

# Centre proposes ESZ around Palghar's Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, invites suggestions to draft

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**Mumbai:** The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has invited objections or suggestions to the proposed eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary in Palghar district.

In a draft notification issued on May 7, the ministry has proposed notification of an area ranging from 1km to



Pic for representation

ESZ to cover an area of 475.16sqkm in Thane & Palghar dists

9km from the sanctuary boundary as the eco-sensitive zone.

The proposed ESZ will cover an area of

475.16 sqkm in Thane and Palghar districts, comprising 280.6sqkm of forest area and 194.6sqkm of non-forest

area, which includes 161 villages.

According to the gazette notification, leopard, which is one of the species found in the sanctuary, holds vital importance. Other species found in the sanctuary include Rusty-Spotted Cat, Jungle Cat, small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Mouse deer, Indian Rock Python, Rat Snake, Indian Cobra, and Checkered keelback, among others. The sanctuary's

rich floral diversity also supports a large number of tree species. The draft notification mentions that a zonal master plan shall be prepared in two years. Tribal land cannot be utilized for commercial or industrial activities without obtaining state approval. Additionally, the catchment areas of all natural springs, rivers, and channels will be identified, and plans for their conservation will be included.



# Doomdooma youth turns saviour of snakes

## CORRESPONDENT

DOOMDOOMA, May 10: Humans are usually afraid of snakes, regardless of whether the reptiles are venomous or non-venomous. As a result, when a snake enters someone's house or compound, the unfortunate reptile usually gets killed.

However, a youth from Doomdooma has appeared in the form of a saviour of snakes. A lover of Nature and wildlife, the youth named Ravi Yadav, son of Ram Ratan Yadav and Rajmoti Devi of Kumarpatty of Doomdooma town in Tinsukia district, has rescued thousands of snakes from various places and released them into the wild. It is fascinating to see how Ravi plays with venomous snakes.

Now, if a snake enters someone's house in the greater Doomdooma region, people immediately call Ravi, who subsequently reaches the place concerned and rescues the cornered reptile.



People have given Ravi the title of 'Snake Man'.

Apart from a strong desire to save the dangerous reptiles, Ravi doesn't have any formal training of catching snakes. In the beginning, he did this work secretly without the knowledge of his family members. However, now everyone knows about Ravi's passion and his knack for it. He has rescued many ven-

omous snakes from different places of Tinsukia district as well as many places of Arunachal Pradesh as well.

Besides snakes, Ravi has also rescued many other wild animals in the recent past and helped the forest department in rescuing snakes and other animals at different times. Consequently, he has become a friend of the forest department personnel.



# Concerns Raised Over Loss Of Forest Land To Squatters, Including Guttikoyas

## Guttikoya influx into T rises as cops busy with poll duty

64 From Tribe Enter T From Chhattisgarh

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**Hyderabad:** While police are busy on election duty with Lok Sabha polls only days away, Telangana is witnessing an increased incidence of Guttikoya tribals foraying into the border state forest. Forest officials said the Guttikoyas were entering from Chhattisgarh to cut the forests for agriculture and set up new habitations on Telangana side.

Rahul Jadhav, district forest officer of Mulugu, said: "There were instances of Guttikoyas coming from Chhattisgarh and trying to encroach forest land and establish habitations. We stopped them."

Forest officials of Bhupathipur section of Eturnagaram north range at Chintagudem village also noticed some Guttikoyas in the region. "We found 3-4 groups totalling 64 Guttikoyas who entered from Sukma district of Chhattisgarh around 10 km inside the forest. They were planning to clear the area near Nemali-

### FELLING TREES FOR CULTIVATION

- Guttikoya tribals entering into state from Chhattisgarh
- Influx as police busy with Lok Sabha election duty
- Tribals entering forest at state border to set up new habitations on Telangana side
- Also to cut forests for agricultural purposes



