

ANIMALS FOUND ONLY IN INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

India teems with incredible biodiversity, ranging from the rugged Himalayas to the northern plains, the Deccan plateau to the islands, and the coastal plains to the lush northeast, providing the right environment for many animal species to thrive. Some of them are found almost exclusively in our country, while for some others, India and its neighbourhood, is home. Here's a primer on such species.

■ Nilgiri tahr

Scientific name: *Nilgiritragus hylocrius*
Estimated population: **3,122**
Status: **Endangered**
Found in: **Western Ghats**
Diet: **Herbivore**
It is the only mountain ungulate in southern India among the 12 species present in India. It is the state animal of Tamil Nadu.



• Malabar squirrel

Scientific name: *Ratufa indica*
Estimated population: **NA**
Status: **Least Concern**
Found in: **Kerala and parts of southern Karnataka. Its cousin subspecies can be spotted in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Jharkhand.**
Diet: **Omnivore**
It is the state animal of Maharashtra and is called shekaru in Marathi. Apart from being the world's largest squirrel, it is the only giant squirrel species out of four with such a colourful fur coat.



■ Great Indian bustard

Scientific name: *Ardeotis nigriceps*
Estimated population: **200**
Status: **Critically endangered**
Found in: **Rajasthan and Gujarat, with small population in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh**
Diet: **Omnivore**
It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world.



■ Lion-tailed macaque

Scientific name: *Macaca silenus*
Estimated population: **Less than 4,000**
Status: **Endangered**
Found in: **The Western Ghats (Karnataka, Kerala) and Tamil Nadu**
Diet: **Omnivore**
As the name suggests, the lion-tailed macaque is named due to its lion-like, long, thin, and tufted tail. It is the only endangered macaque out of 21 species of its genus.



■ Purple frog

Scientific name: *Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensis*
Estimated population: **Less than 135**
Status: **Endangered**
Found in: **The Western Ghats**
Diet: **Insects**



■ Red panda

Scientific name: *Ailurus fulgens*
Estimated population: **Less than 10,000**
Status: **Endangered**
Found in: **Eastern Himalayas (India, Nepal, Bhutan, northern Myanmar) and central China.**
Diet: **Omnivore**
Pandas make a barking sound or release a pungent liquid from glands at the base of their tail when threatened. The liquid also helps the males mark their territory when looking for a mate.



Forgotten roars



Cheetahs were once native to India but became extinct in the country by 1952 due to excessive hunting and habitat loss. To restore the species, India initiated the Project Cheetah reintroduction programme, which began in 2022 in partnership with Namibia and South Africa. Under this programme, African cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*) were reintroduced to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, marking a significant effort in wildlife conservation. The reintroduction aims to restore the ecological balance and enhance biodiversity. While challenges such as habitat suitability and managing human-wildlife interactions remain, this project represents a historic step in India's wildlife conservation efforts and the first intercontinental wildlife translocation.

Gharial

Scientific name: *Gavialis gangeticus*
Estimated population: **800**
Status: **Critically endangered**
Found in: **India and Nepal**
Diet: **Carnivore**
Gharial derives its name from the Hindi word gharā, meaning pot, because



of a bulbous knob present at the end of their snout. Only the male gharials have the ghara, making them the only members of the crocodile family with visible difference between the two sexes.

17,000 trees at risk in Tumakuru mining

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A wildlife conservationist has approached Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre regarding a proposed mining project near Bukkapatna Chinkara Wildlife Sanctuary in Tumakuru that will require the diversion of nearly 50 hectares of forest land and felling of over 17,000 trees.

The conservationist has requested the Minister to reject the proposal due to its proximity to Bukkapatna Chinkara Wildlife Sanctuary.

According to the application filed by the project proponent on the Central government's Parivesh website, while the 7.53 km of the proposed mining area is not part of any national park, wildlife sanctuary, biosphere reserve, tiger reserve, elephant

corridor, etc., it is located 7.70 km away from the Bukkapatna Chinkara Wildlife Sanctuary and falls within the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary.

In the letter written to the Minister, conservationist Giridhar Kulkarni highlighted that the proposed project may result in fragmentation of forest area due to the felling of more than 17,000 trees and loss of wildlife habitat. It may also interfere with watersheds, accelerate human-wildlife conflict, and lead to invasion by weeds and a decline in non-wood forest produce, which will threaten the livelihood of local communities.

Kulkarni has underlined that the proposed area is rich in flora and fauna diversity and houses wildlife such as leopard, sloth bear, wolf, pangolin, and also four-horned antelope, a Schedule-I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

"There is a significant cattle popu-



The forest is crucial fodder source for cattle

lation that uses forests as the main source of fodder. It is an important watershed area for the surrounding agriculture fields and perhaps one of the last remaining lung spaces in Tumakuru with dwindling forest cover. The project, if given a green signal, will result in the felling of 17,206 trees," said Kulkarni.

The letter also alleges that the pro-

posal appears to be an open cast mining and hence may include the use of explosives. "The impacts of mining go beyond extraction of ore and the dumping of tailings. Additional roads will have to be built through pristine forests and grasslands to provide access for earthmovers. One of the more serious consequences of mining may also be habitat fragmentation, leading to human-wildlife conflict, already a serious concern in the district," added Kulkarni.

As per the Parivesh portal, the project has received a recommendation letter from the Deputy Conservator of Forest, Tumakuru Forest Division of Karnataka Forest Department.

However, since the proposed project is located in the deemed Eco Sensitive Zone of Bukkapatna Sanctuary, experts say it will require wildlife clearance from the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife as well.

CM announces additional allocation of ₹400 crore for *Kalaignar Kanavu Illam*

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday announced that an additional allocation of ₹400 crore had been made under the *Kalaignar Kanavu Illam* scheme, aimed at constructing one lakh houses in the State.

An official statement said ₹3,500 crore had been allocated for the 2024-25 fiscal, and each beneficiary would get ₹3,50,000. Permission had been granted for constructing one lakh houses, and the work was under way, it said.

