

# 7cr trees to boost green cover, EVs for tiger reserves

**Team TOI**

**Jaipur:**To increase green cover in the state, BJP-led govt announced plans to plant 7 crore trees under a massive plantation drive. Additionally, Rs 4,000 crore will be invested over five years under Mission Hariyalo Rajasthan.

To reduce pollution and carbon emissions in tiger reserves, including Ranthambore and Sariska, the govt will introduce an electric-vehicle (EV)based transport system for pilgrims visiting Trinetra Ganeshji and Pandupole. Environmentalists have welcomed this move, which addresses a long-standing demand to reduce disturbances in the reserves.

Former state board for wildlife member Sunil Mehta said, "The budgetary provision for EV transportation for Pandupole in Sariska and Ganesh temple at Ranthambore is a historic step. This

will reduce the carbon footprint in our top parks and drastically cut air and noise pollution. I have strongly advocated for electric vehicles for transporting devotees to these temples. CSR funds from private sources were organized solely through my efforts for Sariska."

An official said Rs 20 crore will be allocated for tiger habitats in five tiger project areas. Additionally, Rs 40 crore will be spent to establish a forest and wildlife training cum management institute at Jhalana in Jaipur.

A new zoological park and aquarium will be developed near Keoladev National Park (Ghana) in Bharatpur. New enclosures with predator-proof fencing will be established for the conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), the official added.

A biological park will be set up in Alwar with an allocation of Rs 25 crore.

**The Times of India**

**Chennai, 11 July 2024**

# **9 rhinos among 148 animals killed in flood-hit Kaziranga**

**Mukut.Das@timesofindia.com**

**Guwahati:** The devastating floods in Assam has severely impacted the wildlife population in Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR), resulting in the death of 148 animals, including nine rhinos and 135 hog deer.

Twelve hog deer, one swamp deer and one rhesus macaque succumbed to injuries while undergoing treatment, while two hog deer were killed in vehicle accidents.

The rescue teams have successfully saved 135 animals, primarily hog deer, and released 123 of them back into safer areas after providing necessary medical care.

**The Times of India**

**Jaipur, 11 July 2024**

## **Assam floods claim 9 Kaziranga rhinos**

**Guwahati:** The flood in Assam has severely impacted wildlife in Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, resulting in death of 148 animals, including nine rhinos and 135 hog deer, re-

ports **Mukut Das**. Twelve hog deer, one swamp deer and one rhesus macaque succumbed to injuries while undergoing treatment, while two hog deer were killed in vehicle accidents.

**The Times of India**  
**Mumbai, 11 July 2024**

# **BABY CROCODILE RESCUED, RELEASED INTO WILD**

Santosh Gupta



A baby crocodile was rescued from a 21-year-old man who was attempting to sell it to prospective customers at Powai, officials informed Wednesday. The forest department, Mulund was tipped off about the possible transaction following which they laid a trap and arrested the man and rescued the baby crocodile from his possession. The man was booked under the relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The reptile was released into the wild

# *Barricades set up on NH 14 in Biswanath district to protect animals escaping floods*

**Motorists urged to adhere to speed limits and slow down at barricades**

## CORRESPONDENT

BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 10: In a proactive measure to safeguard wildlife displaced by the flooding caused by the Brahmaputra, the Biswanath Police and the Forest department have jointly set up temporary barricades on National Highway 15.

This initiative aims to slow down traffic on the highway to prevent accidents involving animals crossing the road.

The recent flood has submerged a significant part of the sixth addition of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, forcing numerous animals including elephants, deer and wild pigs, to seek refuge in fringe villages and nearby tea gardens.

Wild animals are seen frequently crossing the Kherbari-Lahorijaan stretch of NH 15 under the Gingia Police Station in Biswanath district, which runs close to the affected areas, posing a significant risk to both wildlife and motorists.



*A herd of wild elephants crossing NH 15 at Bihupukhuri in Biswanath district. – Photo: Biswanath Chariali Correspondent.*

To mitigate the risk, barricades have been placed at four strategic points along this section of the highway. These barriers are intended to re-

duce the speed of the vehicles and ensure the safety of both animals and humans.

The Biswanath Police and Forest department have

urged motorists travelling on this route to adhere to the speed limits and slow down at the barricades. "This small adjustment while driving will

greatly contribute to the protection of our precious wildlife during this critical period," a press release issued by Biswanath Police stated.

