



# IndiaWilds® Newsletter

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## Holy Cows: Old age home for cows:

The cow today dominates the political discourse in India. Though one thought that the emotional pitch around cow will come down after the Bihar elections, it still continues. The question now in front of us is whether this energy can be channelised for a positive impact.

This domestic animal impacts and has the potential to impact positively the wildlife conservation landscape in India.

In India though the cow is protected by law in many states, killing of bulls and bullocks are allowed if they are unfit for work or breeding. In the Article 48 of the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India cow is given special protection for Scientific Agriculture and also for preserving and improving the breed. However, the preservation of various indigenous breeds of cattle has never been taken up. Instead, the focus is on improving the quantity of milk generated by creating hybrids commonly known as “jersey” cows.

There are more than half a crore stray cattle in India (cattle census 2012). At one point of time there were enough grazing lands for these cattle. However, in the cities and towns there are hardly any green spaces for grazing and these stray cattle are trying to eke out a living by roaming in the streets looking for waste paper and edible items thrown by people. In the process,



Cow eating from a garbage bin

they have become a traffic hazard, causing accidents.

Around a decade ago, in a BBC radio interview about BPOs (Business Process Outsourcing) companies, the interviewee was quoted as saying these buildings will grow bigger, roads will become wider but there



will still be cows in the streets. This cynical view of the cow being omnipresent in our lives, albeit in a pitiable condition is likely to continue if no concerted action is taken.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the foreword to the book *The Wild Life of India* by E. P. Gee wrote “In India, perhaps even more than in other countries, there is this difference between precept and practice. In no country is life valued in theory so much as in India, and many people would even hesitate to destroy the meanest or the most harmful of animals. But in practice we ignore the animal world. We grow excited about the protection of the cow. The cow is one of the treasures of India and should be protected. But we imagine that we have done our duty by passing some legislation. This results not in the protection of the cow but in much harm to it as well as to human beings. Cattle are let loose and become wild and become a danger not only to crops but to human beings. They deteriorate and the very purpose for which we value the cow is defeated”.

So it is time for us to think of ways to ensure that the cattle let loose by owners and roaming around the streets are handled in a humane manner.

At present some State Governments give money to Goshala's to have keep cattle. However, the amount of money is not sufficient and hence the cows are neglected. We can create Natural Goshala's or Old Age Homes for cows. These can come up in the fallow lands owned by the Government departments primarily the Revenue department. Large areas of anything between 50 to 200 acres or more bordering forests and having water bodies or ponds can be wire fenced and made inviolate for people. The stray cattle can then be transferred to these enclosures. The cattle can then roam around freely without losing their lives in accidents or without being beaten by people for eating their crops or flowering plants in gardens. They can live on the vegetation in these areas and die in peace.

Since the cattle would be confined to the area, the cow dung will also be dropped in the area.



Cows in a Goshala

It would act as manure and some of the trees and vegetation will become bigger and better. The manure will also help in regenerating the native vegetation. When these cattle die their carcass would help in feeding the jackals, hyaenas and possibly some leopards. Since these cattle would not be injected with diclofenac which kills the vultures, it would also help in bringing back the vulture population from the brink. These days people even sell the dead cattle and their bones and flesh shredded for chicken and shrimp feed. With these group of cattle which will be in the large wire fenced areas, they will be feral for all practical purposes and when they die their bones, flesh and hide will not be taken away for processing into animal feed. So it will indeed help our scavengers and help sustaining their population as we have virtually decimated the wild herbivores by poaching.

Without These predators will also not enter into the villages and towns in search of food and create panic among people. Even today there are many places in India where leopards and other predators are seen close to villages and living in peace. With these areas being made inviolate to people along with their cattle, other herbivores like wild boars etc will also come to these places. Over a period of time these fallow lands will have good greenery and it will be a carbon positive move.

I have come across many vigilant groups who stop transport of cattle as they feel cattle are being destined for slaughter. They beat up the drivers and release the cattle. Unfortunately, for the cattle it is like between the devil and the deep sea. On one hand they don't have food and had to scavenge the trash on the streets, consume polythene bags and aluminium foils along with food and die a painful death and on the other hand there is the prospect of quick death in slaughterhouses. While talking with some of these groups, I was told that some of them genuinely believe in animal welfare and collect donations from people to feed birds like peacocks, pigeons etc close to some temples. So creating wire fenced areas to send draught cattle and street cattle would be a feasible move as these groups should readily help in transporting them as they will feel that cow slaughter will thus be averted.

This move will of course have its detractors as today the real estate lobby despite having unsold inventory of more than six years have their eye on any area lying idle.

By this move, the Government will not need to pay for the upkeep of the stray cattle. They just need to spend money for the wire fencing and provide the area for this purpose in perpetuity.

The cows will at least not feed on plastics and other trash in the cities and die a painful death after consuming those plastics. Apart from being a humane move, it will also make our roads safe and give a positive image about India. Whether the people making noise about cow protection will move beyond empty rhetoric and actually act in creating natural goshalas or old age home for cows is anybody's guess.