Based on the stage of construction, the amount was released to the beneficiaries directly through a single nodal account. For this purpose, ₹1,051.34 crore had been allocated, of which ₹860.31 crore had been released to the beneficiaries, the statement said.

Moreover, ₹135.30 crore had been provided for cement and steel procured at lower prices. So far, ₹995.61 crore had been

spent under the scheme, it said.

The construction of houses had been progressing well, and to further strengthen the process, a government order had been issued to release an additional ₹400 crore. With this, a total of ₹1,451.34 crore was available and released to the beneficiaries based on the stage of construction, the statement said.

Tamil Nadu was taking measures to complete the construction of all the houses by the end of this fiscal, it added.

₹290 crore for library

The State government also issued an order allocating ₹290 crore for the proposed Kalaignar Grand Library and Intellectual Centre in Tiruchi.

The library would come up on 1.85 hectares in Mannarpuram on the Chennai-Madurai National Highway.

A total of ₹235 crore has been allocated for the construction of the library, while ₹50 crore has been allocated for books and e-

books, and ₹5 crore for equipment, as per a government order dated December 17.

The Tamil Nadu government also issued an order reconstituting the State Bird Authority, which was formed last year to monitor and improve bird sanctuaries, nesting conditions for birds, and ecotourism facilities.

The government has decided to include the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Director, Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC), and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Member Secretary, Tamil Nadu Wetland Authority, as members of the authority.

The committee, chaired by the Secretary, Environment, Climate Change and Forests, also comprises representatives from various departments such as Revenue and Disaster Management, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Public Works, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, and Forests.

Concerns over mining area proposal near Bukkapatna Chinkara Wildlife Sanctuary

K.C. Deepika
BENGALURU

A proposal to divert 48.2 hectares of forest land for mining in Tumakuru has been flagged by environment activists who say that the project, if implemented, will result in felling of 17,206 trees and also affect the rich faunal diversity in the area.

The proposed project is the establishment of Saranapani Iron and Manganese Ore Mine by Mineral Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.

Letter to Minister

Giridhar Kulkarni, a wildlife conservationist, in a letter written to Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre, has urged the Karnataka government to reject the mining project proposed in Gollarahalli, Lakmenahalli, Hosahalli, Kodihalli, Thonalapura villages of Chikkanayakanahalli Taluk, Tumakuru district, as it is within the deemed eco-sensitive zone of Bukkapatna Chinkara Sanctuary falling under the administrative control of the Tumakuru Territorial Forest Division.

Last year, a Cabinet sub-committee meeting held under the chairmanship of Mr. Khandre had given in-principle approval for declaring eco-sensitive zones in six forest areas, including Kappattagudda, Bukkapatna, Kammasandra, Nagarahole, Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, and Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary.

“The area is rich in faunal diversity with the presence of wild animals like leopard, sloth bear, wolf,



The proposed mining project will have to be taken up within the deemed eco-sensitive zone of Bukkapatna Chinkara Sanctuary under the administrative control of the Tumakuru Territorial Forest Division. FILE PHOTO

pangolin, and four-horned antelope which are listed in Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Also, animals like jackals, striped hyenas, porcupines, jungle cats, wild pigs, monitor lizards, Indian rock pythons and many other species are found here. The region also has a diversity of avifaunal species,” he has said in the letter.

What the DCF said

The Deputy Conservator of Forest’s (DCF) remarks in the proposal seeking forest clearance also mention that though the proposed land is not part of any National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Biosphere Reserve, Tiger Reserve, Elephant Corridor, etc, and is located around 7 km away from the Bukkapatna Chinkara Wildlife Sanctuary, the proposed mining area and approach road falls within the eco-sensitive zone of the Sanctuary’s default 10 km if eco-sensitive zone is not notified. However, the DCF has recommended

the proposal for further consideration. Mr. Kulkarni said there are villages and habitations around the proposed site and the people there are mainly dependent on agriculture, which is dependent on these forests as it is the main source of water which forms the catchment area.

“This region is perhaps one of the last remaining lung spaces of a district like Tumakuru which has very less forest cover compared to many other districts.”

“The proposed project if implemented will result in felling of 17, 206 trees,” he added.

Mr. Kulkarni also said the impacts of mining go beyond the extraction of ore and the dumping of the tailings as additional roads have to be built through the forest and grasslands to provide access for giant earth moving machines and it is clear from the proposal itself that user agency has sought diversion of forest land for the approach road.

WROUGHTON'S FREE-TAILED BAT SIGHTED AT YBP

Critically endangered bat makes foray into NCR

Jasjeev Gandhiok

NEW DELHI : A Wroughton's Free-tailed Bat (*Otomops wroughtoni*) has been sighted at north Delhi's Yamuna Biodiversity Park (YBP), which chiropterologists (experts who study bats) say is the first record not just for Delhi-NCR but northern India too. The bat is generally seen in the western ghats near Karnataka, with recent records from northeast India's Meghalaya and Cambodia, making this a rare species in this part of the country.

Historically, 14 bat species have been recorded in the capital, with this being 15th unique species in the region, experts said.

The species was sighted on December 1 by Faiyaz Khudsar, the scientist-in-charge of Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) Biodiversity Parks Programme and documentation officer Mohan Singh during a field visit of the park, which comes under DDA. It was observed clinging onto a tree, where it was subsequently photographed and identified.

"We quickly photographed it and reached out to bat experts for identification. It was identified as a Wroughton's Free-tailed Bat, a species not seen in Delhi before," said Khudsar.

Rohit Chakravarty, a Bat researcher at the Nature Conservation Foundation & Bat Conservation International said the only well-known habitat in the country for the species is the western ghats near Karnataka, stating this is the first sighting not just in Delhi-NCR, but northern India too.

