contain the serial number of chapters.

The introduction to the book is nicely written, well researched and gives a ready summary of the historical background as well as the present day challenges. The first chapter after the introduction titled “Lion Shooting” by William Rice was written in 1884 and provides information about Gir, the lions and their numbers. William Rice in the passing mentions about hunting pressure reducing the lion numbers and he believed that the thorn bushes were to be blamed for the comparatively less manes of the Indian lions. *“From being so constantly hunted, lions have left the open plains almost, and betaken themselves chiefly to the forests, where the numerous thorn bushes must drag out the best part of their manes, until they cease by degrees to have any left, except the very old lions. This is supposed to be the reason of the ‘maneless lion of Guzeerat’ being considered a distinct species, a title imperfectly accorded”.*

The next article is by another army officer L. L. Fenton titled “The Indian Lion (*Felis leo*)” and was published in 1924. Fenton writes about the presence of lions outside Gujarat *“Over 50 to 100 years ago they were to be found in fairly considerable numbers in the wilder parts of Gwalior, Goona, Saugor, and even, I believe, as far eastward as Allahabad. The country round Mount Abu, Deesa, and Ahmedabad, also along the banks of the Sabarmati river, as far*

as the Runn of Cutch were also favourite localities for them”.

S.M. Edwardes and L. G. Fraser's article “The Gir Forest and its Lions” published in 1907 talks about the deforestation in Gujarat in its opening lines. They write *“Coming to the great Gir forest south of Junagadh city, one soon realises that it is almost the only stretch of real forest land left in Kathiawar, though the whole province must in earlier times have been very thickly wooded.”*

Charles A. Kincaid in his article “Indian Lions” published in 1935 summarises the major reason for lion's debacle in India. He writes *“The Indian lion once roamed over the whole of India. In the early Sanskrit fables we hear a great deal about*

lions but nothing about tigers. The reason is that the tiger is a newcomer....It (tiger) drove the lion completely out of Bengal and then out of Northern and Southern India. When the English came, the lion was still holding out against the invader in Central India, Guzarat and Kathiawar; but the English completed the lion's defeat. It was exterminated in the two former provinces and its only refuge left is in Junagadh, a state in Kathiawar, where there are no tigers and where H.H. the Nawab preserves the lion against the English sportsmen."

Sir Patrick Cadell in his article "The Preservation of Wild Life in India: The Indian Lion" published in 1933 writes "*there were supposed to be less than a dozen in 1880, and about the same at the beginning of the century when Lord Curzon's visit was cancelled*". Lt. Col. A. H. Mosse in his article "The Lion of the Gir" published in 1957 recounts the controversy surrounding Lord Curzon planning to shoot the last remaining lions and the reasons for cancellation of his lion shoot. "*The feelings aroused on the subject found voice in some lines published in the leading Bombay daily. Of these I remember but a word or two contained in a plea that the lions of the Gir should be allowed to remain in their last retreat undisturbed by 'Viceroy or Vandal'. It was rather hard on Lord Curzon.... In the ear of such a man a tactful word, explanatory of the real urgency of the case of that still living antiquity, the Indian lion, would surely have received a sympathetic response, and have achieved as satisfactory a result as the cruel alliteration of that 'Viceroy or Vandal'.*"

There are also chapters on Lion census giving us a peek into the prevailing methodologies including baits and challenges. This book also includes two articles by S.S. Negi titled "introduction of the Indian Lion in Uttar Pradesh" (1966) and "Transplanting of the Indian Lion in Uttar Pradesh" (1969) and tells us the story of the first failed attempt at lion translocation and the learnings from it.

Divyabhanusinh has also included Dr. Ravi Chellam's article "The Lion's of Gir" where he talks about his field work in Gir which resulted in the later proposal for relocation of lion to Kuno in Madhya Pradesh. The acute need for a separate home for the lions is well described in this article as well as the later article by Stephen J. O' Brien in "Pride and Prejudice" published in 2003.

