

From the editor's desk

The Maharashtra Government's decision to impose a ban on elephants being forced to walk on the streets of country's financial capital Mumbai, and in the two tier cities, Nasik and Thane of the state has been widely acclaimed by animal lovers and wildlife activists. The government has imposed the ban following a death of an elephant, which was mowed down by a speeding truck about a year ago. Ban on 'roaming' of elephants has brought relief to gentle giants as well as commuters in cities. The Government has earmarked a plot to establish an 'elephant village' near Kolhapur to house elephants. In addition to housing the elephants and providing them fodder, the village will also cater to mahouts and their families. The sanctuary will be established on public-private partnership with the

government and animal welfare organisations. Elephants who work in temples when they are young and energetic are often sold to 'babajees' during their old age. These fake 'babajees' dressed up in saffron robes buy an elephant from Rs. 2 to 2.5 lakhs and make them beg on the streets of metropolis. Besides treating them ill, they are poorly fed with less water and fodder. This causes a drastic weight loss of an elephant from five tones to two tones in less than a year. "Life on the streets for the elephants is miserable" says an activist. They commonly suffer from potentially deadly foot ailments, skin problems, eye infections and cataracts. The Maharashtra Government ruled that it was an act of cruelty to force an elephant to walk through the city's congested and polluted streets. Local authorities have now promised to arrest mahout, or keeper, who defies the ban, and to confiscate their

elephants and move the animal to a sanctuary in the outskirts of the city. According to reports, Mumbai had about 14 owners from five families who owned the elephants and used them to beg or hire them out for weddings and other religious ceremonies. The killing of three persons by a rampaging elephant at the Koodalmanikyam temple in Thrissur district, Kerala, a few days ago, is still in the public memory. Animal welfare organisations for implementing their slogan that - "elephants belong to the wild, not in cities across India" - have roped in celebrities to petition the Chief Ministers of other states to follow the Maharashtra's lead and ban the entry of elephants in to urban areas. The petition also says that by following this Chief Ministers can become 'elephant friends'.

Dilip Bafna
(Dilip Bafna)

Wildlife lensmen bag film awards

Acclaimed wildlife photographers Krupakar and Senani have bagged the best nature film award for their documentary on doles (wild dogs) The Wild Dog Diaries. The documentary was screened at the French Film Festival in France.



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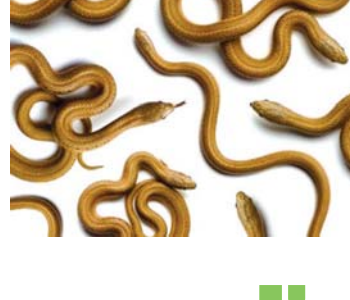
'Donkey welfare' in poll manifesto

It is elections time in Karnataka. In a desperate attempt to grab power, the political parties have promised everything - color television set to free electricity - to voters in their manifestoes. Except Kannada Chaluvali Vatal Paksha led by Vatal Nagaraj, none of the political parties promised measures needed to take care of animals in cities and rural areas. Surprisingly, Vatal Nagaraj, former MLA, who has in the past held agitations in his own style with animals including goats, bullocks, buffaloes and camels, has included "donkey welfare" in his party manifesto. A two-page poll manifesto that has listed out implementation of several welfare programmes if the party is voted to power. The manifesto says "donkeys in Karnataka have been neglected and the party will implement a "comprehensive plan" for their welfare" if the party is voted to power. This is indeed the first of its kind poll promise. With this poll promise, Vatal Nagaraj has shown his love and attachment to animal in a different level.



Threat of extinction

The Kashmir stag or the hangul, unique kind of stag, found nowhere else on earth except in Kashmir, is critically endangered. The experts say that only the European red stag resembles the Kashmir stag. Its number has declined drastically in recent years and it is less than 200 now. The number of hangul was 556 in the early 1980s. The figure has come down in the lush green forests of Dachigam National Park, the abode of hangul. The distinct feature of a hangul is its horns. These horns are used to make the handles of swords and knives. They are also used as medicine and as a charm to keep evil spirits away. The curtailment of hangul's frolicking and overgrazing in the sanctuary by cattle of nomadic tribe are some of the reasons for the decline in number. Further, a hangul in captivity died a few years ago because of a disease, which originated from a sheep farm nearby.