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## Chennai Drowned:

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” wrote Santayana in *The Life of Reason* in 1905.

His words are proving prophetic in India today.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2005 Mumbai faced its worst flooding in its recorded history. Every year life in Mumbai gets disrupted during the rains, however, 2005 was different. On that fateful day the city got 944mm of rainfall, equal to the average rainfall of an entire year. The city was caught napping. It had allowed rampant destruction of mangroves along the Mithi river, Mahim Creek as well as on the Thane Creeks for construction of commercial and residential complexes. Along with clogged drains now the water had nowhere to go. Tomes were written about it but quickly forgotten.



A month later on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2005, New Orleans was flooded as Hurricane Katrina hit the city. With close to 50% of the city below mean sea level, the storm surge led to 80% of the city under water with some places even having 15 feet of water. Fortunately, about 80 to 90% of the city was evacuated before the storm. However, many parts of the city remained under water for a long time. When a city is below mean sea level and there is flooding, it is virtually next to impossible to pump back the water. However, not many learnt that you need to take cognisance of nature's rules while building a city.

The year 2005 ended with flooding a few months later in the eastern coast in Chennai. On 03, December 2005, in Chennai within a period of 24 hours, 234 mm rainfall was recorded at the city centre in Nungambakkam, the Chennai airport area received 282mm rainfall. At Tambaram, the suburb at South of Chennai got 314mm rainfall. Predictably the lakes overflowed, choked drains couldn't take the water, nor the two rivers Cooum and Adyar could drain out the water as the floodplains of these two rivers were encroached upon. Many parts of the city were cut off. In a water starved city this was considered as an aberration and was quickly forgotten.

Ten years on, Chennai has grown bigger. There have been much more investments into the city and its suburbs. Various wetlands have been encroached, debris deposited to fill the wetlands. The wetlands in Tamil Nadu are referred to as *peramboke* lands i.e. wastelands. The real estate mafia didn't leave a single wetland unconstructed. The Government too doesn't realise the importance of wetlands. So the huge Inter-state bus terminus at Koyambedu in Chennai was constructed



## Chennai Drowned:

in a wetland. In 2005, behind the bus terminus, I had found winter migrants. Later, the wetlands were completely re-claimed. A part of the Airport too is built on the Adyar river. Though the administration took some measures in demolishing a few walls and hostels of colleges that had come up in the river bed, a majority of the so called development is unscientific and is on wetlands. So when it rains, flooding is the inevitable consequence. Governments make themselves show as efficient by announcing relief measures. The TN Govt. estimated that the damage is to the tune of 8481 crores and demanded 2000 crores as flood relief from the Central Government. Since there is a State election probably next year, the Central Govt. promptly announced 940 crores of rupees as relief.



Wetland near Chennai

Unfortunately, the core problem remains unattended.

In our quest for growth, we are concretising wetlands. Most of these wetlands used to be fed by seasonal streams. Unrestrained dumping of sewage turned these into gutters, so people only have contempt rather than appreciation for the use of these streams and wetlands. Many SEZs, industries, colleges and residential areas have come up in the wetlands around Chennai. Where I used to see flocks of migratory birds during winter and a solitary jackal at times, today there are housing societies or industries. During my previous stint with an MNC, in a meeting with the Govt. we were suggested that land was available behind our boundary if we choose to fill the seasonal stream. I had strongly said no, however, there are other industries who grab such an opportunity.

To add to this, illegal slums come up in the low lying areas. These slums are inhabited by people who come to the city in search of jobs and work as cooks, drivers, helpers, workers in industry, hawkers etc. They are the first to bear the brunt of

## **Chennai Drowned:**

flooding and diseases that follow water logging. They are the dark underbelly of the Shining India. Unfortunately, our growth is happening in a haphazard manner. Big cities are growing bigger and bigger. The new Government at centre was quick to abolish the Planning Commission but the old ways of lopsided growth continues. This results in highrise apartments everywhere followed by such slums. The Government then turns a blind eye to the environmental violations of builders and industries and often regularise those.

The natural drainage mechanism has been destroyed as our greed has overridden our common sense. We know that when you clog your kitchen sink and the tap is open, the water overflows. Or when you shut the bathtub and open the water tap, the bathroom overflows. So why not use this basic common sense for town and city planning?

It is not just in India that there is higher rainfall. Climate change has become a reality around the world. Qatar, a desert country, has got its heaviest rainfall this month and it led to heavy flooding of the roads. Many cars were completely submerged in the underpasses. The US Embassy in Qatar was closed and many people had to be rescued. Similarly in the neighbouring desert country of Saudi Arabia schools and offices were closed due to flooding. The authorities who were unprepared for this kind of eventuality were forced to use tankers to pump out the water. However, climate change has resulted in unpredictable weather conditions and it will be an uphill battle for the civic authorities.