O' Brien writes about his stunning findings that the lions of Gir had encountered a genetic bottleneck not just in the late 1800s and early 1900s but faced it about 2100 years ago. This was found by obtaining the blood samples of lions and checking the genomic microsatellites. He writes that this genetic bottleneck has resulted in physiological changes. "*Asiatic lions look different in several respects from African lions. They are a bit smaller, and most have a marked skin fold running along the length of their underbelly. Males have a very shortened man, and about half of Asian lion skulls, including all of today's Gir lions, have a bony ridge in the cheekbone that crosses an opening for nerves to the eye called 'infraorbital foramen'. In all other field species and in African lions, the foramen is a single opening with no bridge. These physical characteristics were originally thought to be adaptations or at least modifications associated with the long time that Asiatic lions were isolated from African lions.... We now believe, however, that these physical traits in Asian lions are manifestations of extremely severe inbreeding in their very recent past. The evidence for our conclusions was encrypted in their genes.*"

In the last chapter titled "Region's Honour, Nation's Pride: Gir's Lions on the Cusp of History" Mahesh Rangarajan summarises the politics of regionalism that restrains the relocation of lions to Madhya Pradesh for creating a second home. Though that article was written in 2008, even seven years later the case is still in Supreme Court as Gujarat has filed a review petition against the Supreme Court order for relocating lions to Kuno in Madhya Pradesh. One of the chief protagonist, the erstwhile Chief Minister of Gujarat Mr. Narendra Modi is now the Prime Minister of the country. The Lion now adorns the "Make in India" campaign. However, nothing much has moved as far as relocation of lions to Kuno for establishing a separate home for them and securing their future.

Divyabhanusinh's pen has aptly summarised the plight of the lion "*The lion has no votes and a democracy of humans is likely to look after only the interests of its own kind and not of the other over 370 mammalian species that call the land-mass of India their home as well.*"



Lion cub from Gir.

Photo Credit: Anand Madabhushi

This hard bound book aptly titled “The Lions of India” contains 267 pages is published by Black Kite. It is priced at Rs. 395/- . I hope the publishers of this book can make a Kindle version available so that it can reach to many more readers and help dispelling some of the recent stories doubting the origin of lions in India. It is highly recommended not only for researchers, wildlife enthusiasts, natural history lovers but also for students and the common people as well.

Equipment Discussions -

Go Pro Hero 4 Impressions:

I have the Go Pro Hero 4 in my hands since last year. Prior to the Go Pro Hero 4 Black, I had the Hero 3 Black. I had skipped buying the Go Pro Hero 3+ as the update was incremental and I didn't feel it was sufficient for my needs.

The Go Pro Hero 4 Black is popularly known as Go Pro 4 and shares the same small form factor of its preceding Go Pro cameras.

The Go Pro4 has the 4K resolution as its selling point. It can shoot upto 30p at 4K. At 2.7K resolution the Go Pro Hero 4 Black can shoot upto 60fps and at Full HD ie. 1080p at 120fps, as well as a host of other frame rates like 720p at 240fps which I don't use. The Go Pro can also shoot 12 Megapixel still images and has a time lapse video mode.



The Go Pro 4 can shoot in 4K by using its entire sensor in a Super wide mode. So one needs to be very close to the subject, else everything will appear tiny. Ofcourse, it also has its applications, as one can now shoot wide establishing shots with it. While shooting for a sports documentary for HBO, I also put the Go Pro 4 through its paces to test its real world application and whether some shots from this camera can be used for broadcast.

At the starting of this video clip the establishing shot of the stadium was easily done through the Go Pro. The next shot of the pole vault could easily show the vault, landing and then moving away of the athlete in a nice continuous motion. Ofcourse it was only possible by mounting the Go Pro on a Steadicam Curve, as holding the Go Pro simply by hand induces too much jitter.

Since I was shooting with the C300 from one end of a sprint race, it was not possible to cover both the starting as well as end. I choose to be at the finishing tape and placed the Go Pro on the ground at the starting blocks. Since I had to rush back to my position after placing the Go Pro, the placement was not right and more of the ground was in the frame. For a 1080p ie Full HD finish, I tried cropping up and the Go Pro holds ok if you don't do massive push and pull of the files. Remember that one can hook up the Go Pro 4 with a smart phone and can easily control the framing, unless you are a person like me who doesn't have space for a smart phone.

Equipment Discussions -

Later I tested the Go Pro 4 at Sundarbans shooting wide range of subjects from labourers carrying sand, cooking inside a motor boat, crocodiles etc.

The Go Pro Hero 4 Black, comes in water proof housing like the previous models and can be submerged upto 131 feet deep. While I have never in my life dived to such depths, I did briefly try exploring the shallow waters of Chilika lake. One can have interesting results of flora and fauna even in shallow waters.

Unfortunately the Go Pro 4 can't be used in the low light. Beyond ISO 400, it throws up too much of noise which is not acceptable by my standards. While shooting for a documentary on weavers, the light level was too low for this camera and I quickly gave up shooting with it.