"The Wroughton's Free-tailed Bat is a rare species known only from four locations in India and Cambodia. This sighting from Delhi NCR is the first record from anywhere in northern India. It raises several questions about the ecology of this rare bat. It is unknown whether this species migrates. Systematically monitoring areas where the species has been recorded is required to find answers."

This species was first discovered in 1913 by British Zoologist Dr. M. R. Oldfield Thomas. Experts said it



Experts say this is the first time that the bat has been spotted in northern India. PHOTO: MOHAN SINGH

roosts in caves or dark, damp and little warm places, in moderate colony sizes. It is known to be a powerful flier. As per the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the species is classified as Critically Endangered.

Sumit Dookia, assistant professor at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU), who has been studying bats in the region for over a decade now said spotting the species in a dense urban metropolis such as Delhi is a good sign on the health of the local environment.

"It gives us a sense of understanding that Delhi's landscape is still home to many rare and uncommon species".

HT reported in August last year, citing a long-term study being carried out by Dookia and his PhD student Rajlakshmi Mishra, how out of the 14 historical species, four species -- the Indian False Vampire Bat (*Megaderma lyra*), the Black-bearded Tomb Bat (*Taphozous melanopogon*), the Egyptian Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida aegyptiaca*), and the Indian Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus coromandra*) — are no longer being seen in Delhi and have likely become locally extinct.

First river dolphin tagging done in Assam



STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The first ever satellite geo-tagging of a river dolphin was today done successfully in Kulsi river of Kamrup in Assam.

A team of 40 specialists had been on the job for some time. The first attempt was made in Majuli, but the capture failed. A second effort in Dikhowmukh also was unsuccessful.

“Finally, we succeeded in Badlapathar stretch of Kulsi

river. A healthy male was captured by a team of professional fishermen. Specialists from Project Dolphin, WII, Aaranyak, NTCA and Assam Forest department were part of the team,” river dolphin specialist Dr Ab-

dul Wakid, who was part of the team, said.

It took around 40 minutes to tag the 32-kg animal, after which it was released. No sedative was used.

The team is planning to tag at three more dolphins, one preferably in the Brahmaputra.

“Though this tagging, we expect to know more about the distribution pattern, its movements, how it behaves in the environment and other characters of the aquatic animal,” Dr Wakid said.

“The MoEFCC and National Campa funded project, led by WII in collaboration with Assam forest department and Aaranyak will deepen the understanding of conserving the national aquatic animal,” Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said.

There are only six extant species of river dolphins left in the world today and they are all endangered or critically endangered. This is because pollution, dams, shipping and bycatch have taken their toll on this iconic species.

The population of Ganges river dolphin is around 35,00, of which few hundreds are in Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

The first population estimation of the fresh water dolphins was carried out in Ganges, Indus and Brahmaputra recently, and its findings will be released soon.

Dolphins are among one of the oldest creatures in the world along with some species of turtles, crocodiles and sharks.

Formulate policy to manage sacred groves, SC tells govt.

Union Environment Ministry asked to develop plan for nationwide survey of groves, which are traditionally safeguarded by local communities, for its ecological value and cultural significance

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to create a comprehensive policy for the management of sacred groves across the country.

Sacred groves are patches of trees traditionally protected by local communities for their religious and cultural significance. They also contribute to the conservation of the local biodiversity. These small forests are commonly found in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The recommendation by a Special Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai, S.V.N. Bhatti and Sandeep Mehta was based on a petition highlighting the vanishing groves of Rajasthan.

Significant move

The court's suggestion to the Centre to frame a policy is significant as the Centre has usually maintained that the manage-



Save biodiversity: These small forests are commonly found in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. THULASI KAKKAT

ment of wildlife and its habitat is primarily the responsibility of the States. The Centre had noted that the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, empowered States for declaration of any private or community land, as a community reserve, for protecting fauna, flora and traditional or cultural conservation values and practices.

However, the judgment aligned the preservation of sacred groves with the cultural and traditional rights of entire communities, while asking the Ministry of Environment, Forest

and Climate Change to spearhead the efforts to protect these precious sources of biodiversity.

The Ministry was asked to develop a plan for a nationwide survey of sacred groves. The court said the survey must identify the area and extent of the groves. It said the boundaries of the groves have to be clearly marked but left flexible to accommodate future growth of the forests. It said the Centre should provide instructions against the reduction of the groves.

Justice Mehta reminded

the Centre that the National Forest Policy of 1988, backed by the top court's interventions through the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad batch of cases, encouraged communities with customary rights to improve these forest patches on which they depend for their needs.

Village's efforts

The judgment narrated the story of Piplantri village in Rajasthan, where barren land was transformed to lush green groves due to the efforts of the people. "Piplantri village shows how a community-driven initiative came to effectively address social, ecological and environmental challenges in a cohesive manner," Justice Mehta underscored.

"Sacred groves have immense ecological value. Sacred groves should be identified and protected as community reserves to ensure their preservation against unauthorised land use changes," he observed.

Gauhati HC bans buffalo and bulbul fights in Assam

SUMIR KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI, DHNS

The Gauhati High Court quashed the Assam government's Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for the traditional buffalo and bulbul bird fights, reinstating the ban on the practice.

The buffalo and bulbul fights are organised during the Magh

Bihu celebrations in Assam every January. The BJP-led state government issued an SoP in December last year to allow such fights after they had been disallowed.

On Tuesday, the HC quashed the SoP, acting on a petition by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) India, which argued that buffalo and bulbul fights violate

the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The high court accepted Peta's arguments, citing the 2014 Supreme Court judgment in Animal Welfare Board of India vs A Nagaraja.

Peta's investigations revealed that buffaloes were severely injured through beatings and bulbuls were starved

and intoxicated to fight over food. They also highlighted instances of fights being held illegally, resulting in significant animal abuse.

The birds are commonly drugged with marijuana and other intoxicating herbs. During the fight, a piece of banana is dangled to incite the hungry birds to attack each other, Peta India said.