# Carrying 100 baby turtles in a bag on scooter, wildlife smuggler arrested

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

A TIP-OFF received by police on Tuesday about a smuggler's bid to transport banned turtles prompted officials at Delhi's Geeta Colony Police Station to set up a trap. A team led by Inspector Satyawan kept vigil in areas including Raja Ram Kohli Marg and beneath the Pusa Road flyover in Geeta Colony. This led to the arrest of a 38-year-old man, and a total of 100 baby turtles were recovered from him, police said on Wednesday.

The accused, identified as Bheem, has been involved in a smuggling operation of turtles and other species, police were told during interrogation. The accused is a resident of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. He further revealed that a case was recently registered against his associate



**The accused was nabbed on Tuesday.** *Express*

Ravi Bhatnagar at the Nandgram Police Station, in Ghaziabad, for a similar offence.

"He procures the turtles from Ganga in Garhmukteshwar area called Garh Ganga and from the subsidiary rivers," said DCP (Shahdara) Surendra Choudhary.

He added that a search operation was underway to apprehend Bhatnagar. On Tuesday, the team spotted Bheem on a scooter around 1:15 pm, carrying a large bag while coming from Shakarpur. After he was by the informant as the suspected smuggler, the man was apprehended.

Upon inspection of the bag, police found several live turtles. Bheem failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for possessing them, following which the team apprehended him while seizing his scooter along with the recovered turtles.

The Delhi Police has lodged a case against Bheem at the Geeta Colony Police Station under Sections 9/39/50/51 of the Wildlife Protection Act and Section 11(A) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, simultaneously passing the information about the seizure to the official of Wildlife Department.

# Dramatic showdown in Monsoon Session on cards

## 'UNITED' OPPN LEGISLATORS ARE ARMED WITH CRUCIAL ISSUES TO CONFRONT GOVT

THE GOAN | NETWORK

### PANAJI

A dramatic showdown this monsoon session of the Goa Legislative Assembly is likely as Opposition legislators are ready with a long list of issues to challenge the government.

Right from the prolonged delay in notifying a Tiger Reserve to demanding full investigation details of land grab cases and the controversial Assagao house demolition, etc; the Opposition will leave no stone unturned.

Sources said the united Opposition will seek answers on various pressing issues with joint questions sent to the Legislative Assembly for the government to answer.

### KEY ISSUES ON AGENDA

■ **Tiger Reserve:** Prolonged delay in notifying the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and surrounding areas as a Tiger Reserve

■ **Mhadei water dispute:** Legislators may demand in-depth discussions and firm commitments from

One of the foremost issues on the agenda is the delay in declaring the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and its surrounding areas as a Tiger Reserve. Close to a year ago, on July 24, the Bombay High Court at Goa directed the Goa government to notify the sanctuary with-

the government

■ **Oppn dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the recent PRAWAH inspection**

■ **Assagao house demolition:** Alleged cover-up and political interference in the demolition case

in three months. The State challenged this order before the Supreme Court, which, on September 25, 2023 refused to grant any interim stay but issued notices to the Union Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation

■ **High-ranking police officers' involvement**

■ **Land grab probe:** Updates on the progress of investigations, charge-sheets, and trials

■ **Potential demands for comprehensive reports on the status**

Authority (NTCA), and the petitioner Goa Foundation. The government has been dragging its feet since then.

The Mhadei water dispute is another issue as sources said the Opposition is unhappy with the government's response to a recent inspec-

### No leave for govt employees

**PANAJI:** The State government banned employees from availing leave during the legislative assembly session slated from July 15 to August 7. The government employees are however asked to remain present at their respective headquarters till August 9 to ensure smooth functioning of the session. "It is therefore enjoined upon all the leave sanctioning authorities that any kind of leave shall not be granted to the subordinate officers/officials during the Assembly Sessions.

tion carried out by PRAWAH. "How could the Goa government send just three representatives when Karnataka had 25-30 officials during the crucial PRAWAH meeting? We are surprised that Goa government is taking this issue lightly although Karnataka is

hell-bent on diverting Mhadei from Goa. Legislators might demand lengthy discussions and concrete assurances from the government to give justice to the State," said the source.

The alleged initial cover-up of the Assagao house demolition, political interfer-

ence, and the involvement of high-ranking police officers will also be tabled during the 18-day-long Assembly session. "Full investigation details might be sought," sources said, adding that updates on the progress of the land grab investigations including chargesheet and trial could also be sought.

"Several other issues on the landslides, waterlogging, Smart City, airports are likely to be tabled," the source revealed.

