

A 45-DAY EXERCISE WITH 1,400-PLUS TRAP CAMERAS



Trap camera images of tigers in the Sunderbans

Annual tiger count set to start in Sunderbans

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: A fortnight from now, more than 1,400 cameras will be installed at strategic locations across the Sunderbans forest to capture images of its apex predator.

The trap cameras will be in place for around 45 days as part of the annual tiger estimation exercise in the world's largest mangrove habitat for the big cat.

The annual exercise is conducted by the forest departments of the states that have tigers in the wild. The national tiger census, a quadrennial exercise, is conducted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, which functions under the Union government.

This is the first time the cameras will be placed simultaneously in the Sundarban Tiger Reserve (STR) and the South 24-Parganas forest division. Usually, the cameras are placed in a phased manner.

"The exercise begins on November 21. Usually, we used to keep the cameras for around 30 days. This year, the cameras will be in the forests for 45 days to capture as many images as possible.... We are expecting to complete the installation

of the cameras by November 26. They will remain in place till the first week of January," said Justin Jones, deputy field director, STR.

In total, 1,444 all-weather night-vision cameras will be placed in 722 strategic locations called grids — each 2sqkm grid will have a pair of cameras placed in opposite directions.

The Sunderbans is spread across 10,000sqkm, a little above 4,000sqkm of which is in India.

The Indian Sunderbans is split between the STR and the South 24-Parganas forest division.

"The camera images will be analysed with the help of a software to get to a number. After that, the number will be cross-verified by ocular (visual) estimation," said Jones.

The final report of the last national count, "Status of Tigers 2022", was released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority on July 29 (International Tiger Day) 2023. The exercise had pegged the number of tigers in India and the Sunderbans at 3,682 and 101, respectively.

In 2020-21, the state-level exercise pegged the number of tigers at 96 in the Sunderbans, the world's

only mangrove tiger habitat

But after that, the state forest department stopped formally releasing the results of the annual count.

"The count is for internal analysis. The authoritative figures are only released by the NTCA. We can do ocular estimation but the clear estimation protocols are established by the NTCA. That is the accepted standard for any estimation. The main objective of this annual estimation is to gauge the impact of the tiger protection and habitat management steps we have been taking," said an official at Aranya Bhavan, the state forest department headquarters.

But sources in the department said the number should be more than 105. The estimation excludes cubs. Only tigers more than a year old are included in the count.

"The annual state-level exercise is just an estimate of the tigers based on the findings of the trap cameras. In comparison, the national count is a much bigger and more detailed exercise," said Nilanjan Mallick, director of the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, which includes the STR and the South 24-Parganas division.

Black leopard spotted in Bhandara

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Nagpur: A black leopard was sighted in Bhandara forest division on Monday, marking a significant development in region's wildlife dynamics. Generally, the leopard maintains a nocturnal lifestyle, typically active during dawn and dusk, but the animal was sighted during the day by Lendezari PHC staff.

The employees captured a video of the leopard relaxing in the roadside forest.

Earlier, the presence of black leopard in the region was reported only from Tado-



A forest official said they will intensify patrolling in the area for the safety of the leopard

ba-Andhari Tiger Reserve.

Talking to **TOI**, Bhandara deputy conservator Rahul Gavai said, "We are aware of the leopard's presence. It was last captured by camera traps

on Feb 14. We did not indulge in publicity owing to the safety of the animal. We will intensify patrolling and monitoring in the area as the video grab may have gone viral on social media."

Shahid Khan, president of NGO Save Ecosystem and Tiger, said, "There was no presence of black leopards in Bhandara forest division in the past. We suspect this animal may have entered the area from Khawasa through the Pench-Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve corridor."