Pic For Representation

TRIBALS WANT TO SET UP HABITATION: OFFICIALS	TIGER CORRIDOR AREA	WHO ARE GUTTIKOYAS?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Eturnagaram north range foresters noticed Guttikoya movement</li><li>● Claim 3-4 groups totalling 64 Guttikoyas entered state from Sukma in Chhattisgarh</li><li>● Officials said tribals planning to set up habitation near Nemalivagu area</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● In April, eight Guttikoyas entered Keshavapur beat in Pegadapally forest range</li><li>● Arrested for clearing bushes for illegal cultivation &amp; building huts for habitation</li><li>● Area close to Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, a tiger corridor, forest in 1.4 hectares reportedly destroyed by tribals</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Guttikoyas seem to have been displaced from Chhattisgarh &amp; settled down in Telangana's forests</li><li>● Primarily seen in districts of Bhadradi Kothagudem, Mulugu, Jayashankar Bhupalpally &amp; Khammam</li><li>● Practise podu cultivation, by clearing forest land</li></ul>

vagu and establish a new habitation. Our men with the help of police sent them back to Chhattisgarh and seized their axes," said a forest official of Bhupathipur.

Last month, eight Guttikoyas entered the Keshavapur beat in Pegadapally forest range. "They were illegally clearing bushes for illegal cultivation and erecting huts for habitation purposes. They were arrested," said an official.

The forest beat officer of Keshavapur said the area falls under the reserve forest close to Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a tiger corridor area. Forest in 1.45 hectares was reportedly destroyed and Keshavapur officials booked case.

Guttikoya tribals, who seem to have been displaced from Chhattisgarh, settled down in Telangana's forests,

primarily in districts like Bhadradi Kothagudem, Mulugu, Jayashankar Bhupalpally and Khammam.

The Guttikoyas predominantly practise podu cultivation, a form of shifting cultivation, which involves clearing forest land for cultivation. Forest department has raised concerns about the significant loss of forest land to encroachers, including Guttikoyas.



DID YOU  
KNOW?

## How our cities impact birds

A bustling metropolis can barely be considered a refuge for wildlife, but studies show nearly a fifth of all birds in the world thrive in our cities. With scanty tree cover, sky-high concrete structures, ear-splitting noise and blinding lights, how do birds make sense of and live in our cities? Turns out, over the years, aves with ‘urban traits’ have been evolutionarily selected to live in our cities, and these birds have also adapted in unique ways to survive and thrive.

For instance, urban bird species don’t forage over large areas as it increases the risk of getting hit by a vehicle or a building. They also tend to have smaller eyes than their rural counterparts to deal with dazzling city lights. Artificial light pollution can disorient birds as they fly and increase their chances of colliding with buildings. This phenomenon kills nearly one billion birds annually in the US and Canada.

The incessant low-frequency noise in our cities is drowning out bird calls and songs, disrupting their mating and feeding behaviour. To cope with the din and be heard, city birds are singing faster, at higher frequencies and for longer periods—a feat that drains energy from their tiny bodies. Some birds, like the white-crowned sparrows of San Francisco Bay, have changed their tune altogether to be heard. Unhatched zebra finches and hatchlings show stunted growth when exposed to noise pollution, which can impact their long-term population.



City diets for birds, mostly including seeds and fewer fruits, also influence how birds look. The bright colours in bird feathers come from carotenoids—fat-soluble pigments that give colour to plant parts like fruits. However, in cities, birds rely on seeds or junk foods high in sugar and low in nutrition. Besides, they are exposed to heavy metals like cadmium and lead. As a result, they develop duller plumage—a phenomenon scientists call ‘urban dullness.’

As India’s bird species show a staggering 60% decline, it’s time to look at how our cities contribute to the crisis and redesign them to accommodate us and our feathered friends.

- Spoorthy Raman



# People, BSF jawans help quench thirst of wild animals

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Jaisalmer:** In a bid to provide relief to animals reeling under severe heat in Jaisalmer, wildlife enthusiasts and Border Security Force (BSF) jawans are filling small tanks and dried ponds with water.

