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IndiaWilds Newsletter

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Protecting India's Wilds: When will it get our attention?

We often get aghast when there is a news of a large seizure of tiger or leopard skins, claws and bones. Like a storm in a tea cup this lasts perhaps a few minutes before we jump onto another piece of breaking news. The authorities do make the right noises if and when asked during such moments and then status quo prevails. The actions of a few well meaning NGOs who not only provide support to the forest department in terms of intelligence but also help them in prosecution by providing lawyers make us believe that all is well.

These days drones or remote controlled copters equipped with cameras are capable of beaming images and videos live while they are flying. These have been used to fly over forests and scan the area for poachers and there has been an increasing call to enhance use of such technology by our forest departments. It is human to get bowled over by such technology and believe that these technologies to be the panacea. We do forget that first we must stop the leaking bucket before proposing to add scent to it.

According to IUCN Redlist, India has 974 species that are deemed threatened. Only six more countries have more number of threatened species than India has.



Tiger hacked into pieces by poachers



According to WPSI (Wildlife Protection Society of India) statistics of mega fauna poached & seized, in 2013 110 leopards, 42 tigers, 41 rhinos and 38 elephants were killed. Considering that for every one case that comes to light, there are perhaps 10 cases that evade detection. These figures can cause local extinction of a species from number of places for example all the tigers were once poached from Sariska and Panna. So if we are serious in preserving our wildlife, then it is also important to stop them being decimated by the poachers.



Barn Owl hunted

Too often we forget that the basic role of the forest department is protection of the wilderness areas and wildlife, maintaining the wilderness areas in an ecologically sound manner. Tourism and woodcutting to show revenues is not the real role of the forest department.

To show that the forest department is doing a good job, these days I find some of them doing a few videos of patrolling the highways passing through the forests, asking vehicles not to stop etc. These easy jobs help earn some of them brownie points. Unfortunately, we don't see many examples of foot patrol by the staff. There was a time when the forest department staff used to scour the forests moving from one beat house to another searching for clues of poachers, removing snares, stopping woodcutters from felling trees etc. These patrolling used to instill fear in the minds of the poachers that they can get caught.

Today with the increased amount of roads within our forests, relatively better availability of vehicles, the patrolling by staff is all but limited to a few areas and at the best few times a year. Old age of the staff also plays a big role in this. When the experienced staff retire, the newbies who take their place are not well versed in jungle craft and hence harbor deep fears about wild animals. So patrolling on foot becomes a frightening experience for them.

In one of the tiger reserves, when I prepared to spend the whole night alone in a watch tower on a cold January night, the forester remarked that in his 25 years of service, he has never spent a night alone in the forest and was really scared of wild animals. This forest didn't have the problem of left-wing extremists. So this speaks volumes about the ability of our forest personnel in guarding our precious bio-diversity.

It is not simply the problem of our front-line staff, as the PA managers don't place enough emphasis on foot patrolling by their staff. And when their people do patrolling, it is often limited to the areas that can be covered by vehicles. To effectively patrol an area, one needs to move in through the narrow game trails and trek inside the forest to find signs of intrusion,

snares, poaching, tree felling or presence of animal carcass etc.

Staff Shortage:

The Government through the reviews of various wildlife laws is walking down the path which it thinks is good politically. However, wildlife protection is not its focus yet. Till date we have only heard about conservation vis-à-vis development. It is true that in one stroke large swathes of wilderness areas are opened up for mining, roads, dams and other projects which fragments the habitats and increases the challenge for many species to survive. However, why is there no talk about protection of our wilderness areas from poaching, tree felling and land grabbing? Why no talk about filling the vacant staff positions in the various protected areas (PAs)?

It would be important for conservationists and media to highlight the vacancies in the various areas and continually raise the voice questioning the MoEF. We can easily maintain a list of vacancies though collecting data would be a bit difficult. RTI can be used to ask for such data. However, if MoEF doesn't want then they can simply refuse it by saying data not available. So frequently questions need to be raised in the parliament by MPs (either Rajya Sabha or Lok Sabha) who are interested in saving our wildlife and environment. This is not a one off job but a periodical job and data obtained through such means can be compared to arrive at the effectiveness of the MoEF in saving our wilderness areas. The traditional media which often resorts to sensationalistic stories can easily highlight the lack of staff in various forest departments across the country provided they get these information. So it would be important for conservationists and NGOs to feed them with such data.