Burning bright

Notwithstanding global concerns about the future of the tiger, it is nice to see tiger numbers record a steady increase across many of its habitats in the country. In Assam also, the big cat population continues to be on the healthier side, with its numbers spread across several critical habitats showing an increasing trend. It is particularly heartening to see the striped big cat making a strong comeback in Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve – among the first tiger reserves of the country established in 1973. Once a stronghold of the tiger, Manas saw more than 90 per cent of its tiger population decimated during prolonged ethno-social unrest in the Bodoland region throughout the 1990s and beyond. Not just the tiger, but almost all the populations of diverse fauna were pushed to the brink during the troubled times in the face of unabated killing. Thankfully, sustained and committed efforts by the forest department, NGOs, local communities and the media have infused a fresh lease of life into Manas, as testified to by the restoration of the World Heritage Site status in 2011. The current tiger population of 44 marks an impressive three-fold increase in density over the 2011 figure. This is a clear indication of what enhanced security, better funding, and community involvement can achieve.

The success story of Manas is all the more incredible because of the abyss into which this magnificent wildlife habitat had fallen – and that too for a long time. However, resting on the laurels of this accomplishment will be foolhardy, as serious concerns are still there. With the big cat showing sure signs of moving towards a viable population, the need now is to enhance further security for the tiger and its prey base. It's to be noted that poaching of lesser animals such as deer is still common in Manas, and there have also been unnatural deaths of elephants and rhinos in recent years. With cropland and habitations expanding along its southern boundary, a man-elephant conflict is also palpable in some areas. Disturbingly, several elephants have been electrocuted in the peripheral areas in the past two to three years. While poaching of wildlife may have subsided in the core area, the menace is on in its peripheral forests, which calls for the induction of a more trained frontline squad. With poachers taking recourse to ingenious modes of operation, the need for a dedicated and competent frontline squad hardly needs any emphasis. Another concern in the form of encroachment and illegal logging continues to bleed Manas. The government authorities need to be more proactive and come up with the required interventions to curb encroachment and illegal logging. Given that Manas is home to two flagship species, i.e., tiger and rhino, and both are extremely vulnerable to poaching, foolproof security alone will determine their future survival.

Elephant electrocuted, farmer arrested from Murka village

Staff Reporter

BALRAMPUR

A male elephant was found dead in a paddy field in Murka village within the Balrampur forest division. An investigation revealed that the elephant died after coming into contact with an electric wire set up by a local farmer. Forest staff arrived at the scene and subsequently arrested the farmer involved.

A group of wild elephants had been roaming within room number P 3492 of the Balrampur range, under constant monitoring by the Forest Department. Around 1 a.m., officials received information that one elephant had become separated from the group. Acting on instructions from Forest Divisional Officer Ashok Tiwari, the Forest Department team immediately began searching for the missing elephant. By 7 a.m., the elephant was discovered dead on the forest edge in a paddy field.

The initial investigation re-



vealed that the farmer had set up a high-voltage electric wire using a clutch wire around his crops, leading to the elephant's fatal electrocution. The accused farmer, Rambux, son of Babulal Gond, from Murka village, was arrested, and a case was registered under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. A veterinary team conducted a post-mortem on the elephant, followed by the cremation of the body, in the presence of senior officials including CCF Surguja Matheswaran B, CF Wildlife K.R. Badai, Deputy Director of Elephant Reserve Srinivas Taneti, and DFO Ashok Tiwari, along with other department personnel.

Eurasian Scops Owl sighted

Staff Reporter

NASHIK

During 'Bird Week', an exciting event has occurred in Nashik Deorai, where a rare bird, the Eurasian Scops Owl, has been sighted. The Eurasian Scops Owl is considered very rare in India and has stirred interest among bird lovers.

Kumar Bhoje, the maintainer of Nashik Deorai, captured a photo of this owl, sparking excitement among bird lovers. Previously, this bird was recorded in the Kolkata area in 2021, but sightings in Maharashtra, and especially in Nashik district, are extremely rare.

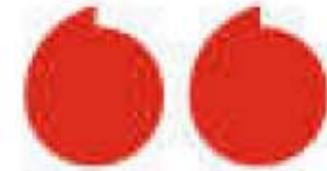


The Eurasian Scops Owl

The Eurasian Scops Owl is a migratory bird, approximately 7.5 to 8.3 inches in length, with a grey-brown colour and yellow eyes. It typically nests in tree hollows or wall crevices.