'Friends in need' of owls, snakes

A group of students in Bangalore are creating awareness against cruelty to animals and doing all they can do to rescue snakes, owls and other creatures, which are important to the ecosystem. About 50 students under the guidance of Prof. Rahmath Ataz, head of the department of Zoology at Al Ameen college, are on a mission under the banner of

Society for Wildlife Education, Adventure and Research (SWEAR). The students belonging to various colleges including Al Ameen, Mount Carmel, St Joseph's and Dayananda Sagar, are spreading the message about the need to be kind to these animals. They say people have very little awareness about these

animals and do not realise they are important to the ecosystem. "We are trying to create awareness against cruelty to animals by holding talks and discussion in schools, colleges and service organisations", an activist said. Their task also involves rescuing owls and snakes that have been injured or have wandered into human territory.

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Vet camp

Animal Right Fund (ARF), Itighatti, Dharwad in association with the officials of the Animal Husbandry Department has successfully conducted a free veterinary camp for domestic animals at Sattur village in Dharwad. The camp was coordinated by Mahesh Hegde, an employee of ARF, Itighatti. More than 125 animals were treated at the camp by Dr. Sunil Kumar.



In search of companions

After leading lonely lives for quite some time now, a few captive animals in the Banneghatta Biological Park, Bangalore, are in search of companions. Park authorities are making all out efforts to meet their need. They have started a search for companions for various kinds of animals and birds, including a zebra, lion-tailed macaque and white peacock.

The zebra, which is aged about 12 years, came to the park along with its mate from Orissa in 2001. Sadly, the animal lost his companion a year ago. Now the authorities are searching a companion for him. Similarly, they have been searching a companion for the eight-year-old white peacock and the Iguana. The Park authorities are trying to provide mates for the animals and birds.



Dhamra project poses threat to sea turtles



Environmentalists have expressed concern over the Dhamra Deep-water Project in Orissa, citing potential impact on sea turtles and the environment. The port is coming up less than five kms from Bhitarkanika sanctuary and less than 15 kms from Gahirmatha's beaches, one of the largest mass nesting sites for Olive Ridley turtle in the world.

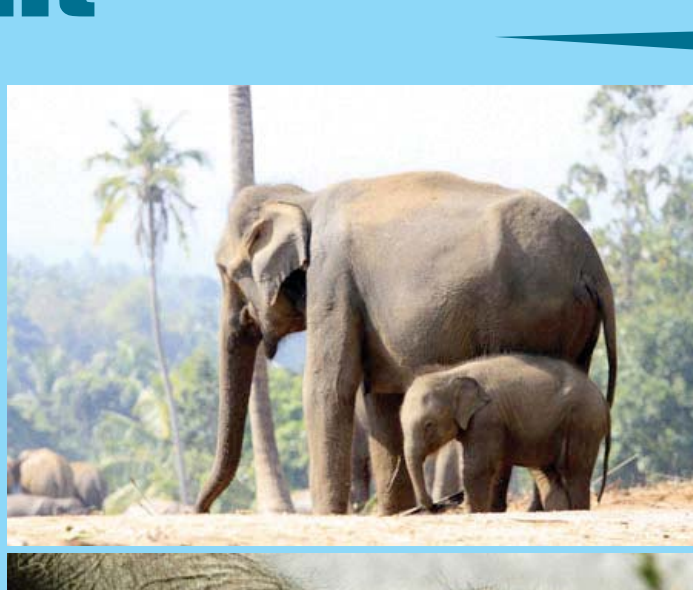
Environmentalists say the port poses a threat to endangered sea turtles, and appealed to Tata Steel, the joint promoters of the Dhamra project, to halt it. The Olive Ridley turtle was a species that enjoyed the same legal protection as the tiger, says Belinda Wright, Executive Director of Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI). Trawling was banned

in the area to protect the turtles. But the Orissa government allowed the industrial project there which would probably drive the turtles away for good, say Greenpeace India activists. More than 100 Scientists from India and across the world have made the appeal to Tata Steel through a petition campaign hosted by a coalition of conservation groups.

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Elephant responding to treatment

Elephants are revered all around India as manifestations of the Hindu God Ganesh. But the life of some of the elephants is miserable. One such elephant suffering from foot ailment, skin problem, eye infection and cataract, is being taken care by an organisation called Jeev Daya Mahamandal, Panjapur, Lonikand, Pune. The court had ordered for treatment as well as exercise of the elephant Lakshmi, aged about 55 years, and is responding to the treatment very well for the past six months. Recently, ARF doctors went to Pune for treating the animal. The treatment and feeding the elephant is a costly affair and a sum of Rs. 1,000 per day is required to provide nutritious green fodder, clean drinking water and maintenance of sanitary practices. Interested persons can contribute money and help rehabilitation of the elephant. Please contact: ARF coordinator Vinay Moray, **Mobile: 98450-09681**.



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