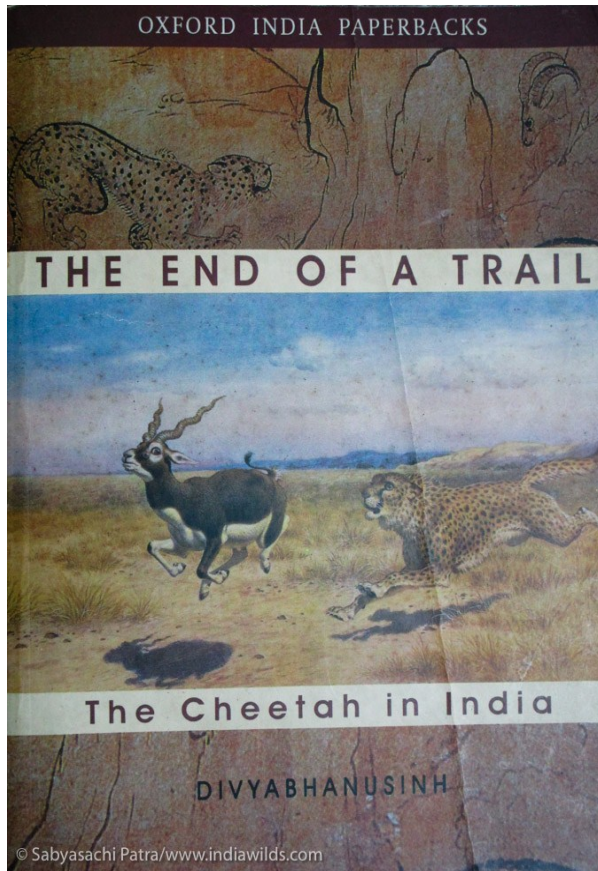
In this age despite Public-Private partnership being the buzz word and is seen as solution for many of our issues, filling staff vacancies is strictly in the domain of the Government. Corporates won't be able to hire people on their own rolls and second them to the forest department as the prevailing mantra is to reduce head-count and create a lean organization. It is also a fact that in many forest departments there have been cases of diversion of staff from patrolling to do errands for the officers. So corporates will not be able to help much in this area.

The Forest department can have some help from full time volunteers in various grades for fixed durations. There can be many young men and women as well as seniors who would be ready to work for free/on a honorarium for a few months with the forest department to fulfill their personal commitments towards environment and wildlife. This can help the forest department as these people would come with fresh ideas, which can help our environment and wildlife.

Will the Government wake up to the grim reality of staff shortage faced by our forest departments and take necessary steps?

Book Review: The End of A Trail: The Cheetah in India By Divyabhanusinh

As the title of the book “**The End of A Trail: The Cheetah in India**” suggests, one gets to know the complete history of the Cheetah starting from the chronicles of the Mughals to the modern day records from various sources till it got extinct. This book also collects information about the cheetah from the middle east to Iran, Iraq as well as parts of the former Soviet republics.



This book is replete with old photographs as well as art works from the Moghul era painstakingly sourced from various museums abroad, which not only tells us the story of the Cheetah along with the wildlife of that bygone era but also educates us about our history. The author writes that Moghul Emperor Akbar's reluctance to read and write resulted in his painters making detailed paintings for him and hence we have some authentic records about Cheetahs through the art works commissioned during his era. The author examines the various records of Cheetah in Sanskrit including the etymology of the name.

The book also delves into the imported African Cheetahs brought into India by the kings of various provinces for coursing when the Indian Cheetah had become relatively rare. Simple case of “Swadeshi” giving way to “Videshi” is a compelling story even about wildlife imports. When you don't care to become self-sustaining, you have to look outwards and import. While discussing the cost of African Cheetah, one also is reminded about the value of the Indian rupees in those days. In 1940, the US dollar was worth 3.31 rupees. Today the rupee is twenty times cheaper, a stark reminder of the nosedive that India's economy has taken since then. These two information is perhaps a telling commentary of not only our economy but the contempt with which we practice sustainability. That is the story of imports of other goods to India as well in the later years.