As the session is set to commence on July 15, the Legislative Secretary has already received 648 starred and 1,940 unstarred questions. The last day for submissions is on Thursday.

# Man caught transporting 100 rare species of turtle

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**New Delhi:** Over 100 live, rare and protected turtles were found in the bag of a man who was transporting these on a scooter to Raja Ram Kohli Marg on Wednesday.

"At 1.15pm, our team spotted the suspect riding a scooter from the Shakarpur direction with a large bag," the police officer, who led the arrest, said.

Acting on an informer's tip-off, officers caught the man. In his bag were 100 live turtles. Among these were 50 Indian roofed turtles, 45 black-spotted pond turtles (both listed under Schedule-I for protection), along with a smaller number of Indian eyed and Indian soft shell turtles, also protected under Schedule-I.

According to experts, the species are considered rare at different levels in International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) but all four are protected under Schedule 1 of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which is the highest level of protection provided to any species.

"They are one of the rarest species, often used as exotic pets. Some use it for oc-



The seized turtles are protected under Schedule-I

cult purposes. The softshell turtle is even exploited as an aphrodisiac," People for Animals (PFA), the animal rights organisation, says.

"The suspect, a resident of Ghaziabad, failed to give a satisfactory explanation for possessing the turtles," a police source said. Subsequently, Geeta Colony Police registered a case under Sections 9, 39, 50, and 51 of Wildlife Protection Act and Section 11(A) of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

During interrogation, he admitted to sourcing the turtles from the Ganga near Garhmukteshwar with an associate who is evading arrest

following a wildlife smuggling case against him in Nandgram, Ghaziabad. Police officers told **TOI**, "He has admitted to selling turtles in the last 2-3 months."

An officer said: "The market rate of one such turtle is Rs 8,000-10,000, making it lucrative animal trafficking."

The turtles have been handed over to wildlife officials.

The turtles were caught in a joint operation of Delhi Police and PFA. "We were tipped off by a source and approached DCP Shahdara. He held the operation to confiscate one of the largest wildlife contrabandss in recent years," a PFA volunteer said.

# *Panic after passenger spots snake peeping from roof in train coach*

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**Lucknow:** Panic prevailed in a Mumbai-bound train after a passenger resting on the side upper berth of AC-3 tier coach, spotted a snake peeping through a small opening of the coach roof.

The snake was first spotted in the morning when Gorakhpur-Bandra Terminus Weekly Express (15067) was passing through Gonda Junction. The coach B3 of the train was finally attended to at 2:20 pm when it reached Lucknow's Charbagh railway station.

A video that went viral on

social media, showed the tail of the snake in the coach roof opening.

"A passenger, identified as Bittu Kumar spotted the snake. An alert was shared to railway authorities, following which Charbagh rail-

## **VIDEO VIRAL**

way staff attended the coach. The entire coach was combed, but there was no trace of the snake. Finally on the appeal of passengers who were anxious to reach Mumbai on time to board international bound flights, the staff sealed the minor openings of the coach roof, and the train departed for further journey," said

a senior official of northern railway Lucknow division.

"On passengers' demand, the coach was evacuated and an available AC3 economy was attached with the train, while the coach with possible snake presence was detached from the train at platform number four," said an official of North Central Railway Prayagraj division.

CPRO NCR, Himanshu Shekhar Upadhyay told TOI, "An arrangement has been made to shift the passengers in a fresh AC-3 tier coach for the safety of the passengers. Meanwhile, we are contacting wildlife experts to inspect the B3 coach."

# The Hindu

## New Delhi, 11 July 2024



## Police rescue 100 turtles, nab smuggler from east Delhi

The Delhi police rescued almost 100 turtles and nabbed a smuggler from east Delhi's Geeta Colony. A case has been registered against the accused under the Wildlife Protection Act and Section 11(A) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Three Indian-eyed turtles and two Indian softshell turtles, both identified as endangered species, were among those rescued.

## **Rhinos dead:**

The flood in Assam has severely impacted the wildlife population in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, resulting in death of 148 animals, including nine rhinos.

# Sarus crane population surges in UP, 19,918 counted State-wide

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Under the special initiative of the state government, the population of the state bird, the Sarus crane, is on the rise in Uttar Pradesh.

According to the latest summer census conducted on June 20-21, 2024, this year's count revealed the presence of a total of 19,918 sarus cranes, marking an increase of 396 from the previous year. The state-wide census highlighted that the Etawah forest division recorded the highest number of sarus cranes with 3,289 being counted.