Shekhar Gaikwad of Apala Paryawaran Sanstha, Nashik, commented, "This sighting is a testament to the rich biodiversity of Nashik Deorai. The appearance of this owl is a

remarkable gift from nature and a reminder of the importance of environmental conservation. Our efforts in preserving our environment are proving effective."



The sighting of the Eurasian Scops Owl in Nashik Deorai during 'Bird Week' is an invaluable gift to bird enthusiasts. It highlights the responsibility we have to protect this bird and its habitat.

Shekhar Gaikwad

Founder, Apala Paryawaran Sanstha, Nashik

Exotic reptiles, orangutan rescued from Dombivli flat

Pradeep Gupta

Kalyan: The forest department raided a flat in Palava township, Dombivli, and recovered 16 species of exotic and endangered animals.

These included colourful snakes, a rare species of orangutan, monkeys, and rare lizards, which are sold at high prices in international markets. Forest department sources said they received specific information that Faizan Khan sold these wild and endangered animals from his house across the country and outside the country to people. Based on this information, the forest department, along with the State Reserve Police Force and local Manpada police, raided the house but found the couple had run away before their arrival.

When the team opened the room situated on the eighth floor of the Savarna building, they found that the accused kept the entire house air-con-



The police discovered several endangered wildlife like (Top) Cumberland turtle, (Right-top) Pine snake, (Right-bottom) Ball python

ditioned and had even installed an AC in the bathroom, where he kept a monkey, different species of snakes, lizards, and colourful turtles. The team, after the raid, rescued the animals prohibited under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. If sources are to be believed, Khan used to live in this flat on rent with his wife and 12-year-old son. When Khan came to know that the forest department was going to raid his house, he locked the house, ran



away. The police are on the lookout for the accused. Animal lover Ankit Vyas said, "Due to this illegal animal trading, the wild animals suffer a lot, and the orangutan found in this operation is an endangered animal, only 500 of which are present in the country and are sold for crores of rupees. I believe this is the first case wherein such a critically endangered species of the great ape was found during a raid in the Mumbai region."

Govt: Identifying 'kodo' crop infecting fungus a challenge

State Briefs DG Forest on 11 Bandhavgarh Elephants' Death

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhopal: Identifying the fungus that infected kodo crops, which is believed to have caused death of 11 elephants inside Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve last month, remains the primary challenge in the investigation, the state wildlife dept told the Centre.

This information was shared at a meeting Jitendra Kumar, director general of forests and special secretary to the central govt, held with senior Madhya Pradesh's forest officials in Bhopal.

Kumar, an 1987-batch Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer, received detailed upda-



Result of ICAR investigation is expected by Nov 14

tes on the ongoing inquiry. Officials told him that the primary challenge was identifying the fungus that infected kodo crops.

The state wildlife department is awaiting the final report from the Indian Council

of Agricultural Research in Hyderabad, where scientists are conducting an in-depth analysis. The results are expected by Nov 14.

The meeting was also informed that toxins from an unidentified fungus were responsible for the 11 elephants' death.

The toxicological examination report from the Center for Wildlife Conservation, Management, and Disease Surveillance at ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bareilly confirmed that the elephants died due to contamination from fungal toxins present in the kodo crop.

The report, which followed a detailed investigation, was based on samples of visceral organs and gastrointestinal contents sent by Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve to IVRI on Nov 2.

Additionally, officers provided him updates on the establishment of a new elephant task force in Madhya Pradesh.

The state has received funding under the Elephant Project, sources said.

Wildlife experts have raised alarm over the possibility of disease, poisoning, or other environmental factors affecting the elephant population in the area.

Leopard rescued after attacks dies at BTR

The Hindu Bureau

BHOPAL

Two weeks after the death of 10 elephants and a calf, a leopard has been reported dead at Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, officials said on Tuesday.

The leopard was rescued on November 9 after he had injured four people in two days in the Manpur buffer range, BTR Field Director Anupam Sahay said in a statement.

A forest official told *The Hindu* that the animal had been handed over to the Mukundpur Zoo in Maihar

district after primary treatment. It was being treated at their rescue centre and breathed its last on November 10 at around 7 p.m, the official said.