Another challenge is the curved horizon that I get in the files. This problem was more acute in the previous Go Pro 3. At the moment, one can straighten the horizon by using some plugins during post processing. Till the next version of Go Pro, we have to live with this problem.

This is a tiny little camera which appears like a toy. Though people initially look at me when I am shooting with it, they soon feel that this is another guy using a small camera and are not much bothered. So it kind of gives anonymity that one so much needs while shooting.

At 499 USD plus the cost of additional batteries, back LCD, charger etc, the cost quickly goes up. It has the potential to do certain things well. When the camera is stable, light is good and there is not much movement, a few shots from the Go Pro can be inserted among other shots. So I do have it in my camera bag for times when I can make use of this little camera.

People who don't need the 4K and who don't need high speed shooting can buy the Go Pro Hero 4 Silver which is 399 USD. It can shoot at 2.7K at 30fps.

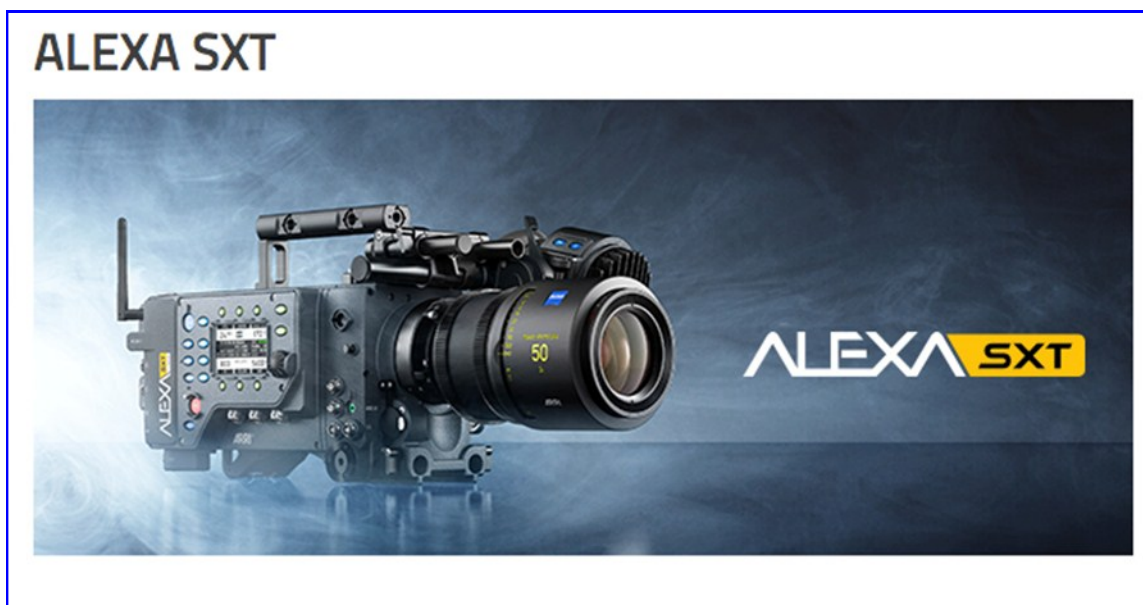
Click on the link to watch the Go Pro video - <https://youtu.be/VWVPNPG6vXLI>

Equipment Discussions -

ARRI launches 4k ALEXA SXT cameras

ARRI launches ALEXA SXT (Super Xtended Technology) cameras with ProRes 4k recording.

With its new ALEXA SXT cameras, ARRI has brought in in-camera recording of ProRes 4K UHD (3840 x 2160 pixels) and ProRes 4K Cine (4096 x 2637 pixels). According to ARRI, ALEXA SXT cameras keep the acclaimed 3.4K ALEV III sensor of previous ALEXAs and add the state-of-the-art electronics of ARRI's groundbreaking ALEXA 65 camera. These high-performance electronics combine the latest generation of FPGA processors with a lightning-fast internal backplane and form the basis of a completely overhauled image processing chain, advanced pixel correction and optional noise reduction. This results in a further improvement in overall image quality. Like their XT predecessors, ALEXA SXT cameras retain the unique and popular Open Gate, 4:3 and 16:9 sensor modes, which can be recorded in ARRIRAW or ProRes.



