



IndiaWilds Newsletter

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Sea Cow no Holy Cow

The Sethusamudram saga continues

The Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Straits are pretty shallow so that large ships cannot pass through. Due to its shallow waters, the ecosystem of this place is unique. It is also relatively undisturbed by human activity, except fishing. So digging up the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Straits for the Sethusamudram project will cause irreversible damage to the marine ecosystem.

These shallow waters are home to about 3268 species out of which 377 species are endemic. There are about 11 species of sea grass found in this area which forms exclusive diet of the dugongs or sea cows. There are also 147 species of seaweeds in this area. The Dugongs are endangered and classified in the Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act. There is seasonal movement of Dugongs from Gulf of Mannar to the Palk bay and vice-versa to avoid rough seas induced by monsoons.



Adams Bridge or Ram Setu: Hindus believe it was constructed by Lord Rama. This ecologically significant area is going to be destroyed by the proposed Sethu Samudram canal project

When dredging is undertaken in this area, the disturbance will force the dugongs to stop migrating. The dredging and blasting of the hard rock will also result in sedimentations which will stop the sunrays from reaching the sea grass leading to their death. As a result the dugong's will also



Sea Cow no Holy Cow (cont.)

die. Apart from the dugongs, the seagrass also forms an ideal ecosystem for various fish species which sustains commercial fishing and the economy of Tamil Nadu.

It would be pertinent to mention that the NEERI Environment Impact Assessment report had acknowledged the presence of dugongs and the fact that they can get hit by ships. In a muddle headed proposal NEERI had proposed that a person should be stationed in the deck of the ship while the ship passes through the proposed Sethusamudram canal and on sighting a dugong the ship should make course correction. Perhaps **NEERI** wants us to believe the ships are not large and fast but nimble like small catamarans moving at slow speeds so that they can make course correction. Unfortunately despite such EIA reports which assumes us to be intellectually challenged, the Government continues to back this proposal.

Many people have argued that the Sethusamudram project is going to destroy the Adams bridge which is inextricably linked to our cultural heritage as the Ram Setu, built by Lord Ram for moving into Lanka (modern day Sri Lanka) to fight against the demon king Ravana who had kidnapped Lord Rama's wife Sita. The proponents have used images from NASA to bolster their argument that this is the Ram Setu, however, NASA has clarified that they had not made any official statement that the adams bridge is man made. Nevertheless mythology, perceptions and beliefs are inextricably linked with our cultural heritage and we should protect it.

Recently the Hon'ble Minister for MoEF Smt. Jayanthi Natarajan has said that Sea cows would be protected. In a statement in the Lok Sabha, she had said that "Dugong has been identified as one of the 16 selected species for initiating recovery programmes in their respective habitats under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes of 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats'. Financial and technical assistance is provided to the Union Territory Government of Andaman & Nicobar Islands under the component 'Recovery of Critically Endangered Species'. Legal protection has been provided to wild animals against hunting and commercial exploitation under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. The minister further said that " Protected Areas, viz., National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves covering important wildlife habitats have been created all over the country under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to conserve wild animals and their habitats."

In 2008, the R K Pachauri committee was formed as per the observations of the then Chief Justice of Supreme Court Shri K G Balakrishnan. The Pachauri committee gave its report last month in February 2013 suggesting that the Sethusamudram project would neither be economically nor ecologically viable project. It said that the projected rate of return is "over optimistic". The committee has said that "benchmark rate of return of 12 percent isn't met for the range of scenarios examined in the case of alignment 4A". However, the UPA Government has swiftly moved to junk the Pachauri committee report. The Government in an affidavit to the Hon'ble Supreme Court has reiterated its resolve to cut across the Adams bridge or Ram Setu to create the channel for navigation of large ships. It said that already Rs. 829.32 crores have been sunk on the project since 30th June 2012. It even has the audacity to dub the dubious EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) report prepared by NEERI as well as other such reports as well-researched technical studies.

In 1964 the area was ravaged by a huge cyclone and the entire town of Dhanuskodi stood broken and was abandoned. Even today one can see the old railway station broken. Such was the devastation that only a few families of fishermen stay there now along with a Navy outpost to



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stop smuggling. Apart from the birds, I could see a few feral dogs in the distance. At that time the word “tsunami” was not in vogue and hence the complete destruction of the area is not attributed to tsunami. However, according to experts this area is a comparatively young formation and hence highly susceptible to tectonic movements. Experts also opine that due to the shallow sea in the area, the 2004 tsunami couldn't hit the Kerala coast as it had to take a circuitous route. However, if the area is dredged, apart from the possibility of its tectonic the tsunami could impact the area and now hit Kerala coast.