This book opened my eyes about the prevalent practices of training other carnivores for hunting blackbucks and other herbivores. Caracal, a rarely seen carnivore, was also trained to hunt.... The trainers were careful about the caracal as it can also attack its handler by biting and holding onto the neck, which the cheetah won't. Reading the training methods adopted gives us an idea about the deep knowledge of animal behaviour these trainers had. Wish our generation could have such grasp of natural history.

This book also highlights the cruel practice adopted by the British of hunting cheetahs by chasing them over horseback and spearing them. A student of India's Natural History will also love the quote of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy during the early 19th Century. Lord Curzon in his letter to the Burma Game Preservation Association wrote “The causes of this diminution in the wild fauna of India are... the steady increase of population, the widening area of cultivation, and the improvement in the means of communication – all of them the sequel of what is popularly termed progress in civilisation.

There are some persons who doubt or dispute the progressive diminution of wildlife in India. I think that they are wrong. The facts seem to me to point entirely in the opposite direction. Upto the time of the Mutiny lions were shot in Central India. They are now confined to an ever narrowing patch of forest in Kathiawar. I was on the verge of contributing to their still further reduction a year ago [1900] myself: but fortunately I found out my mistake in time, and was able to adopt a restraint which I hope that others will follow. Except in Native States, the Terai, and forest reserves, tigers are undoubtedly

diminishing. This is perhaps not an unmixed evil. The rhino is all but exterminated save in Assam. Bison are not so numerous or so easy to obtain as they once were. Elephants have already had to be protected in many parts. Above all deer... Every man's hand appears to be against them, and each year thins the herds. Finally many beautiful and innocent varieties of birds are pursued for the sake of their plumage, which is required to minister to the heedless vanity of European fashion."



Painting of Akbar's Hunt with a Cheetah

Some of the information presented in this book, especially about the status of cheetahs in Iran may look dated as this book was first published in 1995. However, the number of Asiatic Cheetah's in Iran is less and they are still leading a precarious existence there.

In the chapter on Extinction and Reintroduction, Dr. Divyabhanushinh makes a strong pitch for reintroduction of the Asiatic cheetah. "The preservation of fauna and flora is more important than the preservation of any of the great monuments, which after all were fashioned by man and can be recreated at a price. The present generation owes it to its successors to restore the only species of a large mammal lost in the plains of India in historical times. Failure to do so would not be forgiven by the judgement of history".

There was ofcourse an attempt made, albeit muddleheaded, to reintroduce the cheetah in India in 2009. Because of the low cheetah numbers in Iran, relocating a few cheetahs from Iran is likely to reduce the gene pool. On this pretext there was a controversial move to introduce African Cheetah's in India. Thankfully, that ridiculous proposal of introducing an alien species, was nixed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in 2012. For the record, there has been an agreement between Iran and Russia in 2010 to introduce some Asiatic Cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) in their former habitat in the Northern Caucasus region of Russia.

The book has great value for reference purposes as there are many tables including one, which talks about the Chronology of Extinction and gives us an idea about the cheetahs from various parts of the country. This book has as much appeal to the wildlife enthusiast as it has to a researcher or for that matter to a student of history and hence this effort to bring it again in front of a new generation of readers, researchers and wildlife enthusiasts. Published by Oxford University Press, this 248 page book is priced at Rs.795/- and is turning out to be a collectors item.

Conservation News

Fluorosis defangs lions of Gir

A study titled “Ecology of Lions in Greater Gir Landscape” by Dr Jalpan Rupara & Dr Purvesh Kacha found that lions are losing their teeth due to fluorosis. This study conducted across an area of 250 sq. km examined lions as well as people living in Lathi Liliya in Amreli district of Gujarat. They deduced that the high fluoride content in the ground water is resulting in fluorosis which results in tooth decay as well as deterioration of bones and joints.