Additionally, 10 forest divisions reported sarus populations exceeding 500. Notably, the Mau forest division spotted six sarus cranes for the first time in a decade. This year's summer census saw the participation of 10,000 citizens across the state.

An official spokesman claimed that CM Yogi's commitment to wildlife and



environmental conservation has always been evident. Under his leadership, special emphasis has been placed on the protection of animals and birds after he assumed office in 2017. The sarus crane count has shown a consistent upward trend over the years: from 17,329 in 2021 to 19,188 in 2022, 19,522 in 2023, and reaching 19,918 in 2024. This year alone, the sarus population increased by 396 compared to last year, totaling an increase of 2,589 cranes from 2021 to 2024.

The 2024 summer census

revealed the presence of more than 500 sarus cranes in 10 divisions. The highest number was recorded in the Etawah forest division with 3,289 cranes. Other divisions with notable counts include Mainpuri (2,945), Shahjahanpur (1,212), Auraiya (1,202), Kannauj (786), Hardoi (735), Sant Kabir Nagar (717), Kanpur Dehat (709), Gorakhpur (675), and Siddharth Nagar (673).

In 27 forest divisions, the number of sarus cranes was between 100 and 500. These included Rae Bareilly (428), Sitapur (427), Unnao (426), Bareilly (348), Sohagi Barwa (339), Lakhimpur (306), Banda (261), Barabanki (257), Firozabad (239), South Kheri (209), Aligarh and Amethi (194 each), Basti (186), Gautam Buddha Nagar (171), Mathura (166), Bijnor Social Forestry (143), Gonda (142), Etah (138), Sultanpur (137), Bahraich (135), Farrukhabad (134), Kanpur Nagar (133),

National Chambal Sanctuary (119), Budaun (116), Fatehpur (103), and Chitrakoot and Awadh forest divisions (102 each).

Six cranes were seen in Mau for the first time in the last 10 years. Besides, there were 31 forest divisions where less than 100 cranes were found, including 99 in Shravasti, 95 in Kasganj, 94 in Pilibhit Social Forestry, 86 in Hamirpur, 81 in Sohelwa, 80 in Ambedkar Nagar, 78 in Ayodhya, 75 in Hathras, 55 in Agra, 54 in Kaushambi and North Kheri, 53 in Pratapgarh, 51 in Meerut, 50 in Kushinagar, 44 in Bulandshahr, 42 in Moradabad, 36 in Katarniaghat, 34 in Deoria, 31 in Lalitpur, 20 in Muzaffarnagar, 18 each in Mahoba, Prayagraj and Najibabad, 12 in Sambhal, 11 each in Azamgarh and Jaunpur, six each in Mau and Rampur, four in Orai and two each in Hapur and Paliakheri.

# Stray dogs provided with reflective collars and food

A CORRESPONDENT

**DIBRUGARH, July 10:** To ensure that the voiceless and stray animals get a home and don't go hungry, a young man from Dibrugarh, Vineet Bagaria, started a campaign in 2018 and during the COVID-19 lockdown, when everything was shut down, Vineet still fed and cared for the animals.

Witnessing his compassion and dedication, many youths joined him. Later, he founded the "Animal Welfare People" organization, which is working for the welfare of animals.

Two years ago, animal lover Vineet Bagaria passed away. In his memory, on his second death anniversary, the members of Animal Welfare People provided stray animals with reflective collars and food. The effort aimed to give these stray animals a home.

President of Animal Welfare People, Gayatri Hazarika, mentioned that

Vineet Bagaria started the organization in 2018 with a campaign for the welfare of voiceless animals, under which many activities have been carried out for them.

On the second death anniversary of Vineet Bagaria, also known as "Dogs' Father," stray dogs around Dibrugarh town and the university were provided with reflective collars and food. Vineet's parents, Kailash and Anita Bagaria, actively supported this initiative. Additionally, on Vineet's death anniversary, his mother distributed clothes to underprivileged children. Kailash Bagaria shared that during the continuous rain causing artificial flooding in Dibrugarh and surrounding areas, people were in distress, and animals were on the verge of starvation. During that time, the Animal Welfare People organization, initiated by Vineet, provided food for the animals.

The campaign to pro-

vide reflective collars to dogs started on Vineet's death anniversary. The organization helps as much as possible because, during floods, animals roam on the streets, and at night, in the darkness, dogs often die from vehicle collisions. The reflective collars help make the animals visible in the light. Clothes were also provided to children affected by the floods, and many underprivileged people received food supplies.