Our existing ports are fighting with silting and need continual dredging operations to remain navigable. If the Government goes ahead with the present alignment of the Sethusamudram project cutting across the Adams bridge, then it would require continual dredging to remain navigable. The resulting sound is going to cause a lot of distress for dugongs and dolphins.



The BP Oil disaster should have woken us up to the threats of oil leaks from tankers. One such disaster is going to wipe away our entire Gulf of Mannar bio-sphere reserve.

The UPA Government in its infinite wisdom has set a trend of approving environmentally disastrous projects under the pretext of money already spent in projects. So no wonder that it has again taken the tack of the 800 crore plus spent on this project.

I hope the Hon'ble Minister of State for MoEF would walk the talk and move ahead to protect the habitat of the Sea cows ie dugongs and convince her Government to drop the Sethusamudram project.

The last such grand canal digging project was the Panama Canal which was done more than a hundred years back when there was not much awareness about the consequences of ecological impact. Neither they had any sophisticated modeling tools available nor much understanding of science. In the twenty first century with the spectre of climate change looming large over us, do we continue to ignore the environmental impact of our actions?

It is well known that the DMK party is the major champion of this project and its rival the AI-ADMK is strictly opposed to it. With the DMK pulling out of UPA, will the UPA finally reverse its stand?

With the political action hotting up in the anticipation of early elections, does it matter to the UPA Government if the ecologically fragile area like the Adams bridge is broken up for questionable commercial reasons?

Save the Dolphins

Every year between September to March, in Taiji, a small town in Japan, dolphin massacre continues unabated. The number of whales having plummeted due to commercial whaling, the Japanese have taken to killing the bottle-nosed dolphins. They are herded into a small cove and killed by spearing them. Roughly 23,000 dolphins and porpoises are killed by the Japanese and the dolphin meat is sold as whale meat. In an incredibly meticulous and audacious documentary “The Cove” this massacre has been depicted in detail and has found out that dolphins have high level of mercury and eating their meat is a sure shot recipe for disaster. Despite this documentary getting an Oscar in 2010 couple of years have passed by, this massacre continues unabated.

It is sad state of affairs that the Japanese continue their slaughter of these peaceful and highly intelligent creatures. Some of the imagery in this film is heart wrenching and nauseating. India and Japan are two ancient civilisations and they are at war with the natural world. Whereas the Japanese are directly butchering the dolphins and whales, the present Indian Government by virtue of pushing for the Sethusamudram project is acting as a silent killer and is also having blood in its hands.

PM Manmohan Singh’s Economics and Anti-Green Philosophy

Hon’ble PM Manmohan Singh has always been credited as the architect of India’s economic liberalisation. We have believed in whatever the PR machinery had dished out. However, it is time we take a stock of the situation. He had steeply devalued the rupee twice by as much as 40% and had promised that the exports will surge to 20%. His logic was that a weak rupee will make our exports competitive. Unfortunately, it was like the story of the blind men and the elephant with each person having a different perception about the elephant. Whereas the exports organisations like FIEO have been harping on a weak rupee and the RBI also hears them – as in today’s prevailing form of democracy one who makes the loudest noise is heard the most – no one is looking from a holistic perspective. Today we are in a position where our forex reserves are high. However, we continue to import heavily. The Government is harping on Oil and Gold imports. However, electronics imports is also silently moving up and is going to exceed the oil import bill. By 2020, India is projected to import about 400 billion dollars worth of electronic items and will have a net imports of about 323 billion USD. The weak rupee makes the imports much more costlier than they should. Our domestic consumption as well as the manufacturing in all sectors have a import component. So keeping the rupee at the present 54-55 levels really hurts India’s economy.

Whereas, some of our business leaders have sarcastically talked about rupee becoming a toilet paper, no one is willing to stick his neck out and openly say that we have failed to unleash our potential. To make matters worse we have faced Sovereign ratings downgrade. This Government which has failed to protect our economy. And when we hear that he is ready to sacrifice the environment and forests for our economic growth, will you agree with his actions?

During Manmohan Singh’s two terms as PM of India, he has systematically gone about trashing the environment and forests. He is the champion of big industries, however polluted those might be. His two terms have seen approvals given to mines, dams and roads to cut across pristine forests. The PM has often given statements that mines, dams, road projects have to get priority clearance putting pressure on the Minister for MoEF.