The creation of new, powerful and unique looks has been made possible by utilizing the advanced color management engine originally developed for the ARRI AMIRA camera. Taking advantage of the extremely wide native color gamut of the ALEXA sensor, this new engine allows unprecedented control, which in the end means greater creative freedom for the filmmaker. A new type of look file, the ALF-2 (ARRI Look File 2), contains an ASC CDL (Color Decision List) as well as a 3D LUT (Look-Up Table). The new color management engine can easily match the look of current ALEXA cameras, but also provides the basis for radically different looks. In addition, previewing of looks on set is improved, including the option to use the wide color gamut of Rec 2020 gamma, while dailies creation is made more efficient and final grading made faster. ALF-2 files and the tools that create them are compatible between ALEXA SXT, ALEXA Mini and AMIRA.

To further streamline on-set workflows ALEXA SXT cameras include three fully independent HD-SDI outputs. This allows, for instance, a Log C image to be used to show the director a pristine image with live grading, a clean Rec 709 image to be fed to video village, and a Rec 709 image with status information overlays to be displayed on the camera's on-board monitor.

The first ALEXA SXT cameras are planned for release around mid-2015; the full range will comprise ALEXA SXT EV, SXT Plus and SXT Studio models, replacing current ALEXA XT cameras (though the ALEXA Classic EV model will remain in the line-up). ALEXA XT cameras (except ALEXA XT M cameras) shipped between 1st Jan. 2015 and the first shipment of SXT cameras will be eligible for a full SXT upgrade, free of charge.

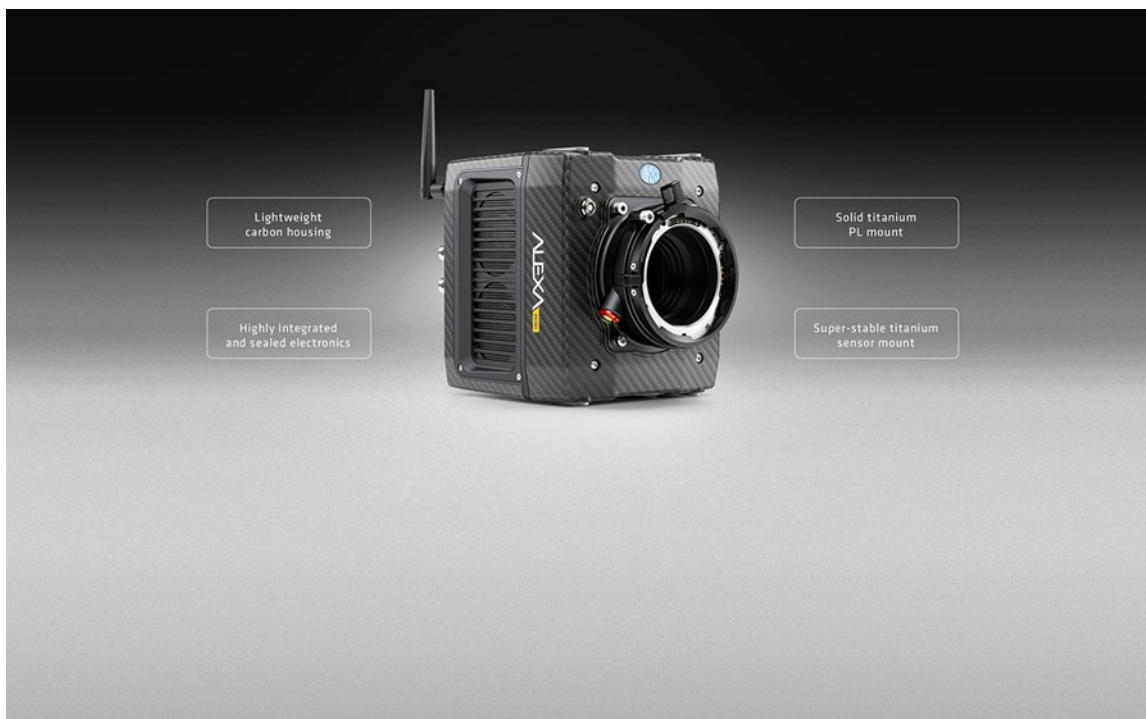
Concurrent with the ALEXA SXT release ARRI will offer an SXR (Super Xtended Recording) Module upgrade to owners of existing ALEXA XT, XT Plus and XT Studio cameras. The SXR Module upgrade delivers all the features of the SXT cameras, although it might not offer all the future upgrade potential.