Many ponds, water bodies have dried up due to heat and animals are roaming in search of water. They have entered into residential areas and are becoming victims of stray dogs or dying in road accidents.

Akhil Bhartiya Bishnoi Sabha district president Radheyshyam Vishnoi said that April has passed but the forest dept, state govt and public representatives have been indifferent towards the wildlife who have been facing water crisis in lathi area. He said that at many places wildlife and cattle are dying due to lack of water. There is water crisis in Dholia, Bhadria, Khetolai, Gangaram ki Dhani etc. In such a situation, villagers and wildlife enthusiasts came together and filling water in tanks, ponds etc so that wildlife and birds get water.

# Poacher arrested in Morigaon, arms recovered

CORRESPONDENT

MORIGAON, May 10: A 45-year-old poacher, Abdul Khalek, was arrested from Gorumara Doloni in Morigaon district last night in an intelligence-based operation led by ranger of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary Nayan Jyoti Das and ASP (HQ), Morigaon, Dhruba Nath.

One .303 rifle, a Thailand-made pistol and 19 rounds of live ammunition were recovered from him. Some of the associates of the accused, however, managed to flee from the spot and efforts are on to apprehend them.

The arms and ammunition were seized in the presence of two independent witnesses and were brought to the range office. The accused was also brought to the range headquarters for further investigation.

# Poacher arrested with weapons

STAFF REPORTER

**GUWAHATI, May 10:** Forest officials from the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Morigaon Police carried out a joint operation in Morigaon, leading to the arrest of a wildlife poacher along with the recovery of weapons on Thursday night.

The arrested wildlife poacher was identified as Abdul Khalek, and a .303 rifle with 12 live rounds as well as a 7.65 pistol and 7 bullets were recovered from his possession. A resident of Ambari village under Moranjhar Police Station in the Hojai district, he was arrested from Gorumoradoloni village in Pobitora. According to sources, there were multiple poachers at the location, but they fled the location before apprehension. The local police have initiated an operation to arrest them all.



# Precious Snakes

It is ironic that while we are so concerned about greenhouse gases and their impact on the environment, we are more or less oblivious to freshwater consumption and its impact on the environment and population. In a world where one in every five persons does not have access to fresh water, and particularly when the demand for water resources in the whole world is increasing, the issue of water footprint needs to be taken seriously



A research team comprising scientists from Macquarie University in Australia, Oxford University, UK, the University of Adelaide, Australia, the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, and the Vietnamese Academy of Science and Technology, did a focussed study on reticulated pythons (*Malayopython reticulatus*) and Burmese pythons (*Python bivittatus*) and reported that snake meat is not only a good source of protein but also the best alternative for sustainable living. This appeared in the journal *Nature's* 14 March 2024 issue under Scientific Reports (DOI:10.1038/s41598-024-54874-4).

The researchers studied more than 4,600 pythons and found that reticulated and Burmese pythons, in particular, required less food to produce, say, a pound of meat compared to conventional farm products such as chicken, beef, pork, salmon etc.

Pythons grow rapidly to reach the 'slaughter weight' within a year after hatching. According to Dr. Natusch, the first author of the paper, "pythons outperform all mainstream livestock chicken and cattle" when food to protein conversion is considered.

Eating snake meat is nothing new. Snakes have long been consumed in Southeast Asia and China as a high-protein, low-saturated fat food source. Hong Kong is famous for its snake soup which has been consumed for over 2,000 years in China.

Scientists are not expecting the consumption of snake meat to be accepted worldwide easily, except maybe in some parts of Asia. But they are battling for it for serious environmental reasons ~ from the point of view of water conservation.

When we consume one kg

of meat, we are consuming 16,000 liters of water unknowingly ~ the amount of water needed to raise livestock to get that amount of meat.