His Government has signed agreements to set up Nuclear Power Plants in Jaitapur and Kundakulam. The protests of people have been systematically stymied. Rather than listen to the people, his government has unleashed the investigative agencies, tax authorities to hound people in the pretext of accepting donations from abroad. During Rajiv Gandhi’s time it was fashionable to blame external agencies for fomenting trouble. Now it is fashionable to persecute voices that oppose the Government’s questionable decisions.

Shri Manmohan Singh has now given a statement that Kundakulam I will be commissioned within the next one month. Despite the nuclear holocaust in Fukushima in Japan, and experts pointing out the fallacy of the Kundakulam project, the Government is fierce in its resolve to go ahead at any cost. We wonder why? In one of the conferences, the Minister for PMO Shri Narayana swamy went on to reel off incorrect data and made the audience believe that Solar power is costly and not feasible. Whereas the cost had dropped down to Rs. 9 a MW, he quoted a figure of Rs. 17. PM Manmohan Singh had made grandiose statements while launching India’s

National Action Plan on Climate Change on June 30, 2008. Dr. Manmohan Singh had said:

***“Our vision is to make India’s economic development energy-efficient. Over a period of time, we must pioneer a graduated shift from economic activity based on fossil fuels to one based on non-fossil fuels and from reliance on non-renewable and depleting sources of energy to renewable sources of energy. In this strategy, the sun occupies centre-stage, as it should, being literally the original source of all energy.*”**

We will pool our scientific, technical and managerial talents, with sufficient financial resources, to develop solar energy as a source of abundant energy to power our economy and to transform the lives of our people. Our success in this endeavour will change the face of India. It would also enable India to help change the destinies of people around the world.”

Unfortunately, the Hon’ble PM seems to have gone back on his commitment and is pushing for setting up of Nuclear Power plants in collaboration with foreign Governments.

It is strange considering the fact that we don’t even know what will be the impact of Nuclear wastes after a hundred or two hundred years. This technology is not even a hundred years old. Why are we ready to sacrifice the interests of generations to come? Why this Government is so short sighted? Why are we looking at Present and ignoring the future?

Or is it because the National Action Plan on Climate Change and other such things are not a priority for the Government and his statements are just the work of some speech writers entrusted to the department with the Hon’ble PM merely reading from a prepared speech? If so, that would be indeed a really sorry state of affairs.

Committee Report on Trees Grown on Private Land

MoEF had constituted a committee on “The Regulatory Regime regarding felling and transite regulations for tree species grown on non forests/private lands”. The Committee Report has now been made public for consultations. The report can be downloaded from this link:

<http://www.moef.nic.in/assets/Report-of-the-Committee-on-Regulatory-Regime-for-Trees-Grown-on-Private-Land-Nov-2012.pdf>

The last date for submission of suggestions is 15th of April. Interested persons may kindly forward us their suggestions on the subject.

Conservation News -

Satkosia Tiger Reserve: Jan 2013

I was in Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Jan 2013. This visit to Satkosia was after a long gap, so I don't want to do a then and now comparison.

First impression:

The Tiger reserve has too many villages. Since this place is blessed with abundant water due to streams, lot of land is under cultivation. The anthropogenic pressures are huge. Looking at the hoof marks in the streams, which otherwise would have been ideal place for the herbivores and carnivores, one can only say that the place is swamped by cattle.

In the core area, in labangi, they have recorded images of a tiger through a camera trap several times. I had heard about tiger movement in this place and wanted to visit it for a long time.

I got into the watch tower and stayed there alone for the entire night in the biting cold to get a feel of the jungle. I had my sound recording equipment with me to help me in listening. Twice I heard alarm calls in the night, once around mid night and the other early in the morning. I presume the alarm call was about 500 meters or so to my left. At around 4.30am there was an unusual human voice for a few moments.

The early morning dawn chorus is not spectacular like the western ghats.

In the morning one sambar, one cheetal and another barking deer came to the salt lick.

One of the forest department staff had a direct sighting of a tiger on foot while going to the watch tower. One of the forest guards revealed that he had seen a leopard kill some two months back. After that no other signs of kill. The prey density appeared to be low, despite the forest department saying that it is bouncing back. One should remember that in disturbed areas the herbivores and carnivores become nocturnal. However, in the night also there were not many signs of them. One didn't find evidence of big herds of deers etc. I did see two gaurs, one sambar fawn alone in the night as well as one wild boar. Unless the prey population bounces back to the level of other Tiger Reserves like Bandipur, Nagarhole, one should not expect the tiger population or carnivore population to increase.



There are patches of dense forest that makes us happy. Rest of the forest areas are traumatised by human presence.