Lion in Gir NP

Courtesy - Rajbir Oberoi

A total of eight lions were studied and three of them were afflicted with tooth decay. One of the lions had only two teeth remaining of its 26 teeth. The other two lions had lost three and four teeth respectively.

The reason cited by the authors was that lions in this region drink from ponds and rivulets, which are known to turn salty during summers and winters due to high contaminants.

Following this report, The Gujarat Forest Department has ordered a study on fluorosis in the area. According to CN Pandey, Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat, the Forest Department has asked Anand Veterinary Institute to study on fluorosis amongst the lions in Lathi Liliya area.

The lions of Gir had undergone a genetic bottleneck and have very low genetic diversity. Hence their susceptibility to diseases is higher. While the proposal to lion relocation to give them a second home hangs in balance, a few of them have moved out of Gir to establish new homes. Some of them perish by drowning in open wells, some others die due to electrocution. With a total estimate population of about 441, the Asiatic lion areas faces a long and hard struggle for existence.



Lion electrocuted in Gir

The demand for tiger body parts for use in Chinese medicine has resulted in poaching of not only tigers but also leopards. There has been information that the poachers are shifting their attention to lions. With lions wandering around in search of a suitable habitat, there hasn't been an easier time for the poachers. These lions are bouncing back from an estimated population of 13 in the early 1900s and scientific research tells us that there was another genetic bottleneck. So one virulent disease like foot and mouth disease can wipe away an entire population. The lions are trying hard to eke out a living. They do need assistance from us in helping create not only a second home in Kuno but also hopefully a few more.

Conservation News

PM's Climate Change Council reconstituted

Government reconstitutes the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change

The Government has decided to re-constitute the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change to coordinate National Action for Assessment, Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change.

The composition of the reconstituted Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, as approved by Prime Minister, is as follows:

Prime Minister	Chairperson
Minister for External Affairs	Member
Finance Minister	Member
Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change	Member
Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation	Member
Minister for Agriculture	Member
Minister for Urban Development	Member
Minister for Science and Technology	Member
MoS (Power, Coal and NRE)	Member
Cabinet Secretary	Member
Foreign Secretary	Member
Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change	Member
Dr. R. K. Pachauri, Chairperson, TERI	Member
Dr. Nitin Desai	Member
Shri Chandrasekar Dasgupta	Member
Shri Ajay Mathur, Chairperson, BEE	Member
Shri J.M. Mauskar	Member
Principal Secretary to PM	Member convenor

Objective of PM's Council on Climate Change:

The PM's Council on Climate Change would focus on the following tasks:

- Evolve a coordinated response to issues relating to climate change at the national level;
- Provide oversight for formulation of action plans in the area of assessment, adaptation and mitigation of climate change;

Conservation News

- Periodically monitor key policy decisions.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change will assist PMO in facilitating the work of this Committee.

The reconstituted Executive Committee on Climate Change (ECCC) held its first meeting on 14th Nov '14. The Committee reviewed the progress made by the eight National Missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

The Committee was apprised of the fact that 29 states had prepared their State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC). The committee noted that allocation of additional 1500 MW power was made by the Ministry of Power to Ministry of New and Renewable Energy for bundling scheme and that a team for quantification of GHG emission reduction through the implementation of national missions was set up. The Committee was also apprised about the establishment of a unit to coordinate actions in all Himalayan States and an institutional mechanism in 7 Himalayan States by Department of Science & Technology (DST) etc.

The National Mission on Enhanced Energy Efficiency reported emissions reduction by around 98.55 million tons by 2015 and saving of 23 million tons of oil- equivalent of fuel savings and distribution of 2.58 million LED bulbs. The designated consumers in the PAT scheme would be enhancing energy efficiency by 4.05% per year which would reduce energy cost by 7500 crores per year. The Committee suggested that the Mission should enhance its targets in the next PAT cycle.