Or, when we have a cup of coffee in the morning, we consume 150 litres of precious water from the earth unknowingly. The cotton T-shirt that we wear is equivalent to about 2,000 litres of water wrapped around us.

It was John Anthony Allan of the University of London who invented a method of estimating the amount of fresh water needed to produce different commodities, a metric he has christened 'virtual water'. The amount of virtual water consumed through food and clothing is many times more than the amount that we consume for drinking and household purposes.

India exports about 20 million kg of coffee annually, and is, therefore, responsible for exporting about 420,000 million litres of virtual Indian water with it. Countries like Argentina, Brazil and the US export billions of litres of virtual water every year while countries like Egypt, Italy and Japan import billions of virtual water.

It was Professor Arjen Hoekstra who introduced the concept of 'water footprint' as a metric to measure the amount of water consumed to produce goods and services.

In other words, the water footprint helps to comprehend how much water people consume daily in their lives, and is similar to the ideas of 'carbon footprint' or 'ecological foot-

print' that most of us are familiar with.

It is ironic that while we are so concerned about greenhouse gases and their impact on the environment, we are more or less oblivious to freshwater consumption and its impact on the environment and population.

In a world where one in every five persons does not have access to fresh water, and particularly when the demand for water resources in the whole world is increasing, the issue of water footprint needs to be taken seriously.

The earth is indeed a closed system and the water cycle ensures that as a whole, it neither loses nor gains water, and so the water will never be depleted. It is jokingly said that it is quite possible that the water that you drank just now was once used by Mama

Dinosaur to give her baby a bath! Critics have legitimately questioned the need to conserve water, given that all that we use will be returned.

While that is certainly true for a closed system, with the dichotomy of increasing population and finite resources, resource management is crucial to maintain the minimum requirement of water per individual.

An analogy may be seen in inheriting a fixed amount of money that can be used only for the benefit of one's children. However, the amount of money spent per child (per capita) will diminish if the number of children increases, and with more progeny, a time will come when

money available per child will fall below what is needed to fulfill their basic needs.

Being a little conservative in using water will help to avoid, or at least delay, any future catastrophe. The water footprint of a country is also an indicator of the efficiency of the nation's water management and agricultural practices.

According to the report of the World Health Organization (WHO), water scarcity impacts 40 per cent of the world's population and 700 million people are at risk of being displaced as a result of the water crisis by 2030.

By 2040, almost 1 in 4 children will live in an area of extremely high water stress. Among the many options suggested by WHO to mitigate the water crisis, attitudinal change is a prime one.

Many conventional livestock fail to satisfy the criteria for sustainability, and there is an urgent need to explore alternatives. Snakes are probably the best alternative.

Snakes require minimal water and can live with the dew that settles on their scales in the morning. They also need very little food and live off rodents and other pests that attack food crops.

Although large-scale python farming is common in Asia, environmentalists suggest that the same is needed in other parts of the world too.

Considering the potential benefits, this will be a bold move and the project requires encouragement from all corners of society.

In the distant future, if a snake burger is served instead of a meat burger in a restaurant, do not get perplexed but think of the precious snake that helped save the enormous amount of precious water of Nature.



**SUPRAKASH  
CHANDRA ROY**

The writer is a Member, National Commission of History of Science, INSA and was Editor-in-Chief of the Journal Science and Culture for about two decades



# 'Sanguem will give 10k-vote lead to BJP'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Margao:** Social welfare minister and Sanguem MLA Subhash Phal Dessai has exuded confidence of BJP securing a lead of nearly 10,000 votes from the Sanguem assembly segment in the May 7 election for the South Goa Lok Sabha seat.

"The large turnout in Sanguem will no doubt work in favour of BJP," Phal Dessai said. "Two tribal hilly areas of Sanguem — Mangal and Saljini — registered 100% voting, while almost all the voters residing at Karla-Cajugotto cast their votes. Kajur village registered 94% polling." All the four villages are 100% tribal-inhabited areas.