Bagaria mentioned that many programmes were organized on Vineet's death anniversary. He stated that the work of providing reflective collars to animals will continue in the future.

It is known that Vineet Bagaria loved animals from a young age. As he grew up, he started working for their welfare. Once his family learned about his work, they began to support him. As he continued to work for voiceless animals, more youths joined him.

# Tourists booked for plastic ban violation on Girnar: Govt to HC

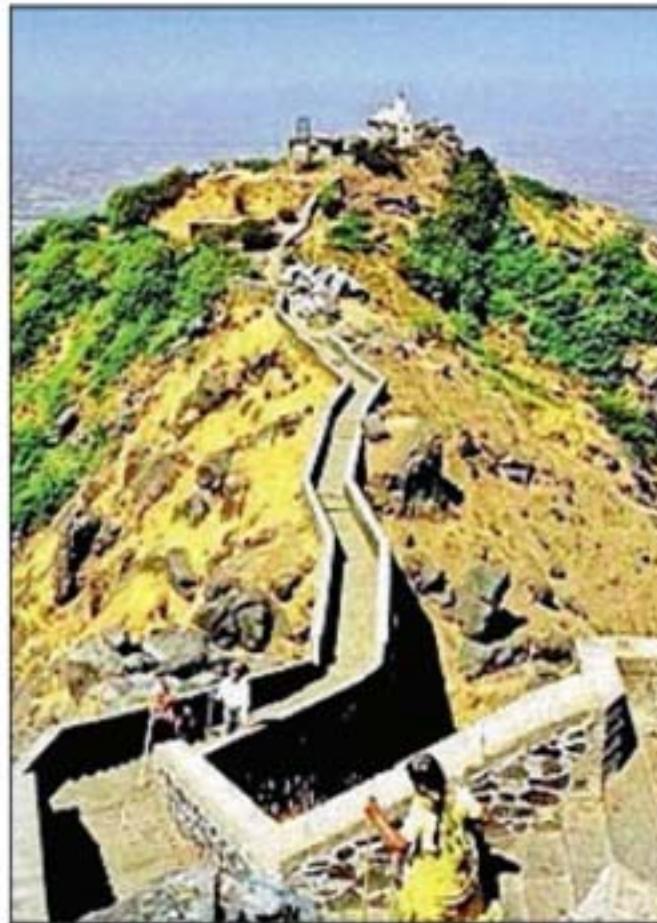
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Ahmedabad:** The state govt informed the Gujarat high court on Wednesday that it has begun registering offences against tourists violating the plastic ban in the Girnar eco sensitive zone (ESZ) to keep the hills plastic-free.

During a hearing on the PIL filed by petitioner-advocate Amit Panchal to keep the areas around temples on Girnar hilltop clean, the state govt detailed the measures it has taken for the purpose.

The forest department has registered 11 offences under the Wildlife (Protection) Act and collected Rs 21,800 in penalties, whereas 128 individuals have been booked and Rs 59,900 collected from them in penalties. The bench of Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice Pranav Trivedi asked the authorities to utilize the amount to facilitate improvements at the ESZ.

Expressing her resentment towards inappropri-



te behaviour, the CJ said, "I think these tourists are the biggest nuisance. They spoil every place on the earth. There are remote places where people go to watch sunsets and you can see water bottles strewn everywhere. In Nalsarovar, there is a small island, and you can see water bottles there also. They just go there to throw water bottles and feel elated about having done something."

For Girnar ESZ, the HC sought Junagadh municipal commissioner's affida-

vit explaining how the corporation disposes and recycles plastic collected from the city and the three villages in the ESZ.

The court also sought to know the progress made in finalization of the zonal master plan during the next hearing.

The petitioner also brought to the court's notice the condition of Dwarka, saying it was a mess. The judges asked him to raise the issue before the court. The CJ said that the govt is doing a lot for development in Dwarka by constructing a new bridge. She told the advocate general that a cleanliness campaign should also be conducted in Dwarka which faces plastic pollution.

The AG expressed his frustration, saying, "Despite being frisked and penalized, people continue to do so (throw plastic). They have become thick-skinned." The CJ said that plastic waste plagues Dwarka and will ruin the environment unless the matter is addressed.