Tourist pressure is not much as other tiger reserves however they come for boating. The forest department had reduced the bookings during the Supreme court interim order banning tourism in core area of tiger reserves. Tourists visit the gorge for boating and one can find all the associated ills of tourism.

In the past there had been some efforts towards relocation of villages. However, that has stopped. Satkosia Tiger Reserve needs urgent action. Else, we have to forget the tiger and other predators.

Muggers & Gharials:

The ranger informed us that there were only four gharials (*Gravilis gangeticus*) in the Mahanadi gorge and unfortunately all of them are male. In the past there used to be crocodile breeding in breeding centre at Tikarpada. However, now it acts as a mini zoo and has two gharial females and four muggers (*Crocodilus palustris*). Since the gorge doesn't have female gharials and the breeding centre only has two females and no males, no breeding happens in the wild or in the centre. If a breeding age male can be trapped and brought to the mini zoo and mated with one of the females then the female can lay eggs. The eggs can be hatched and the baby gharials can be released in the gorge once they become ready for release.



Gharial eggs can also be collected and hatched in the mini zoo. Or baby gharials can also be brought from other zoos or from the wild and can be released in the gorge.

This place used to serve as the breeding ground of tigers. Today its a sad story.

Satkosia was declared as a tiger reserve in 2007 by merging the Baisipalli Sanctuary and the Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary. It is a part of the Deccan plateau as well as Eastern Ghats and is biodiversity rich. With the abundance of water, dense forests, this place used to be teeming with wildlife. Alas, the wildlife has been replaced by the two legged variety.

Though this reserve is spread over 964 sq kilometer, even the designated core area of 524 Sq. Kilometers have villages and is highly disturbed. The forest department has said that poaching has reduced. However, the forest department has to display strong leadership at the top level to make changes happen. A lot of leadership skills are required to coax the villagers to relocate outside the forests. Only then the forests can be nursed back.

One cannot save the tiger with good intentions alone. We need to save its habitat and make it inviolate.



Caged cat 'falls in love' with goat

Mar 6, 2013, 06.37 AM IST

NAGPUR: When staff at the Bor wildlife sanctuary released a live goat in the enclosure of a full grown male tiger, they hoped the beast would make a quick kill. To their astonishment and horror, the tiger instead decided to make friends with its intended meal.

For two days, the tiger did not kill the goat despite being hungry. Instead it played with it; at one point even playfully dumping it in an artificial waterhole. Finally, the goat was shifted out and the tiger was given beef to eat. Officials who watched the sequence of events in dismay are hunting for answers to explain the animal's behaviour. They are worried that having been raised in captivity, the big cat may have lost its hunting skills.

Incidentally, the tiger is one of three siblings - the other two are females - rescued from the Dhaba forest range in 2009 after their mother went missing.

All the three were raised on a diet of beef. Subsequently, though, a few live animals like deer were released in their enclosure to hone their hunting skills. Officials say that while the two tigresses have turned out fine - the goat that was spared by their male sibling was released in their enclosure and instantly killed and consumed by them - the tiger's unusually docile behaviour has become a cause of concern.

Although the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India had recommended release of the rescued tigers sometime back, doubts are being raised whether it would be feasible for the male to return to the wild. "I fear the male tiger is not fit for release," says veteran conservationist MS Chouhan. "When the females were rescued they had killed a dog and it seems they still had some hunting skills, but in the case of the male they are evidently missing."

The peculiar condition of the tiger, adds wildlife biologist Vidya Athreya, could also be because it was deprived of its mother's training. "Cubs require a lot of help from their mother to learn how to hunt well," she says.

The flip side of releasing orphaned tigers back in the wild, as noted tiger experts Valmik Thapar and K Ullas Karanth point out, is that captive animals are often not adept at finding their own food source. They could therefore turn into cattle-lifters or worse, even man-eaters.

Views: Sabyasachi Patra -

"The cubs get their training from their mother. Unfortunately, without the mother around, it becomes difficult for the tigers to understand how to kill. It is also not easy for tigers because they don't just choke the prey to death like the leopard. Ofcourse younger tigers do that when needed and are often not adept at cleanly dislocating the neck. If cubs are kept in an enclosure then they have to be given training. However, that training has to be well thought out. In experiments abroad, to avoid the biological finger printing, the trainer often dresses like the mother of that species and teaches the kid.

The wild animals like tigers have the instinct to hunt. Though I have no idea about this particular tiger, completely hand rearing a tiger and feeding it while not exposing it to smaller prey like frogs, rabbits etc during its childhood makes it associate food as the beef given.

In Nandankanan zoo the tigers have been acquainted with the ringing bells, like pavlov's dog experiment, and associate with food as the zoo keepers ring the bell and then place food.