We read that the Indus Valley Civilisation at Harappa and Mohenjo daro had meticulously planned cities. It is a matter of shame that even after more than 4000 years our city planning is unscientific. Climate change led to the fall of Harappa around 4200 years ago as annual monsoon rains stopped for 200 years.

With the sea levels going to rise, low lying areas like Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai would be the first to see significant flooding. History is repeating itself and these are the early warnings. Hope we wake up from our stupor.

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## Surrender LPG subsidy a Climate Action?

The Hon'ble Environment minister has said that the Government's plan asking people to voluntarily surrender their LPG subsidies is a huge climate action.



The Minister says that with some people listening to the Government's call and voluntarily giving up their LPG subsidies, there is a bigger pool of money which can be given to more houses as LPG subsidies. He said that 6325 families dependent on firewood have been provided with LPG connection. He considers this as a positive action towards climate change. Unfortunately this is stretching the truth way too far.

There have been many efforts throughout the country by NGOs to provide LPG connections to people living in the fringe of forests and housewives prefer the gas stoves over the traditional smoky wooden stoves. It does help in reducing the firewood collection from the forests. However, the Government hasn't taken any massive effort to really make a difference by completely stopping the firewood collection. Hence the hankering for credits and linking it to climate change is certainly a laughable matter.

The Government is not focusing on the use of subsidised LPG cylinders for commercial purposes. The cylinders for commercial customers are costlier and hence they want to use the LPG cylinders meant for domestic consumption. If the Government can ensure that the subsidies domestic LPG cylinders are not used for commercial purposes then the overall cost to the Government would reduce. Today piped gas has become a reality in many cities. The Government has to push for converting all domestic connections to piped gas, so that the overall cost to the Government will reduce.

The call to give up LPG subsidy is a result of the ballooning subsidy bill. The Government wants to reduce its fiscal deficit by reducing the subsidies. So it can't even spend money on necessary things. Hence, reducing subsidies which are unnecessary should be the focus of this Government. Unfortunately, the Government doesn't have the will to do so. For example, the subsidy on fertilisers is massive. Every year it keeps on growing. The fertiliser lobby is pretty strong and ensures that the Government keeps on giving subsidies. It is a well known fact that due to the excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides the soil as well as the ground water and fresh water sources are getting polluted. Even in number of states people are dying due to disease. Farmers are ruined and committing suicide. However, the subsidy burden keeps on increasing.

## **Surrender LPG subsidy a Climate Action?**

The Narendra Modi Government had made some noises about organic farming. It is well known that organic farming doesn't lead to chemical residues in the vegetables and fruits and these days even fetches higher prices. Ofcourse the produce is put through strict checks and any fields should not have used chemical fertilisers for last 12 years to be branded as "organic".

The Government can easily announce reduction of chemical subsidies and either partially or fully divert those to promote organic farming. Unfortunately, the political parties are hand in glove with these fertiliser and pesticide manufacturers and hence we shouldn't expect real action on this front. So may be till some real concrete action happens on the ground, these kind of "positive spin" to routine events will continue.

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## Conservation News

### Backdoor entry for GM mustard?

The Modi Government seems to be embracing Genetically Modified (GM) food crops and soon we may start consuming it without knowing.

It has come to light that GM mustard trials have been conducted in a hush-hush manner and the details are being hidden from people of this country by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC). A 2008 Supreme Court ruling clearly mentions that the details of the trials have to be known to people before the approval for commercial production runs are given.

In 2010 following a huge hue and cry by people, scientists, activists the plans for Bt Brinjal was shelved. There has been scientific studies regarding the potential of crop to wild hybridisation in egg plant (Davidar et al. 2015, American Journal of Botany). Unfortunately, it appears that the Genetic Trials are being conducted primarily from a narrow commercial concern which will benefit a few. Even RSS, the parent body of the ruling party, was against introduction of GM food Crops. However, the Government seems to be putting in all its efforts behind this the reason for which remains unknown.

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### Mumbai Trans Harbour Link to kill Flamingo Habitat

The proposed Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) project which is to link Nhava Sheva in Raigad district with Sewri in Mumbai will adversely affect the mangroves in the area and will impact the flamingos that visit Sewri every year. According to the project proponents about 47 hectares of mangrove forests have to be sacrificed. Taking cognisance of this issue, on 24<sup>th</sup> November the MoEF&CC (Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change) has asked the MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority) to get this project cleared from the Maharashtra State Wildlife Board.



Though MMRDA has been requested to change the alignment, they are adamant in not changing the alignment. Sources say that they fear cost escalation if they change the alignment. Flamingos prefer to feed and rest farther from the bridge and traffic as can be seen in Thane and Vashi. They are comfortable if the traditional fishing boats come close. However, the moment motor boats come about 100m they start flying away. It would not be a wise move to further fragment their habitat by constructing the Nhava Sheva to Sewri Mumbai Trans Harbour link. The construction, deposition of debris,

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## **Conservation News**

noise will act as a death knell for the flamingos. Furthermore, one can plant mangroves, however, one cannot create a forest as there are very complex ecological interactions between various species in these forests and to understand and replicate it in a new place is simply impossible. Given the focus on greenlighting infrastructure projects by this Government, one won't be surprised if the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link project gets the greenlight.