Gauhati High Court bans buffalo, bulbul bird fights in Assam

From Our Special
Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Gauhati High Court has issued an order quashing the Assam government's standard operating procedure (SOP), dated December 27, 2023, which had allowed buffalo and bulbul bird fights to take place in the state during January (Magh Bihu) every year.

The High Court's order came in response to petitions filed by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India.

The petitions were listed before Justice Devashis Baruah in Gauhati High Court and detailed submissions were made by Diganta Das, senior advocate, in support of PETA India's argument that the buffalo and bulbul fights violate the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and that the bulbul fights additionally violate the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, which were accepted by the court.

The High Court further held the SOP to be in violation of the judgment dated May 7, 2014, passed by the

Supreme Court in Animal Welfare Board of India vs. A. Nagaraja (Jallikattu) case.

Justice Baruah passed the order upon hearing the arguments of People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which argued that the 2023 government notification which allowed these fights to take place,

violated the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

Upon hearing the arguments of the petitioners, the court set aside the govt notification and held: "Section 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 deals with the duty of persons hav-

ing charge of animals, which is mandatory.

Rights conferred on animals are the antithesis of a duty.

If those rights are violated, the law will enforce those rights with legal sanction."

It was further held that, unlike other states, Assam had not made any amendments in the Prevention of Cruelty Act, but instead chose to override the Act, as well as the 1972 Act along with the Nagaraja judgement, which could not be allowed.

As evidence, PETA India had submitted investigations into these fights which revealed that "terrified and severely injured buffaloes were forced to fight through beatings and that starved and intoxicated bulbuls were made to fight over food.

"PETA India had also submitted numerous examples of fights being held illegally, outside the dates allowed via the SOP, arguing that allowing the fights at any time of the year was resulting in enormous animal abuse.



Heaters to help Nehru Zoo inmates beat the chill

CARETAKERS ARE ARRANGING ROOM HEATERS IN ALL-NIGHT HOUSES OF LEOPARDS, CHEETAHS, JAGUARS, TIGERS AND LIONS, APART FROM BABOONS AND CHIMPANZEES



HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

TO protect the animals at the Nehru Zoological Park from dropping temperatures, the zoo officials are implementing special winter arrangements for the inhabitants. They are closely monitoring the health of animals to ensure their well-being during the season.

Compared to other city areas, temperature at the zoo is usually low considering the vast green cover in the park and close to the Mir Alam Tank. The care-

takers are arranging room heaters in all-night houses of leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, tigers, and lions, apart from baboons and chimpanzees.

According to the zoo authorities, special measures are being taken so that animals face the season without attracting any health problems. The measures include room heaters for all animals and covering of night houses with green and gunny bags to avoid cool air. Monkeys, like Squirrel and Golden-handed tamara, are being provided with wooden planks with

dry paddy straw and a room heater in the night house.

Authorities are making arrangements for the protection of birds by covering cages with green cloth and placing nest boxes. Reptiles are being provided with dry leaves, bulbs, small pots, and dens to protect themselves from cold winds. Animal houses of the mouse deer breeding centre are covered with green cloth; dry paddy straw is placed in each animal's night house to protect from chilly winds.

For nocturnal animal houses, air-conditioning has been stopped for three

months from November till mid-February. All carnivore night houses are being provided with wooden planks to avoid cramps in the foot. "In addition to all the arrangements, animals and birds will be provided with B-Complex supplements to help them cope with winter stress. They are also getting a healthy dose of seasonal fruits and vegetables," said J Vasantha, a curator.

"Caretakers monitor the health condition of the animals and ensure their safety under the supervision of the veterinary doctors of the zoo park," she added.

Hornbill rescued near Madukkarai, treated at recuperation centre



Veterinarians at the Avian Recuperation Centre in Coimbatore handling a male great hornbill rescued from a pit in Madukkarai on Tuesday | EXPRESS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Coimbatore

A male great hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), believed to be ten years old, that was rescued after it was unable to fly, at Thaneerpandal near Madukkarai forest range on Monday evening, is receiving treatment at the Avian Recuperation Centre located at the Tamil Nadu Forest Academy (TNFA) campus in the city.

The bird, which has been listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, was found in a roadside pit on Tuesday at 10 am as it was unable to fly. After passersby informed, forest staff attached to the Madukkarai forest range visited the spot and

rescued the bird. It was given first aid and then taken to the recuperation centre where it is being treated by Coimbatore forest veterinarian A. Sukumar.

The official said that the bird's air sac (a specialised structure found in birds for respiration) was ruptured and it could have occurred due to an injury. "Despite providing mixed fruits and figs, the bird is reluctant. We are giving antibiotics to heal the injury along with ORS solution to keep the bird hydrated," Sukumar said.

The bird, which has been listed as vulnerable on the IUCN list since 2018, usually lives at a high altitude and it could have come from the reserve forest.

In a first, Assam team satellite-tags Ganges river dolphin

SUMIR KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI, DHNS

In the first such exercise, conservationists in India on Wednesday began satellite tagging of its national aquatic species, the Ganges river dolphin at Kulsi, a tributary of the Brahmaputra in Assam, one of its biggest habitats.

A 40-member team of experts assisted by trained fishermen and veterinarians caught a healthy male Ganges river dolphin and successfully satellite tagged it, allowing the scientists to get real time data of its movement and habitat range.

"Satellite tagging of a Ganges river dolphin is a groundbreaking development," Abdul Wakid, one of the members of the expert team, told *DH*. Wakid heads the Gangetic Dolphin Research and Conservation Division of Aaranyak, a biodiversity conservation group in Assam.

"The plan is to satellite tag another two-three dolphins in the next few weeks," he said.

Ganges river dolphins are unique in its ecology, being nearly blind and relying on echolocation for its biological needs.

This was done under a project of the Ministry of Environment, Forest



A satellite tagged Ganges river dolphin in the Kulsi river in Assam.

CREDIT/AARANYAK, ASSAM

and Climate Change and the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Advisory

Council, and led by Wildlife Institute of India in collaboration with Assam forest department and Aaranyak.