'Internal injuries'

A veterinary health official told *The Hindu* that as per the preliminary post-mortem report, the leopard died due to some internal injuries. Tissue samples have been sent to School of Wildlife Forensic and Health, Jabalpur, for further tests.

"We don't know when or how it received those injuries," the official said.

Lions stroll on veranda, try to enter home

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Rajkot: In villages of Amreli, the nights often have disturbances. Unlike in other places where thieves are the usual suspects, here wild animals are the cause.

This was the case when four lions explored the home of Suresh Agravat in Kovaya village on Sunday morning. The commotion alerted family members and neighbours, who recorded the lions' movements on their phones.

The footage, which was widely shared on social media, shows lions roaming freely through the veranda of a concrete dwelling. It shows



The video shows lions on the veranda of a house in an Amreli village

one lion attempting to access a room by testing a locked door, inspecting it from top to bottom for possible entry.

Locals reported that the

lions remained on the premises for about 20 minutes. The animals had entered by scaling the compound walls, but departed through the main

gate, which neighbours opened to facilitate their exit. The lions then disappeared into the neighbouring reserve forest area, passing through Kovaya village market.

When contacted, in-charge forest officer Nilesh Vegda told TOI that "There is a reserve forest adjacent to this village and movement of wildlife here is a common. In this incident the residents did not report to forest about the lion's movement inside a residential premise, but the same pride of lions again sighted in the street of Kovaya village, we were informed and drove them away in the forest area."

Mangrove alert: From Maldives to Sunderbans

G.S. MUDUR

New Delhi: Rising sea levels and the Indian Ocean temperature patterns have caused some Maldives' islands to lose up to half their mangrove cover over the past five years, a loss portending what could happen in the Sunderbans and other mangrove ecosystems.

Scientists have attributed the mass "dieback" of mangrove trees on the Maldivian islands to increased salinity — salt concentrations — from record-high sea levels in 2020 linked to a natural phenomenon called Indian Ocean Dipole marked by seesaw-like temperature changes in the Indian Ocean. Dieback is a progressive decline in a plant's health.

Their study, published on Tuesday in the journal *Scientific Reports*, provides the first quantified estimates for mangrove loss in the archipelago since a quarter of the Maldivian islands containing mangrove forests started to experience gradual deterioration of trees in 2020.

Mangroves serve as protective barriers against storms and floods and as biodiversity reservoirs that function as nurseries for crabs, fish and prawns that contribute to food security for coastal populations.

"Our findings show how extreme climate events can compound sea-level rise impacts and adversely affect mangroves across the Indian Ocean region, including potentially the Sunderbans," Vasile Ersek, a professor of environmental sciences at Northumbria University in the UK who co-led the study, told **The Telegraph**. "The extreme magnitude of the mangrove dieback illustrates how climate change may push natural systems past thresholds with cascading consequences for nature and people."

Ersek and his colleagues from Australia, Brazil, Maldives, the UK and the US used satellite imagery, sea levels and temperature data and analysed tree wood to investigate the mangrove dieback.

An inhabited Maldivian island named Neykurendhoo had lost 27 per cent of mangrove cover between the periods 2014-2018 and 2019-2022. Another inhabited island

named Hoandedhoo had lost 27 per cent of its mangrove forests over the same period.

Their study revealed that the dead trees showed high stress from salinity compared to living trees. The roots of the trees that died struggled to cope with increased salt concentrations from sea levels which rose at an accelerated rate of 30mm per year between 2017 and 2020.

Around 2020, an Indian Ocean Dipole occurred, causing warmer sea surface temperatures and adding to the increase in sea levels in the region. Although mangroves build their own sediment which allows them to adapt to rising seas, the rate of sea level rise was too fast for the mangroves to keep pace.

The 30mm per year sea level rise between 2017 and 2020 was nearly five times greater than the 6.4mm per year accumulation of mangroves' sediment. The seawater flooded the mangrove forests and their trees died from drowning in salt water.

Similar mangrove losses have also occurred around the same time in the Seychelles and in Madagascar. "This is a warning for coastal areas worldwide," said Lucy Carruthers, the study's first author who is now a coastal science researcher at East Carolina University in the US.