The launch of ALEXA SXT is a significant move, as ARRI had steadfastly remained away from the resolution game which RED had brought in. Even though, RED had launched 6K cameras, the good dynamic range, colours, ProRes files among other features had ensured that even with 2K, Alexa was the most popular camera. Last year, as a precursor to this, Arri had launched the Arri Amira with UHD 4K by upscaling in-camera. With Arri moving to 4K, soon 4K acquisition is going to be the standard.

Equipment Discussions -

ARRI announces the new ALEXA Mini

ARRI has announced the new ALEXA Mini camera, which is compact, lightweight and has the same fantastic image quality as the ALEXA. Earlier, cameras like C500, C300, RED etc were used with ALEXA in situations like cramped car interiors or for drones where the bigger and heavier ALEXA could not be used. Use of the ALEXA Mini will help in streamlining the workflow and hence should find greater acceptance in sets.



According to ARRI, to maintain ARRI's famously rugged build quality in a small and lightweight camera, a number of unique design solutions have been incorporated. These include highly integrated and environmentally sealed electronics, a lightweight carbon housing and a solid titanium PL mount that connects directly with the new internal sensor mount to ensure a super-stable flange focal distance, even when using large lenses. Nimble in use and hardy on set, the ALEXA Mini is easy to transport in backpacks or as carry-on luggage.



The ALEXA Mini can be operated in a number of ways: by wireless remote control, as a normal camera with the ARRI MVF-1 multi viewfinder attached, or with an on-board monitor and controlled via the user button interface on the camera body. Light enough to be comfortably held at arm's length in a hand rig, its compact size and extremely quiet operation also make it ideal for tight shooting conditions. The symmetrical design permits filming in any orientation, including up-side-down and in portrait mode, while multiple accessory points enable highly creative mounting solutions. In addition, the ALEXA Mini's interchangeable lens mount can be replaced with any of those designed for the ARRI AMIRA, allowing the use of B4 video and EF mount stills lenses.

Equipped with a 4:3 sensor, automatic de-squeeze mode for anamorphic productions and frame rates of 0.75-200 fps, the ALEXA Mini records ProRes or uncompressed ARRIRAW either in-camera to CFast 2.0 cards or to a specially-designed external Codex recorder that can record image streams from up to four ALEXA Minis simultaneously -- a compelling option for multi-camera setups such as 360° plate shots. Images from the ALEXA Mini will perfectly match those from all other ALEXA cameras, making the final grade easier and quicker.



Integrated functionality is at the heart of the ALEXA Mini's efficient and self-contained design. A built-in lens motor controller allows new active lens motors to be connected directly to the titanium PL mount, while ARRI Lens Data System (LDS) technology provides frame-accurate metadata that can save time and money both on-set and in post. Wi-Fi connectivity means that iOS or Android devices can be used to remotely control camera functions such as the motorized internal ND filters, which permit rapid responses to changing light conditions without adding bulk to the camera configuration.

The body design is optimized for use with new-generation brushless gimbals, multicopters and other specialized rigs. It is compact enough in the lens direction to allow the use of standard PL mount lenses even on lightweight and space-constrained rigs, such as gyro-stabilized aerial systems. The camera's superb low-light performance makes it perfect for underwater work; dedicated underwater housings are currently being developed by leading manufacturers.

Like the ARRI AMIRA, the ALEXA Mini can record 4K UHD ProRes images, facilitating real-time 4K UHD output and simple pipelines for high-resolution deliverables. More importantly, the Mini and all other ARRI cameras with the ALEV III sensor offer unrivalled overall image quality by focusing not just on spatial resolution, but also on other parameters such as colorimetry, skin tones and High Dynamic Range (HDR). This is equally true whether the chosen output is HD, 2K, 4K UHD or one of the native resolution outputs like uncompressed ARRIRAW 2.8K or ProRes 3.2K, ensuring that images captured with the ALEXA Mini are future-proof, whatever new industry standards emerge.

The ARRI ALEXA Mini is scheduled to begin shipping in May 2015, with orders being taken from March.

Equipment Discussions -

Vitec Group acquires Paralinx, seller of wireless video systems

Vitec group, which boasts of most of the major brands of the filming and photography world like OConnor, Sachtler, Vinten, Litepanels, Teradek, Manfrotto, Kata, Petrol bags etc has acquired Paralinx. Interestingly, Vitec group also had earlier acquired Teradek another high quality wireless video systems maker.