Knowledge gaps remain regarding this species due to its elusive behaviour. It surfaces for only 5.30 seconds at a time, posing a significant challenge in understanding the ecological needs of the species and for scientifically sound conservation interventions, WII said in a statement.

Director of WII, Virendra R. Tiwari said, "Tagging river dolphins will contribute to evidence-based conservation strategies that are urgently needed for this species."

► **Dolphin, Page 3A**

Assam team satellite-tags...

Dolphin, From Page 1

"The real-time data of their movement will provide us with an idea about their preferred habitats, migratory routes, distribution range and the potential threats," Wakid said.

Ganges river dolphins, an endangered species, are indicators of a healthy river ecosystem and are crucial for the aquatic environment. But threats like big dams and infrastructure projects and poaching have pushed them towards extinction. "The dolphins are killed mainly for its fat and traditional medicine. Destruction of habitats is another big threat," he said.

According to an estimate, there are nearly 3,500 Ganges river dolphins in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghana and Karnaphuli river system in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Ninety percent of those are found in India, Wakid said. A survey conducted in the Brahmaputra river system in Assam in 2012 documented 635 dolphins.

Project investigator Vishnupriya Kolipakam said, "This is a significant advancement in understanding the ecological needs of river dolphins. This is vital not only for aquatic biodiversity but also for sustaining thousands of people who depend on these resources."

SAVE OUR FORESTS

Koppal resident raises red flag over illegal tourism

Ministry, tiger conservation body get notice about 'dubious' activities going on at Blue Waterfall in Anshi Wildlife Range

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A resident of Koppal has sent notice to the Central Environment Ministry along with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), principal secretary to the Government of Karnataka, and field director of Kali Tiger Reserve (KTR) regarding illegal tourism activities at Blue Waterfall in Anshi Wildlife Range of KTR.

The notice has been sent under Section 55(c) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act with the intention to file a complaint in the jurisdictional court against the illegal activity.

This provision in the Act empowers activists or citizens to pursue violations that have not been acted upon by government officials. Under this section, a notice can be sent to the authorities concerned. Moreover, if authorities fail to initiate action within 60 days of receiving the notice, the activist or citizen can file a complaint before the jurisdictional magistrate, who can then take cognisance and commence a criminal trial.

According to the complainant and local activists, although the Blue Waterfalls area is not mentioned in



Activists allege violation of WLPA, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980, Indian Forest Act, 1927

Thousands of tourists visited the waterfalls, and many videos had gone viral in social media. The issue was brought to the notice of higher officials, but they denied any such activity –Complainant

the Ecotourism Chapter of the approved Tiger Conservation Plan of Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve (2014-2024), a video from Karnataka Forest Department's social media handle in November 2022 shows the officials promoting it as a tourism spot.

"Thousands of tourists visited the waterfalls, and many videos had gone viral in social media. Apart from videos of forest department officials collecting entry fees from

the tourists, these videos also show a signboard put up along the Anshi-Kadra main road. The issue was brought to the notice of higher officials, but they denied any such activity," said the complainant.

Notably, NTCA has directed the Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka, to enquire regarding the complaint wherein it alleged that officials of Kali Project Tiger Reserve have destroyed the evidence of allowing illegal tourism at Blue Waterfalls in the Anshi Wildlife Range of core/critical tiger habitat of Kali Project Tiger Reserve

Local activists allege that the Forest Department, through its official social media channel, had also shared a video of the waterfall stating that swimming is allowed. However, after objections, the video was removed from the site.

Locals say this is in defiance of comprehensive guidelines issued by the NTCA under Section 38 O(c) of

the WLPA, 1972, which strictly prohibits opening up new areas for tourism in core-critical tiger habitat.

It is also in violation of WLPA, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980, Indian Forest Act, 1927, Karnataka Forest Act, 1963, allege activists.

They say that the promotion of tourism by the Kali Tiger Reserve Administration at the Blue Waterfalls area was well planned.

The notice sent demands a probe into illegal tourism in the core and critical tiger habitat.

"Provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 are the same for everyone, be it the public or the Forest Department. Action must be taken against NTCA officials of the Bangalore Regional Office for violating Section 52 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 as both the officials have completely failed to do the spot inspections and submit the reports even though they were aware of the violations," complainant said.

MP plans new home for cheetahs, relocate leopards

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, DECEMBER 18

ANALYSING THE lineage of cheetahs to “create a strong genetic foundation”, relocating leopards from the predator-proof fenced areas, and augmenting the number of prey animals are part of the Cheetah Action Plan for Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, ahead of the plans to introduce a batch of cheetahs there next year, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Spread across 2,500 sq km landscape straddling Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary’s mix of grasslands, dry deciduous forests, and riverine evergreen patches are meant to offer an ideal habitat for the cheetahs to thrive.

According to an action plan devised by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the MP wildlife department and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), 6-8 cheetahs will be released into a 64 sq km predator-proof enclosure within the sanctuary’s West Range in the initial phase.

This area, characterised by savannah grasslands, supports an “adequate” prey base, with chinkara populations reaching 7.4 individuals/sq m and nilgai at 4.4

individuals/sq km. The sanctuary’s other preys include chital, wild pig, peafowl, and hare, although their densities are lower.

According to the action plan, the sanctuary currently has a capacity of 10 cheetahs. “In order to sustain 6-8 cheetahs inside the predator proof fenced area, annual requirement is 1,560-2,080 prey animals per annum or 26-35 prey animals per sq km. The current prey availability inside the fenced area is 475 animals and is being augmented with 1,500 prey animals such as chital, blackbuck and nilgai,” the action plan states.

However, the sanctuary’s robust leopard population presents a challenge. According to the plan, the sanctuary has an estimated 70 leopards in the West Range, and they pose a threat to cheetahs, particularly cubs and juveniles, and compete for similar prey.