Ersek, however, noted that there are important differences between the Maldives' mangroves and those in the Sunderbans.

"While both regions face threats from sea-level rise, the Sunderbans receive sediment from rivers, unlike the Maldives' carbonate platform mangroves that rely mainly on organic matter for the accumulation," he said.

Carruthers said the impact in the Sunderbans will depend on whether the mangrove forests can retreat landward which would depend on the sediment and accommodation space.

"Islands like the Maldives have very little space which makes them particularly vulnerable," she said. "Given their location, Sunderbans' mangrove forests may not be as heavily impacted by the Indian Ocean Dipole — but understanding its impact on the Sunderbans could be an area of future research."

Orangutan, reptiles saved

Thane: Busting a major wildlife smuggling racket, forest officials on Tuesday rescued an Orangutan and several reptiles from a rented flat in Dombivli. The smuggled animals were found in appalling conditions and would not have survived had they not been rescued in time, the officials said. It was one of the biggest such operations ever conducted, the official added.

'LOSS OF LARGE MAMMALS IS A SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL ISSUE FOR AFRICA AND THE PLANET'

Population of African elephants has dropped drastically, find researchers

Using data on surveys conducted at 475 sites in 37 countries from 1964 through 2016, researchers have found that the populations of savanna elephants fell by about 70% on average and that of the forest pachyderm dropped by about 90%, with poaching and habitat loss the main drivers.

Reuters

African elephants are Earth's largest land animals, remarkable mammals that are very intelligent and highly social. They also are in peril. Fresh evidence of this comes in a study that documents alarming population declines at numerous sites across the continent over about a half century.

Researchers unveiled on Monday what they called the most comprehensive assessment of the status of the two African elephant species — the savanna elephant and forest elephant — using data on population surveys conducted at 475 sites in 37 countries from 1964 through 2016.

The savanna elephant populations fell by about 70% on average at the surveyed sites and the forest elephant populations dropped by about 90% on average at the surveyed sites, with poaching and habitat loss the main drivers. All told, there was a 77% population decrease on average at the various surveyed sites, spanning both species.

Elephants vanished at some sites while their populations increased in other places thanks to conservation efforts.

"A lot of the lost populations won't come back, and many low-density populations face continued pressures.



An African elephant matriarch leads her calf away from danger in northern Kenya. Poaching has affected forest elephants disproportionately and has ravaged populations of both species in northern and eastern Africa.

REUTERS

We likely will lose more populations going forward," said George Wittemyer, a Colorado State University professor of wildlife conservation who helped lead the study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Poaching typically involves people killing elephants for their tusks, which are sold illegally on an international black market driven mostly by ivory demand in China and other parts of Asia. Agricultural expansion is the top factor in habitat loss.

The forest elephant population is estimated to be about a third that of savanna elephants. Poaching has affected forest elephants disproportionately and has ravaged populations of both species in northern and eastern Africa.

"We have lost a number of elephant populations across many countries, but the northern Sahel region of Africa — for example in Mali, Chad and Nigeria — has been particularly hard hit. High pressure and limited protection have culminated in populations being extirpated," Wittemyer said. But in southern Africa, elephant

populations rose at 42% of the surveyed sites.

"We have seen real success in a number of places across Africa, but particularly in southern Africa, with strong growth in populations in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia. For populations showing positive trends, we have had active stewardship and management by the governments or outside groups that have taken on a management role," Wittemyer said.

The study did not track a continent-wide population tally because the surveys employed different methodologies over different time frames to estimate local elephant population density, making a unified head count impossible. Instead, it assessed population trends at each of the surveyed sites.

A population estimate by conservationists conducted separately from this study put the two species combined at between 415,000 and 540,000 elephants as of 2016, the last year of the study period. It remains the most recent comprehensive continent-wide estimate.

"The loss of large mammals is a sig-

nificant ecological issue for Africa and the planet," said conservation ecologist and study co-author Dave Balfour, a research associate in the Centre for African Conservation Ecology at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. The world's third extant elephant species, the slightly smaller Asian elephant, faces its own population crisis, with similar factors at play as in Africa.