The Sanguem MLA explained how he managed to overcome all objections from the forest and wildlife department to ensure that Saljini got connected by a road. He also provided electricity to the village, he said. At Mangal, Phal Dessai said, the forest department "destroyed" the roads that were built, but ultimately, the village finally got a road.

At Cajugotto, Phal Dessai said, a road has been built at a cost of Rs 20 crore. The village has only 184 voters. "State govt's priority has been to build infrastructural facilities for the people, without an eye on votes," he said.



# Wildlife activists resent transfer of elephants to Jamnagar

AJIT PATOWARY

GUWAHATI, May 10: Rampant transfer of elephants from the North East region to the Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust (RKTEWT) at Jamnagar in Gujarat has been widely resented by the environment and wildlife activists of the country and they have been making an unrelenting plea for a halt to this practice, which they view as incompatible to the existing legal provisions.

Significantly, such transfer of elephants are done subsequent to the orders of a Supreme Court (SC) of India-appointed High Powered Committee. Environment and wildlife activists of the country are now raising a demand for making public all the NE elephant's transfer-related proceedings of this High Powered Committee. They argue that since el-

ephants are Schedule-I animals, their protection has an overriding importance.

According to the available information, over 100 captive elephants have been transferred from their natural habitats in North East region to Jamnagar. Contrary to the The Statesman New Delhi, 11 May 2024 information, Jamnagar is an arid area.

Of late, another media report of an alleged transfer of a captive elephant of Tripura, named Pratima, and her calf to RKTEWT has surfaced. The transfer is sought to be done, on the plea of 'a medical emergency', and it is based on an order of the SC-appointed High Powered Committee. According to reports, the elephant and her calf will have to travel a distance of over 3000 km to reach the RKTEWT.

Following this report, environment and wildlife activist Rohit Choudhury has dashed off

a letter to the Chairman of the High Powered Committee with a plea to initiate a process of wider consultation on this matter of NE elephants' transfer to RKTEWT, for making the entire process transparent.

In his letter, Choudhury has argued that the NE region has a large number of elephants. Despite limitations of infrastructure, the region has an established a network of wildlife experts, enthusiasts, activists, forest department officials and veterinarians, who work with veterinary hospitals, forest camps and other facilities to provide care and treatment to both wild and captive elephants in need. These networks have been responsible, despite limited resources in sustaining the care, protection and welfare of the region's native elephant population.

Expressing deep concern over this decision to transfer

the Tripura elephant and her calf, he said that despite the emergency and good faith, it has been taken in haste. For, the decision has not considered the option of involving the region's existing veterinary care facilities for offering the treatment to the elephant. This option of involving the local treatment facilities would have made an arduous over 3000-km journey for this severely unfit elephant, which is still nursing her calf, during the peak of summer.

Choudhury claimed that this transfer is potentially in breach of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and also the recent Captive Elephant (Transfer and Transport) Rules, 2024.

Again, he said, "medical treatment of elephants cannot become a route through which elephants are permanently moved out of their natural habitats in the NE region."



# Wildlife too needs a good drought

Well-intentioned interventions without ecological understanding will disrupt nature's delicate balance

SANJAY GUBBI

Recently, a couple of elephants died in Karnataka, and the cause of death was attributed to dehydration. These deaths garnered substantial media attention and public sympathy. This year, Karnataka is experiencing an intense summer following weak monsoons last year. Some regions are parched, and images of dry forests and scorched waterholes are attracting attention and compassion.