To mitigate this risk, all “leopards within the fenced area will be captured and relocated before the cheetahs are brought to Gandhi Sagar WLS”, according to the action plan. “Cheetahs and leopards may sometimes get involved in inter-specific strife resulting in injuries and even deaths. However, that would be a natural process and management by appropriate supplementation and recruitment from the introduced popu-



lation would compensate for these. All the leopards within the predator proof fenced area will be captured and relocated before the cheetahs are brought to Gandhi Sagar WLS.”

According to the action plan, this translocation effort is not a one-time activity but part of a “decade-long strategy to stabilise the cheetah population”.

“In addition, at least 10 leopards will be fitted with GPS collars to monitor their movements and interactions with other carnivores as part of a comprehensive research programme,” it states.

This research aims to shed light on “resource separation amongst carnivore communities”,

which include hyenas, wolves, jackals, and sloth bears, the plan says. A network of 200 infrared camera traps will be deployed to monitor these populations, while scat analysis will provide insights into dietary preferences.

“This data will inform future management strategies, with the ultimate goal of promoting coexistence between leopards and cheetahs. The sanctuary’s prey base will also be closely monitored through distance sampling and camera-trap surveys, ensuring sufficient food availability for both cheetahs and other carnivores,” the action plan says.

A senior wildlife official says the translocation of leopards “is a

crucial step in creating a safer environment” for cheetahs.

Here’s what the action plan says:

■ About 12-14 wild cheetahs, including 8-10 males and 4-6 females, would be imported from parks or reserves in Africa to establish a new cheetah population in India. These cheetahs would be picked from a “genetically diverse, disease-free, and reproductively viable age group”. Behavioural suitability — such as being predator-wary, capable of hunting wild prey, and socially tolerant — would also be critical. The selection criteria would ensure minimal human imprinting while maintaining tolerance to human presence.

■ To create a strong genetic foundation, the cheetahs’ lineage would be evaluated in the source country to “avoid excessive inbreeding”. They would be chosen based on “known life histories and lineages monitored by supplying agencies, experts, or donors”. These selections would consider ecological factors like “genetic relatedness, social behaviour, and overall compatibility with the population’s needs”.

■ Genetic analysis of the cheetahs would be done using “micro-satellite and genomic” techniques, on all founder individuals to “es-

tablish a wide gene pool”. “This would be done to track genetic diversity and identify signs of inbreeding. This data would guide active management of the population, including introduction of new individuals from other cheetah populations in India or additional imports,” an official says.

■ The cheetahs will be monitored with the help of individual identification where a computer database containing “profiles of individually identified cheetahs would be maintained by the research team and NTCA”, the action plan says. This database would be analysed to “study cheetah demography and population dynamics”. The plan says, “Individual profiles of all the cheetahs of Gandhi Sagar would be maintained... so as to monitor cheetah survival and other vital rates.”

There are currently 24 cheetahs, including 12 cubs, at Kuno National Park. After spending over a year inside enclosures, two cheetahs — Agni and Vayu — were released into the open forest area. The Kuno action plan had envisaged free-ranging cheetahs that would be able to survive in the wild with leopards and other co-predators. But the cheetahs had to be brought to the enclosures on August 13, 2023, after three adults “died due to septicaemia”.

Rahmankheda in claws of fear as tiger continues to roam free

Big Cat And Pug Marks Sighted

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Rahmankheda (outskirts of Lucknow): The only sound that breaks the eerie silence in villages surrounding Rahmankheda is of passing vehicles. Living in fear, villagers are reluctant to venture out for work or even allow their children to play outdoors or go to school.

"Fearing the tiger, we moved our goats from forests to orchards," said Munni Devi, adding that they now return home by 4 pm. "The fear of the tiger has hit our daily lives," added another villager, Cheda.

Rabindra of Katouli village described a tense moment when women went to collect firewood from orchards on Wednesday.

"They saw pugmarks and ran away. Now, no one dares to go into the forests," he said.

Ravi Maurya, another local, said villagers had stopped bringing their cattle to Behta Nala for water and sunlight. Meanwhile, Chunni and her brother Monu, students of class 5 and 6 in the Birampur village, fear going to school.

"We read about the tiger on signboards put up by forest department and in local papers and the situation is scary," they said.

In Dhovalia village, Ab-

CITY'S ENCOUNTERS WITH TIGERS

JAN 1988 | A tiger stayed in Kukrail forest for 15 days, killing nilgais. Shot by Thakur Dutt Joshi

FEB 2009 | A tiger, on the prowl in various parts of UP for four months, spotted in Mohanlalganj. Shot in Faizabad

JAN 2012 | Tiger strayed to CISH campus in Rahmankheda. Tranquilized after four months and sent to Dudhwa



Officials are using drones (top) and have laid a trap to locate and catch the tiger

RAHMANKHEDA TIGER

DEC 2 | Presence of wild animal in Rahmankheda reported

DEC 3 | Pugmarks discovered, confirming presence of wild animal

DEC 9 | Fresh pugmarks identified in nearby forest area

DEC 11 | Residents near CISH report hearing of tiger's roar

DEC 12 | Remains of nilgai found near a cage set up in forest, but tiger not captured in camera

DEC 14 | Pugmarks spotted near CISH

DEC 15 | A villager near Behta drain claims tiger sighting

DEC 16 | Pugmarks found near a minor canal in Gurudeen Kheda village, Rahmankheda. A nilgai killed in orchard in Haluvapur village in Kakori

hay Lal stopped taking his cattle out, fearing tiger attack. Santosh, resident of Jamalnagar, reported spotting pugmarks in the fields. Another local, Jaglal, recounted a terrifying experience. "At 7:30 am, I saw the tiger near the fields and ran for my life, hiding in a nearby hut," he said.

As the situation worsens, forest department urged villagers to stay vigilant and restrict movement during evening hours.

Special emphasis has been placed on ensuring safety of livestock and children, while the search operation continues in the region.