Of African elephants, Wittemyer said, "While the trends are not good, it is important to recognise the successes we have had and continue to have. Learning how and where we can be successful in conserving elephants is as important as recognizing the severity of the decline they have experienced."

Wittemyer added of these elephants: "Not only one of the most sentient and intelligent species we share the planet with, but also an incredibly important part of ecosystems in Africa that structures the balance between forest and grasslands, serves as a critical disperser of seeds, and is a species on which a multitude of other species depend on for survival."

Ranthambore's missing tigers: A tale of turf wars, human threat, age

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Jaipur: Tigers may be disappearing from Ranthambore national park due to a complex mix of territorial disputes, human-related threats, and natural aging, as per wildlife experts.

Recently, chief wildlife warden Pavan Kumar Upadhyay issued an order regarding 25 tigers missing from the park. A search committee could trace 10 of them within three days. Dharmendra Khandal, a conservation biologist with Tiger Watch, noted that among remaining 15 missing tigers, territorial conflicts and human threats appear to be significant factors. Forest de-

iStock/Getty Images



Five older tigers are believed to have died of natural causes due to their advanced age

partment's report reads, "These younger males were frequently observed roaming in search of unclaimed territories. Territorial disputes with dominant males could be the cause of their disappearance. However, human-related factors must also be

considered. These young males may have been exposed to threats from locals, such as poisoning or other manmade risks."

Five older tigers are believed to have died of natural causes due to their advanced age, ranging from 18 to 19 years. The report adds, "Tigers typically live up to around 15 years, making survival beyond that age increasingly difficult. While it is remarkable that these tigers survived in Ranthambore for so long, once they passed the age of 15, they faced immense challenges. Their breeding ceased, and they struggled to maintain their health and territories in the face of mounting competition from younger, dominant tigers."

Students connect with nature through tourism dept trip

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lucknow: Aimed at promoting tourism destinations in the state, the Uttar Pradesh Tourism department has set up Youth Tourism Clubs whose members visited the Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary on Lucknow outskirts on Tuesday.

Organised by UP Tourism Eco Tourism Development Board in collaboration with a travel website, the students from DAV School Lucknow and members of the Youth Tourism Club participated in the initiative which is aimed at introducing youngsters to the region's rich biodiversity and promote environmental conservation.

"Participants observed the sanctuary's avian residents but learned about the significance of preserving natural habitats. With plans for more educational tours on the horizon, the sanctuary continues to be a vital site for wildlife education and appreciation," said Prakhar Mishra, director, UP Tourism.

Prior to the visit, students were briefed about the initiative at the Paryatan Bhavan where principal chief conservator of forests and director of Wildlife Biodiversity Sanjay Srivastava was present. Students were shown a short



Officials of tourism dept giving away souvenirs to students

film about the sanctuary and learned about the birds' habitats and diets. They also toured the nearby Deer Park.

In a message to the students, tourism and culture minister Jaiveer Singh said, "Efforts are on to showcase the natural beauty and serene destinations of Uttar Pradesh to tourists while preserving local biodiversity."

The Youth Tourism Clubs were formed in Jan 2023 in all UP districts. It comprises teachers and students of educational institutions to guide tourists and help them acquaint themselves with the cultural and historical attractions of the state.

At least 25 students and two teachers are included in each club. Members of the club, who are referred to as 'Paryatan Mitras' work on a voluntary basis and educate about tourist destinations and their history.