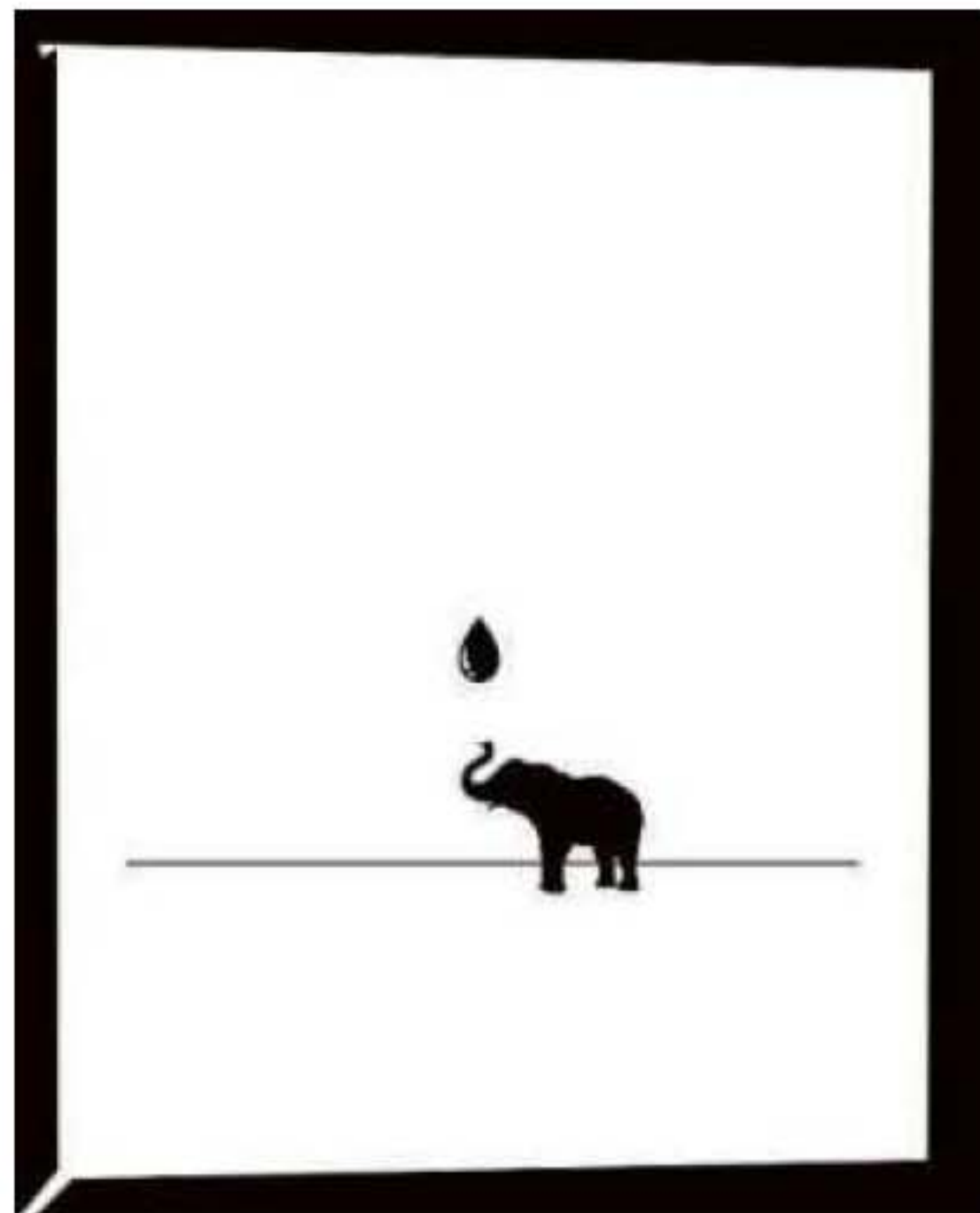
The government is taking measures to refill waterholes in wildlife areas using tankers and other artificial means. Social media is abuzz with messages about the situation, and wildlife enthusiasts are campaigning to provide water to wildlife under the assumption that even wild animals need our assistance.