“Like Teradek and SmallHD, Paralinx is another great example of the pioneering spirit that is so important to disrupting the professional video industry with game-changing products and top-notch customer support,” said Vitec Videocom CEO Matt Danilowicz. “By combining Paralinx’s deep understanding of the market with Teradek’s engineering acumen, both companies are positioned to develop truly cutting-edge technology tailored specifically to their customers’ needs.”

To adequately address the growing demand for wireless video devices, Paralinx will continue to innovate in the UAV and independent content creator spaces, while Teradek will focus on cinema and television applications.

Vitec group is prolific in acquiring brands and last December it had bought over SmallHD which was reported here:

Paralinx was founded by Dan Kanes and Greg Smokler when they had felt the need for a wireless video systems for their own needs, as they are cinematographers themselves.

Dan Kanes said "When we launched Paralinx in 2012 our mission was simple, to enable filmmakers to monitor wirelessly a camera's HD recording in real time. We sought to bring a new level of freedom to video production, an essential link in digital cinematography. Now, in 2015, we are excited to be joining forces with Teradek and SmallHD, other innovators under the world-renowned Vitec Group, to continue empowering content creators with revolutionary technology and unparalleled support."

Co-founder Greg Smokler stressed that they started Paralinx to fill a need and that the customers will benefit from this sell out to Vitec group. “We started Paralinx because as end-users on the front lines of content production we weren’t getting the tools that we needed. This acquisition gives us the opportunity to collaborate with the talented engineers and product development team at Teradek and to make use of the Vitec Group’s manufacturing and operational might. We believe that the biggest winners out of this will be the people that helped us get to where we are today: our customers.”

The systems marketed by Paralinx was eerily similar to that of low end systems from Nyrius Aries Pro. Not only they were physically of the same size but the systems also worked together as the chipsets inside was same. Paralinx appeared to be importing from the same manufacturers, albeit with better quality control with several times a price mark-up. While the terms of the deal is not known, it certainly reduces the competition among brands, lowering the chances of price wars.

Canon EOS 5DS and 5DS R Pre Order info:

B&H has opened preorders for the Canon EOS 5DS and EOS 5DS R cameras.

Link to preorder for EOS 5Ds: http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1119026-REG/canon_0581c002_eos_5ds_dslr_camera.html/BI/19990/KBID/13252

Link to preorder for EOS 5DS R: http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1119027-REG/canon_0582c002_eos_5ds_r_dslr.html/BI/19990/KBID/13252

Equipment Discussions -

Sound Devices 688

Sound Devices has launched a new 688 recorder which has multi-channel mixer, auto-mixer, recorder plus optional SL-6 integrated powering and wireless system.



Sound Devices says that by consolidating these functions, cabling requirements are significantly decreased, de-cluttering the sound mixer's bag, increasing reliability and improving ease of use. The 688 takes the finest aspects of the acclaimed 633, 664, and 788T and creatively combines them with new technology into an unrivaled production audio tool. The following are the key features of the Sound Devices 688:

- 12 analog inputs: Six mic/line preamps plus six line inputs all with front-panel faders & PFLs.
- 16-track recording to SD & CompactFlash cards; Timecode-stamped WAV & MP3 files
- MixAssist 12-input auto-mixer.
- Optional Accessories: SL-6 power distribution & 6-ch SuperSlot™ wireless receiver system; CL-6 input controller with LED metering & transport controls.
- Both SL-6 and CL-6 can be connected to the 688 at the same time. SL-6 to top panel, CL-6 to bottom panel.
- Eight output buses: L/R mix plus Aux 1-6; transformer-balanced XLR & Hirose outs for freedom from ground loops
Two AES42/AES3 inputs, eight AES3 outputs.
- Direct menu control of SuperSlot-compatible wireless (with SL-6).
- PowerSafe protects files from power loss.
- 2-second power on-to-recording.
- Flexible digital mixing and routing.
- Supports all sample rates up to 192kHz.
- Adjustable input & output delay.