The Solar Mission reported the addition of grid solar power of 2870 MW and off -grid solar applications of 364.27 MW along with solar thermal collectors of 8.42 million sq. Mtr till 2013-14 and total CO₂ reduction of 15.5 million tonnes. The Committee was apprised of the new projects of solar parks, solar PV power projects on canal top/canal banks and solar power driven agricultural pump sets and water pumping station in 2014-15 and implementation of green corridors transmission infrastructure.

While noting the progress made, the Committee expressed concern on lack of progress in allocation of sub-targets within the existing earmarking of 3 % for solar projects and implementation of Sustainable Habitat standards by the States. The lack of adequate funding was flagged by some of the missions. The committee discussed some other initiatives as envisaged in the NAPCC. These are Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation in power generation; other Renewable Energy Technologies (RET) programmes; Disaster management links; Protection of coastal areas; Health sector; and creating capacity at different levels of government on climate change and suggested that relevant ministries may prepare a work programme on all these initiatives. It advised that Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) should coordinate these initiatives. Suggestions were also made to launch new national missions in the field of Wind Energy, Health, Waste to Energy conversion and Coastal management.

The committee appreciated the efforts of state governments in formulating SAPCCs and recommended launching of a new Central Sponsored Scheme (CSS), if required, for implementing some of their priority projects. The committee suggested expediting the finalisation of remaining 6 SAPCCs. The committee was apprised of the “Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth” by the Planning Commission.

Government to establish Centre of Zoo Sciences soon - Prakash Javadekar

New Delhi, 03.11.2014

The Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Shri Prakash Javadekar today announced that the Government would set up a “Centre of Zoo Sciences” at New Delhi, while delivering the inaugural address at the 69th Annual Conference of World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). He said that the Centre of Zoo Sciences would aim to turn

around the functioning of zoos in the country, infuse scientific and technical culture in the present system. It appears that the recent incident of a man jumping into a white tiger cage and getting killed has made them include “making zoos visitor friendly” as one of the objectives of the proposed Centre of Zoo Sciences.

The proposed institution would act as a Technical Advisor to the Central Zoo Authority and to provide expert help to the States and UTs in ex-situ conservation breeding of endangered species, and organize training courses for in-service zoo personnel and stakeholders in India as well as for zoo personnel of South Asian countries.

The Minister Shri Javadekar while delivering his inaugural address said the theme of the Conference “Bio-diversity is Us” was quite appropriate for India, a land of diverse habitat eco-system, culture, religion, tradition, language and food. This was also manifested in the country’s cultural tradition that preserved about 13,270 secret groves across the country by the people. India with only 2.4% of the World’s land area was home to 7-8% of the World’s bio-diversity spanning across 91,000 species of animals and 45,000 species of plants. It also had four of the 34 globally identified biodiversity hotspots, supports about 50% of the world’s tiger population and 60% of Asian elephant and rhino population including the only surviving population of the Asiatic lion.

Shri Javadekar also highlighted the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry for the conservation of endangered species. He mentioned the initiative for setting up of Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species at Hyderabad, National Stud Book Cell at Wildlife Institute of India, and major zoos of the country becoming member of the International Species Information System to utilize the web based Zoological Information Management System with the help of CZA had been undertaken to compliment the ongoing conservation breeding programme for various endangered species. The Government had also initiated a programme for disaster management in the zoos in order to deal with recent incidents involving visitors inadvertently falling into the animal enclosures. The Minister also mentioned that the action plan for the conservation of vultures had been a great success with support being offered for conservation breeding centre for 23 species which included various endangered species.

Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Shri Ashok Lavasa, who was also present on the occasion, said that preserving nature was our ethical responsibility and the prime symbol of development would be to successfully conserve nature and ecosystems. He further stated that the Ministry was in the process of bringing about comprehensive changes in the Wildlife Act to incorporate international conventions and practices on environment protection.

It is good that the Ministry has recognized that the zoos are functioning badly and are not in sync with their objectives. Unfortunately mere mention of improving or creating a separate body to improve the scientific and technical culture in zoos would not result in significant change. If proper budgets are allocated and if there is freedom to conduct research on topics of interest to the researchers then it would help in creating an environment of technical and scientific excellence.