Nature goes through a cycle of abundance and crunch. Both of these will have a positive impact on ecosystems and animals. In the past few years, many tanks and lakes inside protected areas have been pumped with water from boreholes sunk inside forests. Water is pumped out around the year, and this may be severely depleting aquifers, affecting stream flows and water availability in a wider area, including other tanks and lakes in the vicinity. Many wildlife species, such as amphibians, fish, and insects that are stream flow-dependent, are possibly affected by this relentless pumping of water. We are altering an entire ecosystem and hydrology due to this well-intended but unscientific act.

Providing additional water sources will artificially increase water-dependent species (e.g., chital) at the expense of herbivores that prefer dryness, such as the four-horned antelope. This may again unnaturally increase large carnivore populations beyond their carrying capacity.

Elephants are landscape engineers and are the glue that binds together the complex web of their habitats. Elephants have large home ranges, and wherever they move, they have a positive impact on their habitat. When they bull-

doze trees to access their bark or fruits, elephants create open spaces that slowly turn into small, highly fertile grasslands and act as a sumptuous buffet for a variety of herbivores, including gaur, sambar, chital, and others. Even when a single old tree is brought down by an elephant, it will unintentionally create space for new saplings to come up. Pachyderms do these acts every single day in every area they move. Annually, they move vast distances in search of water or fodder, and on their way, they create these ecologically vital impacts throughout their home ranges. However, if we restrict elephants to a smaller area by artificially providing them water throughout the year, these positive im-



pacts are not spread out to other parts of their home ranges. Instead, they may end up degrading their habitats by overusing the same patches, as their annual migration patterns are affected due to the availability of resources locally.

Wildlife such as elephants have no natural enemies except for the occasional tiger that kills a young elephant calf. Hence, their numbers are nature-regulated through resource crunch, and one of the key resources is water. When elephant herds move over vast distances in search of fodder and water, or when there is a crunch in these resources due to drought, some of the weak individuals die. This is the process of natural selection adhering to the principles of survival of the fittest.

Long-distance migrations of elephant herds also result in calf mortality, keeping their population under ecological carrying capacity. If we act God and halt this process of migration, their populations will increase beyond the available habi-

tat and resources, leading to intensified human-wildlife conflict. We all know how the human population has exploded due to modern medicine and the consequences of overburdening the Earth.

Some argue that a lack of water will attract wildlife to human-dominated areas, leading to conflict. But such a phenomenon should be supported by data. Comparing human-wildlife conflict instances from the summer of 2024 with years of higher rainfall will help clarify these theories.

Anthropocising wildlife and the notion that wildlife has the same requirements as we humans is a very unscientific thought. Waterholes are not the only source of moisture for wildlife. They access moisture in the food they eat, from fruits, leaves, bark, early morning dew, and a variety of other sources. Elephants in some parts of Karnataka, such as the Cauvery and MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuaries, dig holes in dry stream beds to access groundwater. Such holes, apart from quenching elephants' thirst, continue to act as a source of water for other wildlife, big and small, for a long period of time. Such subtle but incredibly supportive collaborations in nature are little understood, but they keep the cycle of nature churning. That's the wonder of nature's reliable network.

Wildlife have an incredible way of surviving, and nature helps them survive through many known and unknown phenomena that we are yet to fully understand. We lack an understanding of how complex natural phenomena work. Nature has its own alchemy, and we fail to recognise it. For instance, the powerful bolt of lightning breaks down and splits the molecules in the air, creating nitrates, a liquid fertiliser that's essential for the growth of every plant on Earth. These nutrients come down to Earth with rain and transform several parched areas into green landscapes. Nature works best when it is in sync with the planet's rhythms. We need to recognise these wonders and allow nature to take its course.

The sympathy of the public and wildlife enthusiasts is very welcome, but it needs to be rooted in good ecological understanding and input from hydrologists, or else such compassion has the power to bring long-lasting problems to the very species we love to protect.

*(The writer is a wildlife conservationist and author of Leopard Diaries: The Rosette in India)*