In one incident a Maharashtra minister was found entering the zoo and cuddling tiger cubs. That is the expectation of zoos these days and not for research and release in the wild. No wonder that there is such severe lack of expertise in releasing such tigers in the wild."

Extreme weather kills thousands of Ladakh's pashmina goats

Mar 5, 2013, 03.01 AM IST

NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR: Last year's unusually dry summer and this winter's unprecedented snowfall, the worst in nearly 50 years, in Ladakh's Changtang area has claimed over 18,000 "pashmina" goats, the source of one of the finest varieties of wool that has put the region on the world map.

Changtang is a high altitude plateau in southeastern Ladakh, inhabited by Changpa (Champa) nomads, and known for its harsh and semi-arid weather with very little vegetation. The harsh winter makes these mountain goats grow extremely warm and very soft coating that is six times finer than human hair and used to produce pashmina wool. Its products including shawls, scarves, wraps, stoles are exported worldwide.

"While rains were scanty last summer, the winter witnessed unprecedented snowfall," said Dr Morup of Leh's district sheep husbandry office. Because of the harsh climate no other agricultural activity is possible and the fodder comes mainly from the natural vegetation. Lack of rain last year dried out the natural flora and the heavy snowfall in January and February cut off the region from the rest of the country, preventing fodder supplies. "The goats perished because of extreme cold and lack of food," he explained, adding, "We had supplied 13,000 quintals in November before the closure of the roads, otherwise loss would have been more."

Leh deputy commissioner Tsering Angchok told TOI, "Now, 1100 quintals of fodder have been sent in 62 trucks to the area where these animals are located."

The members of the Ladakh hill council, led by executive councilor Gyurmet Dorje, are helping in organizing additional stocks of fodder to prevent any further loss of these "golden goats". The council members accuse the Omar Abdullah government of not doing enough to save these rare animals.

"These conditions also threaten the ancient nomadic lifestyle of the Champa people," said Tsewang Namgyal, advisor to YDA, an association of Drukpa Buddhists. Among the three main lineages of Himalayan Buddhism practised in the region, the Drukpa lineage has the largest number of followers. The harsh climate does not permit agriculture and these people are completely dependent on their livestock.

The pashmina wool has an enormous contribution to Ladakh's economy. "This kind of calamities might convince them to quit the nomadic lifestyle and settle in the villages. This will have a huge impact on the local economy," he added.

Views: Sabyasachi Patra -

"The spectre of Climate change is now haunting us. These are the early warning symptoms before we face full blown impact. The people in Ladakh report of receding glaciers. Snow melt which sustains their lives by providing water and regenerating the vegetation is becoming less. The situation is tough.

Some say that climate change is certain but it is first going to impact the poor and the ones who are living in sync with nature. The muddle headed argument is that we can remain closeted in our air-conditioned houses. However, people don't realise that already large parts of the country is ravaged by drought. Without water many a civilisation has perished.

The situation is so bad that water tanker owners now wield considerable power and are now even contesting elections. They are now becoming the kingmakers and ultimately going to be the kings deciding how many drops of water to be given to whom.

Can we ignore the reality? And for how long? "

135 yrs on, 'extinct' lizard rediscovered

TNN Mar 24, 2013, 05.27AM IST

MUMBAI: Indian scientists have rediscovered a rare lizard that British colonel RH Beddome had last spotted in the Eastern Ghats in 1877.

"This elusive lizard, *Geckoella jeyporensis*, commonly named as Jeypore ground gecko, was believed to have become extinct since it was last seen in 1877. But in 2010-11, a PhD student of Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Ishan Agarwal, and his team spotted it again in Orissa," Bombay Natural History Society senior scientist Varad Giri told TOI.

Giri studied this rare find. "After properly studying its features and taxonomy, we were thrilled to learn that this is the same gecko which became 'extinct' 135 years ago. This rediscovery was recently published in the scientific journal of *Hamadryad*," said Giri.

The published work was the result of two years of collaboration between scientists from the CES, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore; Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai; and Villanova University in the US.

The story of the rediscovery began in 2008-09, when Agarwal began working on the genus *Geckoella*. Ishan was desperate to find this lost species to understand more about its evolutionary history.

Finally, in 2010, a team from CES embarked on a trip to try and locate this species. The team included two members of the Karanth Lab, CES, Ishan Agarwal and Aniruddha Datta-Roy and their field assistant, Tarun Khichi.

They managed to find the *Geckoella jeyporensis*. The team re-assembled in 2011 and was able to find the species again in Andhra Pradesh.