# Two arrested with elephant tusks

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Vadodara:** The special operations group (SOG) seized two elephant tusks from the Yakutpura area on Wednesday and arrested two men. The tusks, each four-foot-long, are valued in lakhs of rupees in the black market, said Vivek Patel, SOG police inspector. The accused were identified as Irfan Sheikh and Azaar Pathan. The police said that a man from Bihar gave them the tusks.

The accused were promised a 20% commission on the deal. "We are now trying to track down the man who gave them these tusks. The tusks have been sent to the Wildlife Institute of India for DNA tests to ascertain what elephant species they belonged to. The tusks may be of an elephant from India or brought here from abroad," Patel told TOI.

The accused don't have any criminal record, but the cops are investigating their network and why they were asked to sell the tusks. The forest department too has been involved in the investigations.

# Wild elephant dies after being hit by train



## CORRESPONDENT

MORIGAON, July 10: An adult wild elephant was fatally hit by a train near Jagiroad Railway Station on early Wednesday morning.

The tusker was crossing the railway tracks when the accident happened.

It is believed that the elephant had ventured out of the nearby Sonaikuchi forest in search of food.

The carcass was detected by the railway police and forest staff.

The elephant was knocked down by the Silchar-bound Kanchanjungha Express (train number 13173) at around 4:35 am at

Tegheria, an official of Jagiroad Railway Station said.

Two elephants were on the tracks but one moved away from the spot a few seconds before the train arrived. Both elephants were separated from a herd that entered Jagiroad area on Tuesday night.

# Wildlife board will now take 1st call on clearance to projects in protected area

Jayashree Nandi

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**NEW DELHI:** In a shift from a decision in March, to consider projects requiring a wildlife nod only after the project has received a forest clearance, the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEFCC) has issued a new sequence of priority: a nod from the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) is a prerequisite for considering projects in protected areas further for a forest clearance.

To be sure, all project proponents can apply for all environmental clearances including forest and wildlife simultaneously on union environment ministry's Parivesh 2.0 website. Parivesh 2.0 is also integrated with the National Single Window System (NSWS) through which investors can apply for all relevant approvals.

The sequence of priority is only for decision making by officials on a particular project. The updated guideline was issued earlier this month. SC-NBWL is headed by the union environment minister, Bhupender Yadav.

"The proposals, involving entire forest land located in one or more

## FINAL CLEARANCE FOR PROJECTS LOCATED BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE A PROTECTED AREA WILL BE GIVEN ONLY AFTER A NOD FROM SC-NBWL

Protected Areas, would be considered for grant of 'in-principle' approval under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, only after obtaining the recommendation of the SC-NBWL, permitting use of forest land for non-forestry purpose, has been obtained," the new sequence sent to state governments says.

However, for projects located both within and outside a protected area, an "in-principle" stage I forest clearance can be granted for the portion of land outside the protected area, but the stage II or final clearance in such proposals will be given only after a nod from SC-NBWL, according to the guidelines. "Further, no working permission after stage I will be admis-

sible in such cases to avoid fait-accompli situation," they add.

Proposals located in the eco-sensitive zone of a protected area requiring both wildlife and forest clearances will be processed simultaneously.

HT reported on March 22 that SC-NBWL had decided that it will consider proposals for wildlife clearance for projects only after they have received forest approvals, a new protocol that officials said was aimed at avoiding conflicting decisions and to enable tighter scrutiny of projects in eco-sensitive zones. The latest decision was possibly taken to prioritise careful decision making on diverting forests from protected areas, consultants said.

"All environmental permissions are needed independently and they can be applied for simultaneously, hence they are not interdependent. The question is what should be considered first keeping in view where the proposal falls, and if a proposal falls in a protected area, SC-NBWL nod looks more important than forest clearance," said an environmental consultant who helps projects with environmental clearances.

"Parivesh 2.0 takes shorter time

and is more project friendly because all clearances can be applied for simultaneously. But we are aware that there is a sequential nature for prioritising. For example, when we apply for environmental clearance, we are asked at what stage our forest clearance is. Forest clearance takes the longest because it has two stages, it involves tree enumeration, study of the area etc," said another consultant.

"I am not sure why they are allowing stage I forest clearance for projects involving both protected area and non-protected area. This is because the impacts on wildlife both outside and inside protected areas will be similar and both areas need to be prioritised" she added.

Out of 1888 wildlife clearance proposals since March 30, 2023, 91 have been disposed of. Of those 91, 19 proposals have been rejected according to the Parivesh 2.0 dashboard. Around 1046 wildlife clearances are under consideration of state authorities and rest are pending at various levels.