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### **No GIB eggs for Gujarat**

Two years ago Supreme Court had asked Gujarat to relocate some of its Asiatic lions to Madhya Pradesh — it is still not done. Gujarat Govt. has been vehemently protesting the order to relocate a few lions to Madhya Pradesh. Now Rajasthan is refusing to send eggs of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) to Kutch for breeding. The site was chosen in Kutch because of proximity to the sea coast and hence moisture, lower temperature and vegetation throughout the year so that potential of egg laying is maximum.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with the Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra forest departments had planned for conservation breeding programme by collecting eggs from the wild and transporting these to Kutch, to build a breeding population and subsequently release captive-bred birds.



**Great Indian Bustard**

**Courtesy - Kaustav Cahtterjee**

Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje is supposed to have instructed Rajasthan wildlife officials that no GIB eggs were to be shared with Gujarat. Instead, the state forest department has been asked to request the Centre for a breeding and research centre for Rajasthan's state bird near Jaisalmer in the Desert National Park (DNP).

The Centre has sanctioned Rs 35 crore for five years under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) for the project.

## **Conservation News**

The GIB is critically endangered with less than 200 remaining in the wild, mostly in Rajasthan.

The rationale behind sending eggs to hatch in Kutch is being questioned as nearly 90% of the birds are in Rajasthan. The grasslands of Kutch used to have Great Indian Bustards, however their sightings have become increasingly rare. It is obvious that Gujarat Government has failed in preserving this species.

On the other hand, Rajasthan too hasn't done great as the Great Indian Bustard is now found only in a few areas, having become locally extinct in much of its former range.

Unfortunately, State Government are now increasingly becoming narrow minded in trying to keep a species in their state and not collaborating with each other to reintroduce the species in its former range. If the health of the species would have been given importance then Gujarat wouldn't have had a problem in sending lions to Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan wouldn't have problem in sending GIB eggs to Kutch. Interestingly Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are ruled by the same party. I hope GIB doesn't lose out in the games people play.

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### **8 More birds added from India to IUCN Red List:**

IUCN has added the eight bird species from India in the Red List of threatened species for 2015. The following are the eight species added to the list of threatened:

- The Northern Lapwing
- Red Knot
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Eurasian Oystercatcher
- Bar-Tailed Godwit.
- Horned Grebe (uplisted from least concerned to vulnerable)
- Common Pochard (uplisted from least concerned to vulnerable) and
- Steppe Eagle

Total number of threatened bird species in India have reached to 180 from 173. This show the increased threat to their grasslands and wetlands habitat.



**Common Pochard**  
**Courtesy - Subhash Shrivastava**

## **Conservation News**

The European Roller was down listed from near threatened to least concerned.

The very fact that a bird with the name common ie “Common Pochard” is now becoming uncommon should be a matter of concern.

At one point of time, in India naturally occurring water bodies were every where. In places where water bodies were not present, Rajas and Maharajas used to construct ponds and water bodies to act as water storage. Those use to act in re-charging the ground water. There were also ample grasslands and forests and birds were numerous. They were so numerous that the British used to indiscriminately kill thousands of birds in shoots. Today shooting continues, albeit surreptitiously. However, the major threat is habitat destruction. The real estate mafia is always on the look out for filling up wetlands and constructing on it. Those moves are passed off as development and growth oriented. So we have reached a point that common species are on the verge of extinction. It is time we woke up, else, the new generation would not get the pleasure of hearing bird songs.

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## **IndiaWilds App for Android Mobile**

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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>

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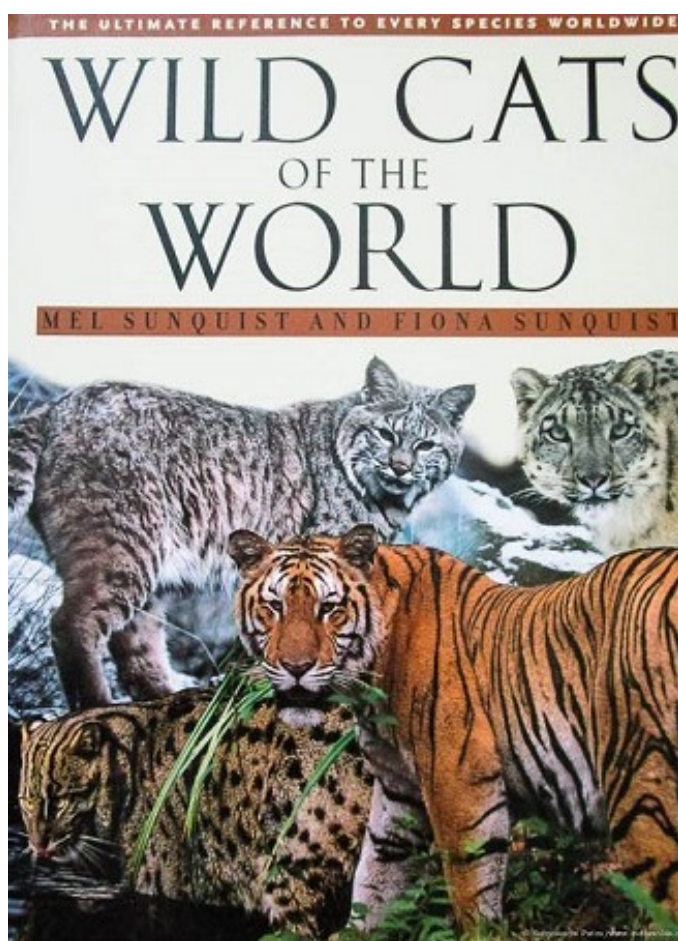
## **Book Review -**