Views: Sabyasachi Patra -

"This is a great piece of news. I feel some of these species can be rediscovered, if people know about them. Some of these species are mis-identified as common species, so remain undiscovered and continue to be classified as extinct.

Our wilderness areas are under tremendous assault from human population explosion, concretisation, large projects like dams, canals, power plants and to plain old human greed. With the vanishing wilderness, some of these species are being lost even before discovery. I hope we can protect our wilderness areas so that our wildlife can thrive. And we humans can also benefit by preventing/delaying climate change. "

Another rhino shot in Kaziranga for horn

Published: Friday, Mar 1, 2013, 23:15 IST

Place: GUWAHATI | Agency: IANS

Despite a shoot-at-sight order, poachers killed another endangered one-horned rhinoceros in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and took away its horn, officials said on Friday.

This was tenth such killing in the area since January though close to 400 Assam Forest Protection Force (AFPF) commandos are deployed in the park.

The carcass of the male rhino, suspected to have been killed on Thursday evening, was found in the Agaratoli forest range. They said the rhino was hit by seven bullets of a .303 rifle.

Park Director NK Vasu said the guards had an encounter with the poachers but they managed to take advantage of the darkness and escape unhurt with the rhino horn.

The poaching took place just two km from Arikati anti-poaching camp in the forest, officials said.

"The guards heard gunshots and launched an operation. However, the operation was suspended after dark and resumed this morning," Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Suresh Chand said.

Besides forest guards and field officers, 370 personnel of elite AFPF are in the park since the beginning of this year. Another 150 AFPF personnel are likely to arrive at the park.

"The number of poachers has gone up due to huge demands for rhino horns in the international market. Groups involved in the trade of wild animal parts have pumped in huge money to procure horns," said Vasu.

He said there was need to find out the reason behind the sudden rise in the demand for rhino horns.

"There have been attempts by poachers to enter the park and kill rhinos every day," he said.
This is the 10th rhino killed in the park and its adjoining forests in the last two months.

Last year, over 40 rhinos died in various protected areas of Assam. While at least 12 of them were poached, over 30 died in three waves of floods that swept through the state.

Views: Sabyasachi Patra -

"The Massacre continues: One More Rhino Killed by Poachers in Kaziranga

Another Rhinoceros has been murdered in Kaziranga National Park and its horn removed. The body with number of bullets was found in the Burapahar range of Kaziranga National park. The empty shells have been recovered.

Earlier the Chief Minister had announced a CBI enquiry and there have been attempts to strengthen the enforcement, however the massacre continues. There is a intelligence failure as the forest department is unable to know poachers are getting ready to enter the park. After the poaching incident, the whereabouts of the poachers are not known. To make up for its inefficiency, there are many raids conducted on the neighbouring villages, however, the villagers say that this is only meant for show. Forest department officials say that on the contrary, they have been conducting massive combing and search operations to recover the horn and nab the poachers.

The truth is somewhere in between. Kaziranga has turned into killing fields. When will the Government ensure that the Rhinos are safe? "

92 Lions died in 2011 and 2012 in Gujarat

92 Asiatic lions have died in Gujarat during the previous two years, revealed the Gujarat's Minister of State for Forest and Environment Shri Govind Patel. He further mentioned that nine lions had died due to unnatural causes including falling in open wells. Out of these 92 lions 46 each died in 2011 and in 2012. A majority of these lion deaths are cubs numbering 43, followed by 29 female and the rest 20 were males.

The minister also denied that lions are moving out of the Gir forests due to paucity of water.

In the last lion census in 2010, a lion population was estimated to be 411. With close to a quarter dead - 22.62% to be precise - the lion population is in precarious condition. According to scientists, any species with a population below 500 is under threat of extinction. With Gujarat linking the lions with its pride and refusing to relocate a few lions for a second home for lions, at any moment a disaster like the one faced in Serengeti can wipe out the entire asiatic lion population.

Genetic studies have revealed that the Asiatic lions don't have much of genetic diversity as the lion population appears to have come out of a severe bottleneck even before the early 1900s when the population was down to double digits. With populism prevailing over sanity, the lions may soon be a forgotten footnote in India's history, unless the Hon'ble Supreme Court directs the Gujarat Government to relocate lions to Kuno.

Equipment Discussions -

Canon EOS 100D/SL1 - smallest and lightest DSLR

Canon has introduced the EOS 100/Rebel SL1 camera which is touted as the world's smallest and lightest DSLR.