Since June 28, 2022, 3770 projects have received "in-principle" forest clearance and 997 have got final forest clearance.

**{ GEETA COLONY }** ACCUSED BOOKED UNDER WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT

# Wildlife smuggler nabbed carrying 100 baby turtles on a motorbike

**HT Correspondent**

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**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police on Wednesday arrested a 38-year-old man trying to illegally sell 100 turtles, mostly hatchlings, near northeast Delhi's Geeta Colony as they busted a racket in which rare reptiles were being smuggled for the past six months.

The turtles were stuffed in a bag being carried on a two-wheeler, and the ages of the reptiles can only be ascertained after tests, officials said.

Some of the turtles were endangered species that are offered rigorous protection under the Wildlife Protection Act.

The arrested accused was identified as Bheem Singh, 28.

Police said they received a tip-off around 1pm that a man was smuggling dozens of turtles, adding that a group of animal activists had posed as decoy customers and

ordered the turtles online from him. They were communicating on WhatsApp and Telegram.

Deputy commissioner of police (DCP) (Shahdara) Surendra Choudhary said the recovered turtles fall under the "banned" category, which means they cannot be kept as house pets or traded.

"A team was deployed near Raja Ram Kohli Marg at the Pusta Road in Geeta Colony. At 1.20pm, the staff noticed a man approaching on a scooter with a big bag. He was spotted under the flyover and was caught after the activists identified him," the DCP said.

Police then carried the turtles to a police station, where they were kept in buckets filled with water. The reptiles were later carried shown to a judge at the Karkardooma court. The accused was also produced before the court.

"They were taken out of the bag and were immediately kept in water. We arranged four to five



Some of the rescued turtles in a bucket at the police station. HT

buckets and the turtles were evenly distributed. The staff also brought some seeds and fruit to feed the turtles. The activists told us that it appeared that the reptiles had been confined in the bag

for days," said an investigating officer aware of the case.

Forest department officials said the turtles were finally taken to Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in the evening.

## Endangered, vulnerable

According to the initial assessment, the reptiles include 50 Indian-roofed turtles (*Pangshura tecta*), 45 black pond or spotted pond turtles (*Geoclemys hamiltonii*), three Indian-eyed turtles (*Morenia petersi*) and two Indian softshell turtles (*Nilssonina gangetica*). Police said each turtle would fetch the smugglers anywhere between ₹8,000 to ₹10,000 in the black market.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, the Indian roofed turtle is listed as "vulnerable and rare", and the black pond, Indian-eyed and Indian softshell turtles are listed as "endangered". Singh was booked under the Wildlife Protection Act and Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act.

Reports showed that the Indian-roofed turtles are found in major rivers and in Pakistan and

Bangladesh. The black-spotted pond turtles are Schedule I species sold for \$120 dollars online. Officials said the recovered turtles are found in the Ganga and its tributaries, adding that they can grow up to two feet in size.

"The accused told us that he and his friend from Ghaziabad have been smuggling rare species of turtles for five to six months. He procures the species from the Ganga stretch in Garhmukteshwar area called Garh Ganga and from other subsidiary rivers," said the officer quoted above.

The officials added that the turtles will be kept at Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary for now.

Gauri Maulekhi, an animal activist said these turtles are mainly trafficked so they can be sold as pets. "Though not legally allowed to be kept as pets, people still buy them illegally on the black market for this very purpose," she said.

While documenting the butterflies of Nagarhole and Bandipur, researchers have uncovered the importance of migration for the survival of the species, writes **Pavan Kumar H**

## An arduous journey on vibrant wings

**J**ust before the monsoon sets into the foothills of the Western Ghats, thousands of butterflies prepare to make their way to drier plains. Some of the migrating species include the dark blue tigress, double-branded black crow and Indian common crow. Over the next month, these colourful species travel over 400 km, passing by mountains and braving rough winds to reach the Eastern Ghats.

The journey to the Eastern Ghats is essential for these butterflies. The eastern plains are climatically suitable as they are rain shadow areas between June and September. The butterflies who migrated, spend their sunset days here.

The migratory swarms typically consist of several thousands of individual butterflies. This annual migration is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, the migration takes place in response to the heavy downpour in the Western Ghats during monsoon. Secondly, the species of butterflies migrating from the Western Ghats do so longitudinally (from west to east) and not latitudinally (north to south).

While experts know where their journeys start and end, the route these species take to arrive at the eastern plains and back to the Western Ghats is still unclear. Any disturbance to the route will adversely impact their life cycles.