### **Wild Cats of the World**

**By: Mel Sunquist and Fiona Sunquist**

Do you know what is Jaguarundi? Have you ever heard about Oncilla, Kodkod and Manul? These and other species of wild felids totalling 36 have been covered in the book Wild Cats of the World.

This book has detailed the ecology and behaviour, social organisation, feeding ecology, distribution of the species, reproductive behaviour, status in wild as well as in captivity for each of the listed species. The book also contains lot of photographs both in colour as well as in black and white. Many of those are from captivity. Though some of the photographs could have been better, still they help in conveying the information of the species. I liked the way each chapter on a species starts with a black and white photo.



### **Leopard Behaviour:**

The compilation by Mel Sunquist and Fiona Sunquist would also appeal to the casual wildlife lover as the chapters have many interesting references about the behaviour of a species which would challenge the knowledge gleaned by watching some of the wildlife programs of the popular broadcasters like NGC and Discovery. For example, it is a generally accepted fact that a hyaena appropriates the kills of a leopard and the leopard generally leaves the kill and takes cover. However, one incident from the book shows the opposite. Jonathan Scott records an occasion when a female leopard struggled with a hyaena that was attempting to steal a kill from her. “She charged, switching from defence to attack, clawing at the hyaena and sinking her daggerlike canines into his neck as he attempted to snatch the impala away....The two animals con-

## **Book Review -**

tinued to struggle ferociously for possession of the impala, fighting in the manner of hungry lions contesting ownership of a small kill. Neither dared release their grip on the food so as to bite the other, for fear of losing it altogether. The hyaena outweighed Chui by at least thirty pounds, and the crushing power of his jaws was second to none. But it was Chui's food and she possessed the muscular strength which, pound for pound, rivalled that of any hyaena. The leopard wrenched the kill and the hyaena towards the eucalyptus tree where the impala had originally hung". (page 328)

### **Domestication of Cats:**

Dogs are generally referred to as man's most loyal companion and hence one may guess that there would be more dogs than cats. However, this book dispels that myth and says that in 1997 there were 70.2 million pet cats in USA as opposed to 55.9 million dogs.

It also provides information about origin and domestication of cats. "cats are believed to have been first domesticated in Egypt, some four thousand years ago, but the problem of identifying the exact period when domestication occurred is complicated by the fact that domestic cats are only recently descended from the African wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*). For this reason, the skeletons of domestic cats and wildcats are difficult to differentiate"... "Though most of the evidence points to Egypt as the birthplace of the domestic cat, bones of small felids have been found at older archaeological sites in other areas. The remains of African wildcats have been excavated from Jericho and dated at 6000 to 7000 B.C., but there is no evidence that these were from domesticated animals; rather, they may have been the bones of cats killed for fur. Recent excavations of a six-thousand year old settlement on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus have unearthed a cat's jawbone, suggesting that cats may have been associated with people for longer than was previously thought. Wildcats do not occur naturally on Cyprus, so the animal on the island must have been brought there in a boat, either as an accidental stowaway or as a pet". (page 100)

### **Information about Early Lions**

"The earliest true lions appeared in Europe 600,000 years ago. Believed to be the largest cats that ever lived, these early cave lions were some 25 percent larger than today's largest lions. The European cave lion (*Panthera leo spelaea*) spread from Europe to eastern Asia, and fossil material about 400,000 years old has been found at China's Peking Man site in Choukoutien, where fossil tigers have also been found. Cave paintings and fossil evidence from 200,000 years ago show that cave lions later coexisted with early humans-lion bones have been found alongside artifacts from Neanderthal people". (page 286)

### **Lion vis-a-vis Tiger:**

There is an interesting information about fighting ability of a lion vis-à-vis a tiger. "Occasionally lions were forced to fight tigers, but apparently the tiger always won. This observation was confirmed more recently in the 1950s by a keeper at the Bronx Zoo, where a lion cub named Zambezi and a young tiger named Ranee were raised together. Their occasional fights always resulted in victory for the tiger. Alfred Martini, the keeper, described the tiger as being a better fighter, "like clever boxer against a heavy hitter, shrewder and trickier". (page 287)

Apart from the species listings there are also other interesting chapters. In the Appendix, chapters like Olfactory Communication in Felids, Vocal Communication in Felids, Reproduction in Felids etc as well as Conservation status that are informative. One can also find the list of Scientific as well as Common names of the species for ready reference.