- Three camera returns & dedicated COM return.
 - Internal & external slate mic inputs.
 - Ambient TC generator and reader and internal TC backup battery.
 - Easy to navigate interface, 1000-nit LCD visible in all light conditions, configurable metering.
 - USB Keyboard for metadata entry.
 - User-configurable headphone presets.
 - Light-weight, durable carbon-fiber chassis.
 - Powered by AA-battery (x5), external DC or NP1 via SL-6.
-

Natural History -

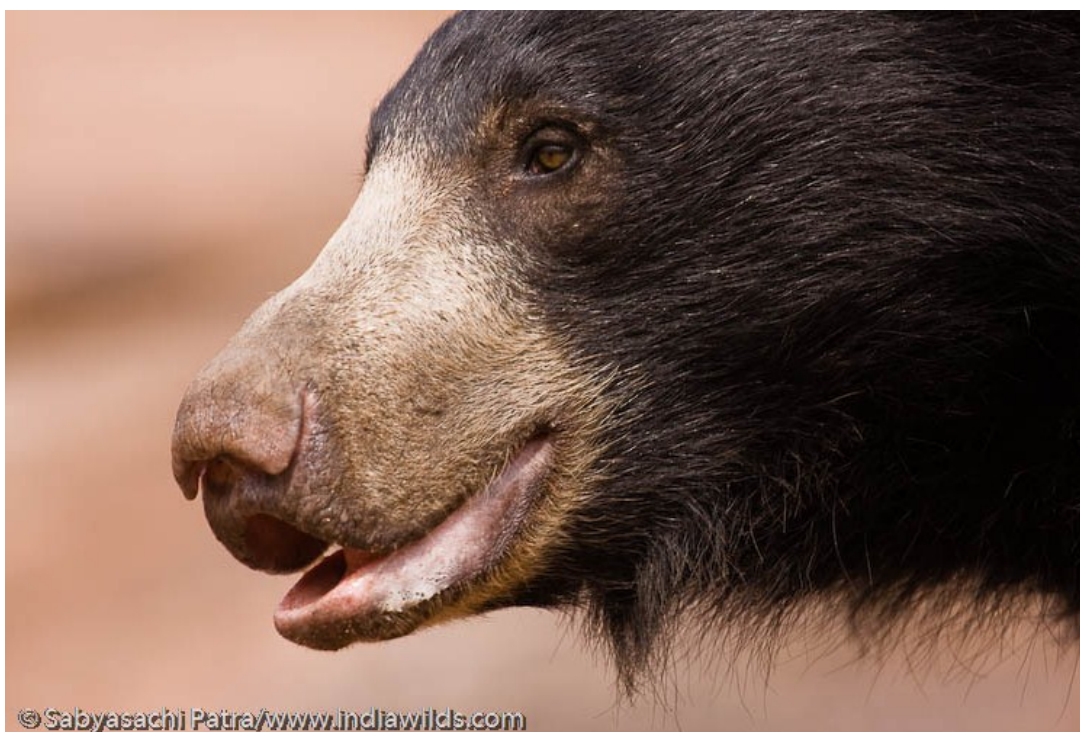
COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'A Tongue a cubit long'

The Sunday Statesman: 22-February-2015 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

" IN many Indian languages, a long tongue signifies impertinence, especially the young, the lowly and others expected, by a fading tradition, to observe a respectful silence while their elders and betters gabble. Not so in Tamil, length of tongue something different, an epicurean love of food, particularly in the phrase, "a tongue a cubit long" that denotes a shrewd discrimination in things to eat.

Judged by that Tamil phrase, the HIMALAYAN BLACK BEAR in the picture must be a regular gourmet - and it is! It wanders far in search of titbits, climbs trees for honey, knows where the market-gardener has grown his peas and often indulges a taste for red flash and choice insect fare. The much wider distributed SLOTH BEAR, too, is choosy in its feeding; it will dig a foot-and-a-half into the soil for the sake of a beetle grub, excavate deep into an anthill to finally at the queen and climb the wild date palm to drink the toddy from the tapper's suspended pot (in places where Prohibition does not obtain, of course!) It has aptly been called an expert field-botanist for it knows just where and when to find the fig and the ber and the jamoon fruit and mohwa flowers.

Both these bears are bulky beasts and need plenty of sustenance and to find the varied titbits they like they often travel far and work hard. But of course they do guzzle more easily obtained food as well and indulge in a great feast when they strike it rich, as when they find their way into an orchard or a field of corn.



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Sloth Bear Daroji

Talking of gourmets among our wild animals, I would leave out those creatures, like the Pangolin (though the pangolin does have a long tongue!) that are highly specialised in their feeding habits - they are faddists, not gourmets! Most of the predators may also be left out for they have limited choice of food - raw flesh is much of a muchness and even when it is something they fancy especially, predators usually bolt their food and do not chew and relish it. However within these limitations they do have strong preferences. Cattle-lifting TIGERS like a well-fleshed cow or bullock if they have the choice and

both TIGERS and LEOPARDS (which, like all hunters, have to keep very fit to find and to kill their prey and instinctively avoid all risks of potential injury) lose their habitual caution when they sight the prickly, plump porcupine - at times they get quite badly stuck and are disabled or even die, in consequence.