It would have been good if the MoEF would have also focused on in-situ conservation. There is hardly any research and effort to release animals in the wild. No amount of ex-situ conservation breeding is going to help if we don’t focus on releasing back healthy specimens back in the wild to augment existing populations as well as gene pool.

It is also a bit premature to celebrate the success of vulture conservation action plan, as vultures still remain endangered and hardly seen in most of our landscapes. Diclofenac drug is still available in number of places and is also available for humans. People are using that to treat their cattle and hence the danger persists. The Government has to take stern steps to take the killer drug out of the system. The ecological role played by vultures is enormous to be ignored. We hope vultures will again be seen in large numbers in and around our forests and villages. Only then we can claim success. Else, breeding of a few vultures in a centre will take our focus off the issue.

Equipment Discussions -

Canon announces EF 100-400 f3.5-5.6 L IS II USM lens

Canon has finally announced a version II of the highly popular EF 100-400 mm lens. The following are the salient features of this lens:



- One fluorite and one super UD lens element provides excellent correction of chromatic aberration throughout the entire zoom range, helping to deliver high-quality images with high resolution and contrast.
- Rotation-type zoom ring allows for more precise composition and excellent balance when handholding. The previous version had a push-pull mechanism which when hanged down can have a focus creep if not locked.
- Inner focusing, ring USM, a high-speed CPU and optimized AF algorithms for fast and accurate autofocus.
- Optical Image Stabilizer provides up to four shutter speed steps of correction*.
- Three image stabilization modes (standard, panning, and during exposure only) provide outstanding results for a wide range of shooting situations.
- Improved zoom torque adjustment ring allows easy setting of zoom tension.
- New Air Sphere Coating (ASC) helps to significantly reduce backlit flaring and ghosting.
- Highly resistant to dust and water, and amazing durability enabling shooting even in harsh conditions.
- Circular aperture (9 blades) helps deliver beautiful, soft backgrounds. The previous version had 8 blades. So the bokeh is expected to be more circular and beautiful.
- Fluorine coating on front and rear lens surfaces helps reduce smears and fingerprints.

- Lens hood with side window permits specialty filters to be adjusted with hood in place. Canon has introduced this for the first time in its lens line up to help in adjusting filters.



- Newly designed tripod mount can be attached or detached without removing the lens from the camera.
 - Minimum focusing distance of 3.2 ft. / 0.98 m with 0.31x maximum magnification. The previous version can focus to 5.9 feet/ 1.8 m. So during Safari if the tiger comes close still you can focus and it will also help in macro situations.
 - Size: The version II is slightly bulkier ie. it is 3.7x7.6 inch instead of 3.6x7.4 inch
 - Weight: The weight has increased by 200 g to 1.6kg.
- Price: \$2199 USD

Canon Press Release

Canon U.S.A. Introduces New Super-Telephoto Zoom Lens, The Compact And Highly Mobile Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM

New Super-Telephoto Zoom Lens Delivers an Enhanced IS System Providing Four Shutter Speed Steps of Correction, a Rotation-Type Zoom Ring, and New Optical Element Formula to Help Maximize Image Quality

MELVILLE, N.Y., November 10, 2014 - Canon U.S.A., a leader in digital imaging solutions, today announced the highly anticipated Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM lens, a second generation compact super-telephoto zoom lens featuring significant advancements in optical quality, image stabilization performance up-to-four steps, and rotating-zoom-ring design. This new L-series super- telephoto zoom lens features Canon L-series weather resistance and rugged magnesium housing to meet the needs of wildlife and sports photographers or photojournalists working out in the elements. Fully compatible with all EOS cameras, the EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM features a completely redesigned optical formula containing one Fluorite and one Super UD lens element - a combination unique to lenses in this focal range - to help

Equipment Discussions -

deliver sharp images with high resolution and contrast. This combination of elements helps thoroughly suppress chromatic aberration throughout the entire zoom range.

"The Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM is the logical evolution of the very popular EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM introduced 16 years ago," said Yuichi Ishizuka, President and COO of Canon U.S.A., Inc., "This long awaited, next generation lens was developed to be a highly portable and adaptable telephoto zoom lens for today's modern professional and advanced amateur photographers."