Highlights:

18 Megapixel CMOS sensor (APS-C size)

Digic 5 processor

Small size (25% smaller and 28% lighter than EOS 600D or Rebel 4Ti)

Press Release:

Canon U.S.A. Announces World's Smallest And Lightest DSLR Camera

New EOS Rebel SL1 Digital SLR Camera Fuses Advanced Image Quality and Features into an Ultra-Portable Body

MELVILLE, N.Y., March 21, 2013 – Continuing the quest to deliver superb product innovations, Canon U.S.A., Inc., a leader in digital imaging solutions, today announced the world's smallest and lightest DSLR* camera: the EOS Rebel SL1 Digital SLR Camera. It features a newly developed 18.0-megapixel CMOS (APS-C) sensor and high-performance DIGIC 5 Image Processor for exceptional image quality and speed. With its combination of lightweight size, ease of use and outstanding image quality, the EOS Rebel SL1 is perfect for users looking for the ideal camera to bring sightseeing on vacation or to capture the everyday.

"The EOS Rebel SL1 Digital SLR Camera represents a new era in DSLR versatility: ultra-portable, full-featured DSLR cameras," said Yuichi Ishizuka, executive vice president and general manager, Imaging Technologies & Communications Group, Canon U.S.A. "The EOS Rebel SL1 combines the high speed, high image quality and expanded shooting range of a DSLR camera, with the easy and fun usability of a point-and-shoot camera."

Advanced Image Quality in a Compact Body

As the world's smallest and lightest DSLR, the new camera body is 4.6" (w) x 3.57" (h) x 2.74" (d), and weighs only 14.36 oz.** In comparison, the EOS Rebel SL1 is approximately 25 percent smaller and 28 percent lighter than the EOS Rebel T4i digital camera.

The EOS Rebel SL1 features an 18 megapixel CMOS (APS-C) sensor that performs exceptionally well in both bright and dimly lit shooting environments with an ISO range of 100-12800 (expandable to H: 25600) for photos and ISO-6400 (expandable to H: 12800) for video. Canon's DIGIC 5 Image Processor technology allows for exceptional image quality and shooting speed up to four frames per second (fps).

The camera includes a new nine-point center cross-type autofocus (AF) system to help achieve fast, sharp focus. The new AF system also includes a new Hybrid CMOS AF II sensor, which provides a wider focus area when shooting photos or video in Live View mode, and a continuous AF speed that's increased from previous EOS models.

To help capture video with ease, the EOS Rebel SL1 features Canon's Movie Servo AF, which provides continuous AF tracking of moving subjects. When shooting video with one of Canon's new STM lenses, such as the EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM (available in the standard lens kit), Movie Servo AF takes advantage of the lens' stepping motor for smooth and quiet continuous AF. The camera is capable of Full HD shooting in a number of recording sizes and frame rates, and enables easy manual control of exposure, focus and Live View features. The combination of Canon's new Hybrid CMOS AF system II and EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM lens is ideal for shooting video helping to ensure only the sounds of the scene are recorded.

Allowing for clear and easy viewing even in bright environments, the Touch Screen three inch Clear View LCD monitor II provides a rich and expansive display as well as providing intuitive touch panel operation. Two finger touch gestures (multi-touch) can be easily used for zooming or changing images, accessing menu and quick control settings, and activating focus point and shutter release while

shooting.

Creativity at your Fingertips

The EOS Rebel SL1 encourages users to explore their creative side with a wide array of features for convenience and simple shooting. The EOS Rebel SL1 is equipped with Scene Intelligent Auto Mode, an advanced function that detects faces, colors, brightness, movement, contrast, distance and other factors and automatically adjusts and selects the exposure method needed. The results are photos with a wide dynamic range, ideal for users without advanced photography knowledge or experience.

Users can also access advanced imaging features like the new Effect Shot mode, which automatically creates two different shots, one with a selected creative filter and one without. In addition, Creative Filters and Background Blur Simulation can now be displayed in real time during Live View shooting. Editing photos is also a snap with the Rebel SL1's in-camera editing and cropping functionality. This feature allows users to view and crop the image using the camera's LCD touch screen and save the edited version as a separate file.

For those who would like to take beautiful photos with ease, the EOS Rebel SL1 offers a variety of scene modes to explore. New special scene modes include Kids, Food and Candlelight, giving users advanced presets to help ensure the best possible photos even under difficult shooting conditions.

Pricing and Availability

The new EOS Rebel SL1 Digital SLR Camera is scheduled to be available in April for an estimated retail price of \$649.99 for the body alone or \$799.99 bundled with the new EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM kit lens.