Before the onset of the northeast monsoon, their progeny returns to the Western Ghats between October and early December.

"To thermoregulate, these three species of butterflies migrate to the eastern plains to beat the rain," says Santosh S, a faculty at the department of studies in zoology, Mysuru University. Along with V Gopi Krishna, president of the Nagarhole Conservation Society, Santosh has been conducting studies on these butterflies in Nagarhole and Bandipur Tiger Reserves.

Over the last decade or so the duo have recorded the details of 209 butterflies in Nagarhole National Park and 185 species in Bandipur National Park. Apart from Nagarhole and Bandipur, the team intends to study the behaviour,

adaptations and migration patterns in all five tiger reserves in Karnataka.

"There have been studies on butterflies encompassing the entire Western Ghats in general but this is the first area-specific study in Tiger Reserves of Nagarhole and Bandipur including range and beat level information, along with GPS readings. There are hardly any such similar scientific studies being conducted in B R Hills, Bhadra and Kali Tiger Reserves," says Gopi Krishna.

### Ecosystem indicators

Butterflies are known to indicate the health of an ecosystem and play an important role in pollination. "Butterfly watching, coupled with scientific documenting and statistical analysis can be very helpful in staying alert about the subtle changes in habitat and climate," says Brijesh Kumar Dikshit, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, also an avid butterfly watcher. The number of species, their spatial distribution and count can provide important information about the habitat and its temporal change, he adds.

However, disruption to their ecosystems and migratory routes has affected the survival of many species. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an international organisation working for nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, states that there are more than 18,000 species of butterflies in the world. India is home to 1,501 varieties. Experts so far have recorded the presence of 334 species of butterflies in the Western Ghats, a biodiversity hotspot.

Though butterflies live for a short period, their life is full of fascinating events. For instance, line blue retires to the shade by 9 am during the summer to avoid extreme heat and harsh sun. Krishna and Santosh are also mapping the presence of various species of butterflies in their habitats, the reasons for the presence of specific butterflies in those particular regions and the impact of development work.

"Even the dust, smoke or residual smoke from minor construction could impact the



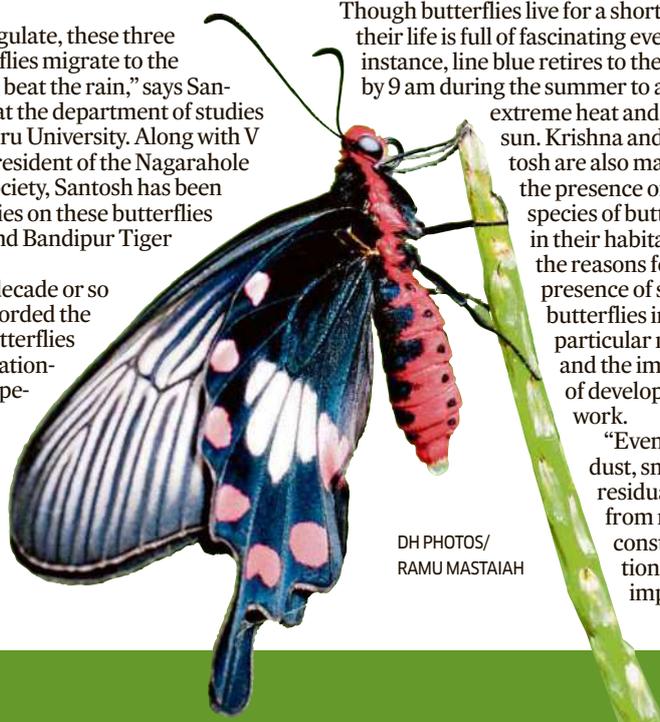
PHOTOS BY GOPI KRISHNA

larval host plants and nectar plants which are important drivers for migration. The absence of such supporting plants, which are cleared for such construction could adversely impact the lifecycle of butterflies," says Gopi Krishna. He adds that any alteration to habitat that causes butterflies harm could have a cascading impact on human lives as well.

"They are known to be umbrella species and several plants that humans are dependent on, are pollinated by these insects," he explains.

Large-scale butterfly migration was last seen in 2018. Ever since, there has been a noticeable decrease in numbers due to varying monsoon patterns and climate change.

The researchers say their study can help the forest department assess the impact of projects and make crucial decisions regarding long-term conservation measures of a particular ecosystem. The impacts could include improving habitat connectivity and managing invasive species.



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