Though this book claims to be the ultimate reference to every species worldwide and the authors are said to have put in more than a decade of work there are certain areas that could have benefitted some rigorous effort.

There are also chapters on field research techniques, Relocating Cats: History and Guidelines for Future where the authors

## **Book Review -**

briefly cover the subject, the researchers as well as serious wildlife lovers can get much more detailed information from other sources. In the Relocation Cats chapter one would have expected the introduction of a zoo bred tigress into the wild by Bill Arjan Singh, as the authors seem to be familiar with Billy, having quoted him in the leopard chapter. Similarly introduction by Born Free foundation which had got lot of press coverage worldwide or relocation of lions from Gir to Chandraprabha Sanctuary in Varanasi Forest Division in 1965 should have found mentions as they were some of the initial work done on the subject. In India a lot of work has been done on relocation of leopards as well as tigers since the publication of the book “Wild Cats of the World”. So readers of the book may skim through these chapters.

The authors have quoted scientific journals, papers etc and have even cross-referenced those. However while including references some of the popular and respected authors like Jim Corbett and Billy Arjan Singh are included but well respected naturalists like M. Krishnan’s observations are surprisingly absent. Even authors like Kenneth Anderson have been quoted whom Billy Arjan Singh had accused of concocting “pot-boilers” stories in his books. The authors perhaps have depended on books published abroad and/or of foreigners. Many Indian authors especially on tigers have been completely overlooked. Hopefully these can be taken care off in a next edition or by other authors if and when such a work is again undertaken.

In the wild cats category the information on Indian desert cat *Felis libyca* is sparse.

To conclude, I feel “Wild Cats of the World” with its 452 pages will be a good help to researchers for preliminary help on literature survey as the articles are cross-referenced. It will also be a good reading for kids, students and wildlife enthusiasts for the breadth of information. The book is hard bound and is published by University of Chicago Press.

The list price of the book is **\$45 USD**. It is available in **India at Rs.3409/-** from [amazon.in](http://amazon.in)

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## Equipment Discussions -

### Canon launches XA35 and XA30 Camcorders with Built-in Wi-Fi® Capability

Canon has launched two HD Camcorders with 20x Optical Zoom lens.

#### Following are the Salient Features

Sensor: CMOS, 1/2.84"

Resolution: Full HD ie. 1920x1080 at 24p and 60p

Zoom lens: 20x ie. 26.8mm to 576mm

DIGIC DV4 Image Processor

Buy: <http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Ca...DFF/d10-v1-t12>



**Stabilisation:** Canon has included Intelligent Optical Image Stabilization with powered and dynamic modes and auto on/off mode. The Dynamic IS helps in improving the translational IS i.e. up and down/left and right movements, including roll axis correction (tilting/rocking of the camera forward and back), horizontal roll correction and vertical roll correction for a total of five-axis correction when shooting on the wide end of the lens.

The Macro IS Corrects angular and shift-type shake in wide-angle shots.

It also has a Powered IS mode for correcting low-frequency shake when zoomed in to longer focal lengths.

Improve low light ability: HD CMOS PRO image sensor with low-luminance noise of +3dB for improved low-light performance

**Recording media:** Dual SD card slots

**Codec:** AVCHD (28Mbps) and MP4 (35Mbps). The XA35 has an HD/SD-SDI output (XA35 only) to feed video directly to a microwave van, satellite uplink, or other TV transmission system.

**Expanded Dynamic range:** The Canon XA 35 and XA30 feature Wide DR mode where one can get a dynamic range

## Equipment Discussions -

up to 600 percent compared to the 300 percent on the predecessor Canon XA25/XA20 camcorder models.

**LCD:** 3.5-inch, 1.23 million-dot OLED touch-panel display and 10,000:1 contrast ratio Electronic Viewfinder with controllable iris.

**New Highlight Priority Mode:** This mode helps in capturing visual characteristics which can easily be lost due to video compression, so that realistic depiction of blue skies and clouds, the translucence of water and the luster of metals etc is achieved.

Qualities like Peaking for better focus assist, zebra for exposure, colour bars and test tone are available in these camcorders.



**Canon XA-35 Camcorder**

**Built-in WiFi:** The XA35 and XA30 HD camcorders both feature wireless connectivity for easy sharing and uploading of files.

### **Infrared Shooting mode:**

The XA35 Professional Camcorder features an Infrared Mode allowing the capture of video in very low light. Improved from the XA25 and XA20, it can shoot at brightness levels that are approximately 1.4 times more sensitive, and allows low-light capture by removing the infrared cutoff filter from the optical path. Its specially designed lens coating allows the infrared light to pass through to the image sensor. Additionally, the detachable handle of the XA35 features an infrared emitter with a diffuser to shoot appealing infrared imagery even in complete darkness. For evening camera crews or nature documentary makers, the benefits of a compact, high performance camcorder for shooting in such conditions are obvious. Also, the XA35 gives the option of recording in white or green mode.