Natural History -

Wild boar feeding on Deer Kill

I came across this scene in Bandhavgarh National Park in 2006. I was very happy to see this as earlier, I had told my driver that I will only photograph a wild boar eating flesh. The driver and the guide were aghast and told me that wildboar doesn't eat meat. I was surprised that these fellows have been going to the forest everyday and don't have an idea about the wild boar habits. Fortunately, two days after we had this conversation, we came across this scene where a tiger had left behind a few bones, intestines and head portion of a cheetal stag (axis axis).

Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) also feeds on carrion. They are also known to steal a bite when the tiger has gone to the water leaving behind a fresh kill. I have seen Spotted deer with fawns giving alarm calls when wild boar comes close to them. Ofcourse, I haven't seen a wild boar actually killing a fawn, but it is likely that given a chance they can kill a fawn as well.



COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: Egrets M. Krishnan (Courtesy Shri.Saktipada Panigrahi)

The Sunday Statesman 10 March 2013

" WHERE the water is shallow and not too still, in estuaries and by sand-spits and the margins of lakes, the LARGE EGRET seeks its patient living. It is a solitary bird and likes a fair stretch of knee-deep water - but so do other waders more sociably inclined. Even when it finds a quiet creek, away from ibises and spoonbills and storks, it is rarely altogether free from the companionship of its cousins.

From these cousins it is distinguished by its size and carriage. Our egrets differ from herons in being all white - one of them, the Cattle Egret, has turned pastoral and moreover it does not belong to genus Egretta. But the Large Egret, the Smaller Egret and the Little Egret are all waders and all white, with exquisitely dissected plumes adorning them during the breeding season.

It is not easy to tell the two lesser egrets apart at a glance, highly sociable birds both and often found in the same places. Indeed, the difference between them is especially slight when they are not breeding, and the Little Egret lacks the Smaller Egret's distinctive, drooping, nuptial crest. The yellow feet of this bird contrast sharply with its black legs and are conspicuous in flight, but this may not

serve to distinguish it always. However, there is no mistaking the lone Large Egret.

If you see a gleaming white bird, the size and shape of a grey heron but more daintily made, stepping warily over the shallows by the shoreline, you may safely put it down as a Large Egret. Its long, slim neck is thrust well forward and even in repose it stands less upright than a grey heron - when it walks, the horizontal leaning is more pronounced and at times the bird seems almost on the point of toppling over!

Not that it is ever in danger of losing its balance. It is a canny bird and knows that fish and tadpoles and such underwater things that it hunts, are suspicious of sudden splashing. So it lifts its black feet clear of the surface and moves carefully forward through the air before setting its legs down gently through the water again: it cranes forward and prospects the shallows ahead and, when the prey is near enough, a lightning plunge with the poniard bill secures it.

After summer, this deft bill turns from black to yellow and with the plumes of love fallen, the humped back and abruptly tapering end of the tail are plainly visible. A Tamil poet who lived some 2,000 years ago has likened the shape of an egret standing huddled in the water during the rainy season to the bud of the water-lily - from afar and from June to November the simile seems strikingly true to life.

Incidentally, the aigrettes that were once so much in demand among fashionable ladies in Europe are the nuptial plumes of egrets - the Smaller Egrets being the most abundant provider. The plumes were collected humanely, without injury to the valuable birds, at egret farms near villages. With aigrettes going out of fashionable in the West, probably on account of a false sentimentality, egret farming has ceased to be thriving industry. The birds, however, continue to thrive and are rarely disturbed at their breeding sites by villagers, who consider the water fouled by a nesting colony excellent for the fields."

- M.Krishnan

This was first published on 9 August 1953 in The Sunday Statesman

Image of the Month -

The Image titled "Pelican Landing" by Gautam Biswas has been adjudged as the Image of the Month for February 2013

Details about the image: Bharatpur Bird sanctuary. Canon EOS 1Dx with 500mm f4 IS L lens ISO 800, f5.6 1/3200s



Wildlife Photography -

Bottle-nosed Dolphin by Abhishek Jamalabad



Black-headed Oriole by Dr. Jitendra Katre



Wildlife Photography -

Himalayan Griffons at Ranthambhore by Vijay Rajan



Crimson Sunbird by Anshul Jain



Wildlife Photography -

Kestrel by Sucheth Lingachar



Moment in the Wild: Leopard by Balaji Loganathan



Wildlife Photography -

Flights of Fancy: Flying Fish by Abhishek Jamalabad



Grass Jewel: One of our smallest butterflies by Vikram Gupchup



Wildlife Photography -

Sunset in Bharatpur by Gautam Biswas



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

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

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Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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