For photographers who want to work as closely as possible to their subjects, the minimum focusing distance of the lens has been reduced to just 3.2 ft. (0.98m), resulting in maximum magnification of 0.31x. The original EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM was well known for its push-pull zoom adjustment, but the EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM uses a rotation-type zoom ring similar to the one found on the EF 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM lens that allows for more precise adjustments, easier handling, and consistently excellent weight balance during handheld photography. In addition, the lens features an improved zoom torque adjustment ring that allows for the easy setting of zoom tension based on personal shooting preferences. The Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM also features an inner focusing system, a powerful yet quiet Ring USM, a high-speed CPU and optimized auto focus (AF) algorithms for fast and accurate autofocus in various shooting situations.

The Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM features three Image Stabilization (IS) modes - standard, panning, and during exposure only. Each IS mode is individually engineered to help provide outstanding results in a wide variety of shooting situations, and all serve to satisfy the personal preferences of photographers based on the type of IS they desire. The optical IS provides up to four shutter speed steps of correction, increased from 1.5 steps in the previous model*. In addition, the EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM features Canon's newly developed Air Sphere Coating (ASC) which helps to reduce backlit flaring and ghosting significantly, as well as a 9-bladed circular aperture Electro-Magnetic Diaphragm that helps to enhance beautiful, softly blurred backgrounds.

As with all L-series lenses, the Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM is highly resistant to dust and water, with excellent durability in even harsh conditions, ideal for wildlife photographers even in rainforest environments, or sports pho-

tographers on the sideline grabbing action shots of the big game. Fluorine coating on the front and rear surfaces of the lens can repel dust particles and water droplets. It also makes smears and fingerprints easy to remove without the use of lens cleaning fluid. Included with the lens is the new ET-83D lens hood, that features a cleverly placed and convenient side window allowing the user to easily adjust specialty filters while the lens hood remains in place. In addition, the EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L II USM is equipped with a newly designed detachable tripod mount which can be removed to reduce weight during handheld operation.

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: THE RATEL (THE HONEY BADGER)

The Sunday Statesman: 09-Nov-2014 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

"IN the old days there was a theory about the peculiar colouring of the Ratel, which is silvery-grey on the top and black below - the usual rule for a beast to be light-coloured ventrally and dark dorsally. Explaining the unorthodox colour scheme of the Ratel, people said that it helped this nocturnal animal in escaping observation by moonlight. They argued that the broad, silvery black blended so perfectly with the bright moonlight, and the black legs and underside with the shadows, that the ratel becomes almost invisible.

Now that is a theory that can satisfy armchair naturalists. It is true that the ratel is nocturnal but, unlike the Chukori of Hindi lyrics, it is not active and happy only when there is a moon. In fact, I suspect that the ratel's reputed fondness for moonlit nights is due to the fact that on dark nights people were unable to see the animal as it roamed abroad, and that it was observed only when the moon was bright enough for visibility. I must confess that I have never seen a ratel wild, by moonlight or any other light, but I have no doubt that its colouring renders it less clearly visible by moonlight than a beast that is dark all over. Those who have seen the ratel wild (usually on a riverbed or along some forest path) seem to have no great difficulty in spotting it.

The scientific explanation of the ratel's colouring is more interesting. Broadly speaking, the ratel belongs to the group that includes the Badger, the skunk (very ratel-like in its colouring) and the wolverine. The ratel, which belongs to Africa and Southern Asia, is closest to the badger and is, in fact, the Honey Badger. In this interesting loose group, many animals are dark below and light on top, or else conspicuously marked with white on the face or on top of the head, these creatures are very tough and quite formidable, in spite of their medium size, and many of them (the skunk and the wolverine, for example) have potent stink glands in addition - I should add that the wolverine, which is admittedly one of the toughest animals in creation, is not conspicuously marked in contrasting tones but is more or less whole-coloured. A characteristic that these beasts have in common is that they seem to fear no enemies and go about quite openly, not effecting the catlike stealth of typical predators, or the furtiveness of the hunted; living on small prey and partly on vegetables, they do not need to be silent in their movements, though some of them hunt expertly.