New pug marks found, search intensified: Fresh tiger pug marks have been discovered in Katuoli villa-

ge, situated 4km from Rahmankheda. On Monday, the tiger ate part of a nilgai it had hunted earlier in Haluvapur.

Villagers in Katuoli reported seeing the tiger in the morning while working in the fields. Locals believe the beast moved towards the Behta drain and later retreated into the Katuoli forest.

There are suspicions that it might return to Rahmankheda through the forest. In response to these developments, a team from forest department, led by additional principal chief conservator of forests Renu Singh and DFO Sitanshu Pandey, visited the area to inspect the footprints. Thermal drone cameras were deployed to search the nearby

forests for signs of the tiger.

Forest department's full-scale search: DFO Sitanshu Pandey has launched a large-scale search operation in the area. Three teams have been deployed, equipped with 12 trap cameras, two trapping cages, and thermal drones.

Authorities are urging locals to remain vigilant, avoid going out at night, and take extra care to ensure the safety of children and livestock.

Tech and public awareness: In collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India, forest department is using night vision cameras and drones to track the tiger's movements. Pamphlets with safety instructions have been distributed throughout the villages, advising residents to avoid venturing into the forests alone.

Red flags, but solar plant in Gir area may get green light

Saurashtra Forest Dept Officials Had Raised Concerns

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Ahmedabad: State forest department officials in Gandhinagar have initiated the process to approve a solar farm in the Greater Gir region despite their colleagues in Saurashtra raising concerns over its impact on lions and other wildlife.

Sources said the project, to come up in over 4 lakh sq m in Visavadar taluka's Ghodasan village, was given a negative opinion by the assistant conservator of forest and deputy conservator of forest.

There are concerns that the project will hinder lion mobility, which in turn, could lead to increased human-animal conflicts and in-breeding among the big cats.

"The project is a central public sector undertaking (CPSU) and permitted by the Union govt. The proposal is under consideration by the office of the principal chief conservator of forests in Gandhinagar. It is being considered as a one-off case and is likely to get approved. The permission has not yet been granted, but the process has begun," said a high-ranking

officer. At the base of the controversy is the project's location. "ESZ guidelines state, 'no new commercial construction (including solar farms and installation of windmills) of any kind shall be permitted within 1km from the boundary of the Gir Protected Area or up to the extent of the eco-sensitive zone, whichever is nearer'."

said another senior officer. He added that the department believes the solar plant will be 3km outside the ESZ periphery and ignores that fact that the Gir ESZ proposal includes Ghodasan on the list of villages that will fall inside the zone. Also, a 10km buffer around ESZs is still applicable since the Gir ESZ proposal is yet to be approved.

The senior forest official maintained that extensive projects would impede lion mobility, and that the department, in Aug this year, had re-

solved not to authorise large-scale projects in the area. A senior officer in Gandhinagar admitted, "Such large-scale projects can hinder lion movement, and this was the basis for denial of permission by the officials in Junagadh."

Jaipal Singh, in-charge principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), confirmed that the proposal has been received and is under consideration by the department. "We are just going ahead for the approval as per the guidelines on eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) laid down by the Govt of India. The Gir ESZ notification is still a draft notification," he said. Sanjeev Kumar, principal secretary, forests and environment, too confirmed that the proposal was under consideration, and that guidelines permit promotional activities.



A TIMES OF INDIA ENDEAVOUR

Mulu Bera, the minister for forests and environment, was unavailable for comment. Dr Jalpan Rupapara, who conducts research in the Greater Gir area, said, "In the past, we have written to forest minister Mulu Bera, urging him to stop setting up the plant. Large-scale solar power plants occupy vast tracts of land, destroying vegeta-

tion and adversely affecting herbivores, while also preventing animal movements through fenced-off areas. During our research field visits, we observed a significant decline in the lion population in areas where large-scale solar plants were installed, including Rajula and Savarkundla."

Moreover, there is an office memorandum of MoEF & CCF from June 2011, clearly stating that green energy project permissions should be denied in wildlife corridor areas, irrespective of their distance from protected areas, said Rupapara.

The project will have fencing as high as five feet to prevent nilgai and other wild animals from damaging the solar system.

A lion expert said large projects in lion corridors could cut off their movements, keeping animals from moving from one pride to another. Setting up solar plants in ESZs results in complete changes of the land-use pattern, which is one of the most important criteria for restricting activities in eco-sensitive zones, according to the guidelines, he said.

Another wildlife expert noted that such projects could lead to inbreeding due to restricted movement, thus weakening the genetic pool. The hindrances in corridors can also increase the risk of human-wildlife conflict.

Tiger carcass recovered

BISWANATH CHARIALI,
Dec 18: A carcass of a tiger was detected at Chichu Chapori under Biswanath Wildlife Division on Tuesday. The carcass was found by the camp staff during their regular patrolling.

Later, as per the SOP of NTCA, the post-mortem was conducted by the veterinary officers in the presence of the forest officials.

The tiger is suspected to have died due to fighting with other wild animals. The carcass was later disposed of by burning as per protocol. – Correspondent

SV KRISHNA CHAITANYA @
Chennai

THE first-ever synchronised survey of the Nilgiri Tahr, conducted from April 29 to May 1 this year, has revealed a total population of 1,031 tahrs in Tamil Nadu, with 552 living in fragmented habitats across 128 blocks and 479 in large contiguous landscapes spanning 12 blocks.

The survey report released by Forest Minister K Ponmudy on Wednesday shows that if the population in the adjoining blocks in Kerala are taken into consideration, the combined population of Nilgiri Tahr stands at 1,858, with 1,229 in Tamil Nadu (inter-state boundary) and 827 in Kerala's Eravikulam National Park.