Tiger beetles native to state take centre stage at World Tiger Beetle Day event

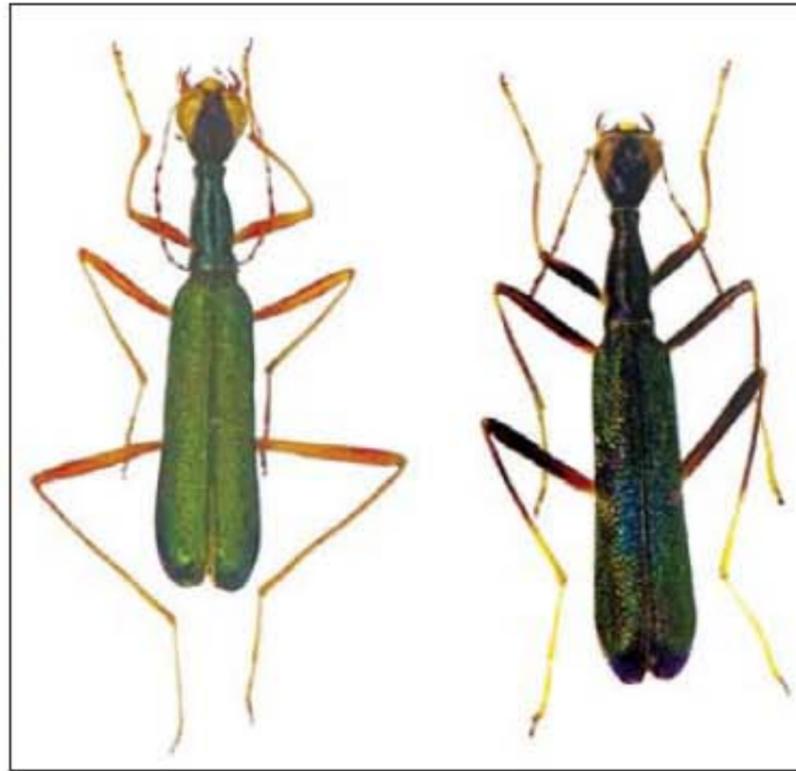
By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Nov 12: Rare tiger beetle species native to Meghalaya was the centre of attention at the World Tiger Beetle Day, observed on November 11. The virtual event, organised in honour of Dr David Pearson, an authority on tiger beetles, emphasised the conservation needs of these unique species and highlighted Meghalaya's crucial role in protecting some of India's most endangered tiger beetles.

Meghalaya's tiger beetle species, such as the Thin Brush Tiger Beetle (*Neocollyris macilenta*) and the Ringed Brush Tiger Bee-

tle (*Neocollyris annulicornis*), were prominent topics at an IUCN Red List Assessment Workshop in May 2024, led by the South Asian Invertebrate Specialist Group (SAsISG). This workshop revealed that nearly half of India's endemic tiger beetle species, including those found in Meghalaya are threatened by activities like monoculture plantations, mining, and infrastructure development that degrade their natural habitats.

The Thin Brush Tiger Beetle, found in Meghalaya's southeastern highlands



(Left) Thin Brush Tiger Beetle; and Ringed Brush Tiger Beetle

at around 1,400 metres, is most active in April but faces threats from mining and monoculture plantations encroaching on its

limited habitat. Similarly, the Ringed Brush Tiger Beetle, which inhabits the southwestern forests at about 1,150 metres, is vulnerable to habitat loss from road expansion and other development projects.

Organised by Dr Sanjay Molur and his team at Zoo Outreach Organisation (Zooreach), the event brought together students, researchers, and conservationists from across India.

Dr Pearson's presentation on tiger beetle ecology and behaviour underscored their importance as insect predators that help maintain ecological balance. The event also saw the launch

of four tiger beetle-themed lapel pins by the wildlife NGO 'ROAR', aimed at raising awareness about these lesser-known insects.

The virtual meet and subsequent discussions underscored the need for targeted local action in Meghalaya, urging bodies like the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council to include tiger beetle protection in their conservation priorities. Experts highlighted that greater public awareness of these "six-legged tigers" could help build support for preserving their habitats and ensure these rare species continue to thrive in Meghalaya's forests.

Tiger poisoning case: C'garh HC takes suo motu notice

Staff Reporter

BILASPUR

The High Court of Chhattisgarh has taken suo motu notice and demanded a response from authorities regarding the recent killing of a tiger by poisoning in the Korea Forest Division.

Chief Justice Ramesh Sinha has asked that the case be merged with an existing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on similar matters. Following the

tiger's death, Forest Department officials have been questioning residents within a two-kilometre radius of the incident site.

The tiger's body, discovered last Friday by villagers near the Guru Ghasidas Tiger Reserve, was estimated to be two to three days old. A subsequent post-mortem report confirmed that poisoning was the cause of death.