## **Book Review -**

### **Slow and Fast motion and interval recording:**

The Canon XA 35 and XA30 feature slow (maximum 0.4x) and fast (maximum 1200x) recording options as well as interval recording options, so that one can do timelapse.

**Weight:** 0.77 kg

For us wild life shooters, the 20x zoom lens will be a big help. The compact nature of this camera will be helpful in treks etc where carrying heavy equipment would be a challenge. The only issue now is that this is in NTSC and doesn't shoot PAL ie. 25fps. So one has to use 24p.

**Cost:** The XA 35 costs **2499 USD** and the XA30 costs **1999 USD**.

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## Equipment Discussions -

### Sirui K40X 54mm ball head

One line review: It is stable with my heavy lens and camera combo. I had never heard this name Sirui before and I assume many of you would not have heard the name of this Chinese company. It was a leap of faith for me to order the Sirui K40X 54mm ball head from [amazon.in](http://amazon.in)

This ball head specifications had the the highest load bearing capacity mentioned in the specifications. At 35kgs rated load capacity, I thought this may be stable for my normal camera and lens which comes around 9kgs.



### First impressions:

I got a small package and from the outside packaging it looked cheap. Then I removed it and saw the original Sirui box. Neither the colours were impressive nor the quality of the card board box. Immediately I thought that I have made a mistake. Inside the box there were three pieces of badly cut thermocole. Within it was a soft pouch. On opening the pouch I found the ball head.

Two decades ago I was a metallurgy engineer and when I held the ball head the fit and finish and the anodizing made me feel good.

The ball head appears heavy and solid. The knobs look to be of good quality. I proceeded to immediately place it on my tripod. I didn't bother to look at the flimsy one page folded manual as it appeared to confuse me. Also, the best way to test the gear is to see if it is intuitive or not for use in the field. In the forest one can be in a life threatening position if you fiddle around your gear too much in presence of animals.

After fitting the ball head on the tripod, I was surprised to find that the panning is smooth. I had bought the ball head pri-



## Equipment Discussions -

marily for locked down shots as I don't trust cheap heads. Though the ball heads don't have a handle, one can hold the camera and the ball head at the base to do a bit of panning. One can get away with it. So full marks for something which I never intended to do.

I proceeded to mount my Canon 400mm f2.8 L IS USM lens which weighs 5.3 kgs. Mounted a 2xII TC on it and the Canon Cinema C300 camera. It was more than 8+ 9kgs. This combo on the same Gitzo GT3530LSV tripod and a Manfrotto MVH500 AH flat head fluid head used to shake violently on a single tap and was unusable. So I was interested to see it mounted on the Sirui K40X ball head. The moment I lock it there is no vibration whatsoever. I couldn't believe my luck. I could see that I can do some basic pans with this combination.

However, if the ball head is not locked, then this combo can flipover and hurt you. So don't try to tilt up the camera for some vertical moves. This is not designed for vertical moves. If you need vertical tilt-ups then go for a regular fluid head at substantially more cost. Period.

I am more likely to use the Sirui ball head for static shots with long lens as well as on treks where carrying my OConnor 1030HDs fluid head and Sachtler ENG CF DH2CF tripod would necessitate one extra porter and physically impossible in many shooting situations.

During my recent shoot, it was raining. There was a kingfisher and I wanted to shoot it. However, the knobs became wet and it became very difficult to twist it. I had to use a piece of cloth to grip the ball head knob and only then I could loosen it for correct framing. Unfortunately, by that time the kingfisher vanished.

I used this ball head for shooting macros of spiders in trees. Unlike my OConnor fluid head which can be moved at will and will stop wherever I want for precise framing, the limitations of ball head was all too clear during the macro filming. Even after tightening the ball head sags a bit down. So you have to aim a bit higher and tighten and that is an imprecise way. When you are shooting macro and the magnifications are more than 1:1, slight movement and you lose the focus and it becomes very difficult to hunt for the subject. This is cheaper and lighter than a fluid head and hence can be carried around at ease. However, you have to live with the limitations of the ball head design.

No equipment will work 100% at all situations. We need to understand the limitations and then use the equipment accordingly.

To buy from B&H click -

[http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Sirui\\_K\\_40X\\_Ball\\_Head/Ntt/Sirui%2BK-40X%2B%2BHead/N/o/kw/search/BI/19990/KBID/13252/DFD/d10-v1-t12](http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Sirui_K_40X_Ball_Head/Ntt/Sirui%2BK-40X%2B%2BHead/N/o/kw/search/BI/19990/KBID/13252/DFD/d10-v1-t12)

## Natural History -

### **COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'The Aggression of the Vegetarian '**

**The Sunday Statesman: 01-November-2015 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)**

"IT is hard to say who first expounded it, but the thesis that among Indian wild animals the larger herbivores are, as a rule, more aggressive towards men than the carnivores has been the conviction of more than one naturalist-shikari who knew our fauna intimately.