It is said that the toughness and stink of these creatures, advertised by their bold, contrasty colouring, give them a certain immunity from attack by larger animals - that their pattern of colouring is a "hands off" signal. In short, the scientific explanation is more or less Warning Colour.

Now, I have always felt a guarded distrust of Warning Colour as an explanation, but it is so very logically complete, and the more I see of life the less logical does it seem to me. I believe that the sight and details of colouration play a much less important part in casual encounters between wild beasts than they do in our lives. For one thing, animals go more by movement than by pattern or colouration in spotting one another, again, they are so much more sensitive to sound and smell than we are: moreover, sight, at night and in the scrub or jungle, cannot be a completely revealing sense, and remembering how colours fade in poor light, and the the majority of animals are colour-blind, small touches of colour or tone can have no significance - and the theory of Warning Colour is so very dependent on the apprehension of vivid markings is obnoxious, small creatures by their potential enemies, which enemies have no instinctive apprehension of the unpleasantness of warningly coloured creatures, but must learn to avoid them by experience! And what happens when a certain colour pattern, said to be of a powerful warning nature, is pointed out in a perfectly harmless creature? The pundit, far from being perturbed, is actually delighted - he lectures you on how mimicry exists side by side with Warning Colour.

Mind, I do not for a moment that warning colouration does not obtain in nature, or that mimicry is not a provable fact (and mimicry has no value apart from warning colour) - I only say there has been a tendency in the recent past to resort to this

theory too freely. I do not think the ratel's parti-coloured coat can be explained on the basis of warning colouration. The skunk, notorious for its stink skin, is silvery on top and black below, somewhat like the ratel. The ratel, too, has a sub-caudal stink gland, though it is less potent than the skunk's. But so far as I can ascertain, the ratel does not use its stink gland when it is fighting aggressors.

Dunbar Brander, and after him Champion have rightly called the ratel the bravest animal of our jungles. It is absolutely fearless, and its strong loose skin covered in harsh hair, its elastic muscles and its indefatigable zest for life makes a formidable combination along with its powerful jaws and useful claws. Instances are on record of ratels fighting and routing dogs which set upon them in the jungle - I have observed captive ratels carefully when they were "fighting" their keepers. The stink gland (which presumably has a social function in the ratel's free life) were never used on these occasions.

The Ratel is not only the bravest beast of our wild beasts, it is also one of the most playful. Full-grown ratels turn somersaults and indulge in frisky gambols - even ratels shut up in a small cage will find amusement in turning head over heels within the narrow confinements of bars. The ratel is really tough, and full of tireless energy but it is essentially crepuscular and nocturnal and cannot stand the sun - more than one captive ratel that I knew died of sunstroke. The name Honey Badger seems to have been well earned - the animal certainly does not have a sweet tooth. I always feel fascinated by it when I see a ratel in a zoo but cannot help feeling sorry also - it seems such a shame to continue a nocturnal wanderer so fond of open spaces and roving afield, and to exhibit it by the harsh glare of the sun."

-M. Krishnan

This was first published on 30 March 1958 in The Sunday Statesman

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.

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>

Image of the Month -

The honour for the Image of the Month goes to Pralay Lahiri's image of an Yellow-throated Marten from Darjeeling scavenging in a garbage dump. This image also shows how these rarities are trying to adjust to a human dominated landscape. Congratulations Pralay!

Darjeeling hills, January 2014

D7000+AFS Nikkon 80-400 ; 1/800 ; f/6.3 ; ISO 800



Wildlife Photography -

Bharal Ladakh by Sucheth Lingachar



Montagu's Harrier male by Shyamala Kumar



Wildlife Photography -

Oriental White eye by Jitendra Katre



Staying Firm by Bibhav Behera



Wildlife Photography -

The Blue Hour by Abhishek Jamalabad



Variable Bush Frog Calling by Abhishek Jamalabad



Wildlife Photography -

Funnel web spider by Pajwal Ullal



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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