It is among the herbivores and omnivores that we find the real epicures. Most of the herbivores need plenty of food and crop or browse steadily with little evidence of leisured relish. However, they do have decided tastes. Many of us like the bitter gourd in a curry and some like its bitterness unmitigated by too much spicing or jaggery, but no man is as fond of the fruit as the BLACK BUCK is. In the Tungabhadra area, it was by setting snares for them in patches of wild bitter gourd that the trappers exterminated local buck. Many ANTELOPES and DEER have powerful likes in the matter of herbs, leaves and fruits they eat, but none, I think, is as particular as the MUNTJAC or barking deer.



Blackbuck

Incidentally, the deer has a tongue almost a cubit long, which it wraps around a twig and then draws down to strip it clean of tender leaves! It has been said that occasionally this deer will eat the dead meat. Once I watched a muntjac feeding for almost an hour; it never stopped long at any place, and covered much ground with a nibble here and nibble there, seeking and finding choice buds and shoots and herbs.

Even the ELEPHANT, which needs such quantities of fodder everyday, can be quite a gourmet. Pad-elephants which I got to know loved ripe bananas, wood-apples dried dates and sugarcane but rejected guavas and the nelli fruit (amla). Incidentally, wild elephants are very fond of the jackfruit which they crush open to get at the sweet, pulpy segments within, leaving the spiky, glutinous rind.

It is among the omnivores that we come across some of the nature's choosiest eaters. Many RODENTS are omnivorous, eating a certain amount of animal food besides plant food. The common PALM-SQUIRREL, is given to a much more varied diet than most people think and uses much cunning and climbing skill to get what it wants. I hope to make a report on its feeding habits in this column in due course, but the point I now wish to make that we know little about the gustatory preferences of even such a common and garden creature.

Sometimes observation reveals unexpected tastes and experiments yield quite surprising results. The "MUSK-RAT " which runs about our homes is really the MUSK-SHREW, and a true insectivore, subsisting on cockroaches, crickets, termites, worms and such small fry.

Natural History -

Intrigued by finding it so often in rat-traps baited with coconut or sweet biscuits, I carried out an investigation, only to discover that the musk-shrew has a decided sweet tooth and loves anything with sugar or honey in it!

MONKEYS, specially the omnivorous macaques, are sometimes fastidious in their feeding. Though the Bonnet Macaque feeds on many kinds of grain, fruit and herbage (including tender leaves of the tamarind) which it has little difficulty in finding, when it comes to the corrinda (and the closely allied Carissa caranadas) fruit it will spend hours in going from bush to spiky bush carefully picking each purplish ripe berry between fore-finger and thumb and then stuffing it into the cheek-pouch.

And I have seen this monkey climb a tamarind to drink the water held in a hollow high up the tree by the laborious process of flipping the water up with a hand and catching the droplets in its open mouth when there was a pond with stone steps close by at which it could have slaked its thirst much more comfortably - water that has been in contact with the wood of tamarind or nelli trees has a sweetish taste.

But of course no animal goes to the lengths that man does in his gustatory orgies. I may be mistaken but though I can find nothing definite about it in books I have, is n't it a fact that both human history and dentition go to show that man is essentially an omnivore? "

- M.Krishnan

This was first published on 21 December 1958 in The Sunday Statesman

Wildlife Photography -

Irrawaddy Dolphins in Sunderbans by Mrudul Godbole



Sunderbans Baby Crocodile by Saktipada Panigrahi



Wildlife Photography -

The Plumbeous Water Redstart by Catherine Christian



Northern Pintail by Samrat Sarkar



Wildlife Photography -

Waterfowls at Nawabganj by Nishith Kumar



Dikhala Tiger Family by Debasis Bose



Wildlife Photography -

Leopard at TATR by Subhash Shrivastava



Blackbuck Leaping by Rajbir Oberoi



Wildlife Photography -

LRK Diary by Vipin Sharma



Some Gold by Roopak Gangadharan



Wildlife Photography -

Glass Shrimp by Abhishek Jamalabad



Horned Leaf Hopper by Prajwal Ullal



Wildlife Photography -

Infrared Water Monitor by Sabyasachi Patra



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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