The Anamalai hills hold 41% of the total population of Nilgiri Tahr in Tamil Nadu, whereas the Nilgiris landscape holds 24% of the population. These findings illustrate that 197 Nilgiri Tahrs inhabit the inter-state boundary between Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the Anamalais landscape. Similarly, the population of Nilgiri Tahr in Mukurthi National Park was 203 numbers in 24 groups. Moreover, 83 tahrs occupy both states in Nilgiris landscapes

TN HOME TO 1,031 NILGIRI TAHRS

■ Total estimated population of Nilgiri Tahr in 140 blocks in entire TN – **1,031**

■ Total estimated Nilgiri Tahr population in Tamil Nadu and Kerala – **1,858 (1,031 in Tamil Nadu + 827 in Eravikulam National Park, Kerala)**

■ The enumerated population of Nilgiri Tahr in Grass hills National Park

276

■ The enumerated population of Nilgiri Tahr in Mukurthi National Park
203

■ Total estimated population of Nilgiri Tahr in 140 blocks of Tamil Nadu and 3 adjoining blocks of Kerala together
1,229

■ Male to Female ratio of Nilgiri Tahr among the classified population **1:2**

■ Female to Young ratio of Nilgiri Tahr among the classified population **2:1**

--Bangitapal of Tamil Nadu and Sispara of Kerala.

Chief Wildlife Warden Rakesh Kumar Dogra told *TNIE* that a deeper analysis was needed to understand why the tahr is moving into new habitats and not preferring some of the known historic landscapes. On radio-collaring, which was temporarily suspended following the death of a female tahr recently, he said it will be repurposed. "Radio-collaring will be done when we go for the reintroduction of tahr in new habitats," he added.

The survey also highlighted the male-to-female ratio, estimated at 1:2, and the female-to-young ratio at 2:1, emphasising the species' reproductive potential. Nilgiri Tahr was observed at elevations ranging from 270 to 2,630 metres above sea level, and a new colony was discovered in the Pasumalai habitat in the Chinnamanur Range. The tahr has become locally extinct in 8 historic habitats including Budha gundu (Pollachi) and Nedungundru (Valaparai) among other areas, and has not been documented

in these habitats for the past few years.

Conducted across 13 Nilgiri Tahr-holding forest divisions in Tamil Nadu and adjoining areas of Kerala, the survey was the first of its kind and involved the collaboration of the Tamil Nadu and Kerala Forest departments, WWF-India, and IUCN. The survey spanned 1,862 kilometres of footwork, with drones documenting the process, and pellet samples collected for molecular studies at the Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation in Vandalur.

Two caught smuggling four agile gibbons from Malaysia in suitcases

Gibbons were brought to the city to be handed over to their contact who was waiting at the departure gate of the airport

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Special Intelligence and Investigation Branch (SIIB) of Customs at Bengaluru International Airport unearthed a wildlife smuggling trade and caught two people, including a businessman, allegedly trying to smuggle four agile gibbons concealed in four suitcases to Bengaluru on Wednesday.

The officials, based on the profiles of the passengers, intercepted Mohammed Ansar, 62, and his associate Syed Jabbar Nawaz Pasha, 43, from K.G. Halli and recovered the suitcases from them. They rescued the four baby gibbons as soon as they landed

in Bengaluru from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on a Batik Air flight.

The gibbons, stuffed in the bag along with a few chocolates and biscuits, were brought to the city to be handed over to their contact who was waiting at the departure gate in the airport, said the officials. However, the accused escaped after the duo was caught.

The duo were mules for the international wildlife trade racket and were offered ₹10,000 along with to and fro tickets and accommodation, the official said, adding that the exotic animals are illegally sold as pets.

Legal requirements

As per the import export



One of the gibbons that was being smuggled into Bengaluru. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

(EXIM) policy of India, import of live animals listed in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of

Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) without a valid Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) license, NOCs from the Chief Wildlife Warden and MoEF&CC, CITES Export Permit and Animals Quarantine Certificate are prohibited.

“The duo did not produce any valid documents to import these live exotic animals and hence it is a violation under CITES as well as the Wild Life (Protection) Act. Violations of the animal species listed in CITES Appendix-I of Schedule-IV of the Act attracts the punishment of three to seven years of imprisonment with fine,” the official said.

Officials said hiring mules is on the rise in Tamil

Nadu where unemployed youth have been lured with foreign trips and pocket money in return for carrying consignments. The rescued gibbons were given medical aid and quarantined at the airport and the process is on to deport them back to Malaysia from where they were brought.

Other cases

In November, the customs officials at the Kempegowda International Airport rescued as many as 40 wild animals, including a baby American alligator and gibbons which were being smuggled in a trolley bag from Malaysia. In October, the officials in Chennai had rescued gibbons which were smuggled from Malaysia.

Wildlife experts tag almost-blind Ganges river dolphin for the first time in India

Rahul Karmakar

GUWAHATI

A team of wildlife conservationists tagged the almost-blind Ganges river dolphin for the first time.

A healthy male river dolphin from Kulsi, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, was tagged and released under veterinary care.

An initiative of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, it was executed by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department and biodiversity conservation group Aaranyak.

The tagging under Project Dolphin is expected to help understand the dolphin's seasonal and migra-



A wildlife team with a healthy male river dolphin that was tagged.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tory patterns, range, distribution, and habitat utilisation, particularly in fragmented or disturbed river systems. Officials said the lightweight tags emit signals compatible with Argos satellite systems even with limited surfacing time and are designed to minimise interference with dol-

phin movement.

“The first-ever tagging of the Ganges river dolphin is a historic milestone for the species and India. This project funded by the National CAMPA Authority will deepen our understanding of conserving our national aquatic animal,” Environment Minister

Bhupender Yadav said.

“Tagging river dolphins will contribute to evidence-based conservation strategies,” Virendra R. Tiwari, the director of WII said.

The Ganges river dolphin is unique for being nearly blind and relies on echolocation for its biological needs. India houses about 90% of the global population of the dolphin, distributed across the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli river systems. However, its distribution has drastically declined over the past century. Despite its wide range, knowledge gaps remain regarding this species due to its elusive behaviour. It surfaces for only 5-30 seconds at a time.