We are speaking of normal attitudes and bents -- not of exceptional reactions or abnormal, cultivated tastes. The man-eating Tiger and Panther must be left out of this consideration, and also the rouge Elephant (which is often an animal maddened by abiding pain of a man-inflicted injury). And we should also leave out the fright reaction of animals closely confined and provoked; a captive Tapir, probably the most timid of all beasts, has been known to savage a man who caused it pain.



Even with all these limitations, the thesis might seem absurd at first sight. We think of carnivores as specially savage animals -- in spite of the fact that Man's best friend is a carnivore! That they kill to live is something that makes people think of them, at all times, as likely killers.

But normally no carnivore attacks man. When excited, as when courting, or when apprehensive, as when guarding cubs, a Tiger or Panther may attack a human intruder, but being equipped with exquisite senses, and being swift in their nervous controls, they almost invariably give a timely warning, often several warnings, before they attack.

I can easily find support for this view that it is chance-met herbivores that are more dangerous by citing the zoo experts. Any experienced zoo man will tell you that the greater cats give him little cause for worry, and it is some of the old dog-monkeys and, in particular old bucks and stags (and we always think of antelopes and deer as such harmless, lovable crea-

tures) that are really dangerous. But I will not cite this testimony. In my opinion, animals, especially mammals, live under such artificial restraint in even the best-run and planned of zoos that observations of these captives helps little in understanding their true nature.

It is especially the adult male that is aggressive among the herbivores. The bull Elephant and the lone bull Gaur can both be really dangerous on occasion. The bull gaur is normally a most peaceable beast, very shy of man, and rarely attacking except under extreme provocation -- it is the bull wild Buffalo that is truculent by nature. But there are authentic instances of an old lone bull gaur attacking men without provocation, and I myself knew, for a ticklish week, that a lone bull was so restive that to approach him was to ask for trouble. The rather idyllic picture of him reproduced here, with sunlit wild flowers against his shade darkened flank, is a memento I specially value of a critical moment.

When a bull Gaur does go for a man, he is persistent and savage in attack, continuing to trample, gore and toss the victim long after death. This is generally true of herbivorous aggressors, which lack the merciful swift and clean efficiency of the carnivores in killing.



Ask any true Jungly, living on the outskirts of a typical forest area holding elephant, gaur, deer, tiger, panther, bear and pig, and he will tell you that it is the Elephant that he fears most. Being mainly nocturnal and crepuscular, being so early with their perception of the approach of the man and so quick to get away from him, or at least to give him due warning not to approach closer, the Greater Cats rarely cause humanity in the jungle any anxiety. Sloth Bears (which are vegetarian in the main) can be dangerous; being short-sighted and given to preoccupations, at times they take no notice of one till one is almost upon them -- and their behaviour is unpredictable. PIG in the jungles usually give men a clear berth, but on occasion an old Boar may stand his ground and turn aggressive -- when there can be no two opinions on what the human intruder should do! However, it is the mighty Elephant that people whose business takes them through elephant jungles really dread. In places where they have not been disturbed or molested, as in some sanctuaries, elephants may be very tolerant of humanity. But elsewhere in the Nilgiris for example, they can be aggressive and dangerous.

It is usually a Lone Bull that one has to beware of, but I have heard of an entire herd attacking transport lorries. Personally, I think this truculence is a comparatively new development, caused or stimulated by the constant disturbance of human invasions of their territory, probably also by occasional injury inflicted by men -- elephants are both long-lived and intelligent.



The fact remains, however, that though one can find reasons for a tusker turning aggressive, he is a singularly dangerous beast. The uncanny silence with which he can move, the deceptive-seeming casualness of his movements, his persistence in attack and the fact that unless one can jump down a steep bank it is hardly possible to outrun an elephant, and quite impossible in bushy or grassy cover, all make an encounter with a misanthropic tusker specially risky and terrifying.



Luckily he is shortsighted, and if one gets quickly behind a tree or bush, hugs the earth and freezes, chances of escape are excellent."

-M. Krishnan

This was first published on 19 February 1961 in The Sunday Statesman

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## **Wildlife Photography -**

### **Chital Fawn in Sundarbans by Saktipada Panigrahi**



### **Male Gaur by Abhirup Dutta Gupta**





## **Wildlife Photography -**

### **Elephant in Bandipur by Sucheth Lingachar**



### **Peacock by Rajan Kanagasabai**



## **Wildlife Photography -**

**Indian Eagle Owl by Shyamala Kumar**



**Hoopoe by Prasad Dingankar**





## Wildlife Photography -

### Brooke's house Gecko by Prajwal Ullal



### Spider by Arun Acharjee



## Wildlife Photography -



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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