During a hearing, the division bench of Chief Justice



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Ramesh Sinha and Justice AK Prasad reviewed the matter. Chief Justice Sinha, expressing frustration, issued a notice to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, demanding a detailed affidavit. He emphasized the alarming decline in tiger numbers, noting, "If we cannot protect our forests and wildlife, there will be little left for future generations".

Investigators suspect that the tiger might have been poisoned in retaliation for

hunting cattle in the area. It's believed that someone mixed poison into the remains of the cattle carcass. A dog squad from Gomarda Sanctuary has been assisting in the investigation, and Forest Department officers have detained several individuals for questioning.

The incident marks the second tiger death in Chhattisgarh under similar circumstances, underscoring concerns over wildlife protection in the region.

Tiger poisoning case: Chhattisgarh High Court takes suo motu notice

Avdhesh Mallick

BILASPUR

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Up to 2 km P'kula area around Sukhna Lake declared ESZ

Centre rejects Hry proposal to notify 1 km area surrounding lake

DUSHYANT SINGH PUNDIR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, NOVEMBER 12

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, has finally issued a notification demarcating an area from 1 km to 2.035 km around the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary as an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) on the Haryana side in Panchkula district for the purpose of preventing, controlling and abating environment pollution.

The ministry has turned down the proposal of the Haryana Government that area of 1 km around the sanctuary on its side be delineated as an ESZ.

Extent and boundaries

The ESZ in general extends up to 1 km from the boundary of the sanctuary on the Haryana side. It is further extended to 2 km in the reserved forest on the northern side. On the eastern side, the ESZ boundary is mostly 1 km, running along the boundary of the reserved forest. However, it is extended on the south-eastern side to make it co-terminus with the boundary of the reserved forest. The total area of the ESZ is 24.60 sq km.

The area of the ESZ will be 6078.98 acres (2460.07



FILE

WAY PAVED FOR NEW HARYANA VIDHAN SABHA BUILDING

Former Haryana Speaker Gian Chand Gupta claimed that the ministry has given environment and forest clearance to 12-acre land in Saketri to be swapped with 10-acre land for the proposed Assembly building in the UT, which is near the railway station light point in Chandigarh. The 12-acre land in Saketri is out of the ambit of the ESZ, says Gupta, adding that he had raised the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar for the construction of a new Assembly building. The allocation of land for the Haryana Assembly building in Chandigarh was announced by Shah on July 9, 2022.

hectares). The ESZ will include area comprising Sector 1 and part of Sector 2 and 3, including Gymkhana Club under the Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP), some tubewell chambers, paragliding parks and area under Sector 1 of the Mansa Devi Complex (MDC), area under Chandimandir Cantonment (small arms firing range of military station at Chandimandir, Central Soil & Water Conservation Research Farm and part of

area under the Municipal Corporation of Panchkula.

As per the notification, of the 10 villages, namely Prem-pura, Sokhomajri, Damala, Lohgarh, Manakpur Thakardas, Surajpur, Chandimandir Kotla, Darra Kharauni, Rampur, Saketri and Mahadevpur, that fall in the ESZ, Saketri and Prem-pura fall within a radius of 700 m from the boundary of the sanctuary.

Banned, regulated activities

All activities in the ESZ will

be governed by the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the rules made there. The prohibited activities include commercial mining, stone quarrying and crushing units, setting of new saw mills, setting of industries causing pollution (water, air, soil, noise, etc), use or production or processing of any hazardous substances, commercial use of firewood, discharge of untreated effluents in natural water bodies or land area, etc.

Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary is under the control of the Chandigarh Administration and shares boundary with Punjab and Haryana. The sanctuary is located in Shivalik foothills which are ecologically sensitive and geologically unstable. The total area of the sanctuary is 25.9849 sq km. To protecting, propagating and developing wildlife and its habitat, this area was declared as wildlife sanctuary vide Chandigarh Administration in 1998.

In 2020, the Punjab and Haryana High Court declared Sukhna Lake a living entity and directed the Environment Ministry to declare at least 1 km area from the sanctuary's boundary in both states as ESZ.