

**SITE INSPECTION REPORT ON ROADS IN AND AROUND RATAPANI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY AND SARDARPUR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, MADHYA PRADESH SUBMITTED TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE**

Dr M D Madhusudan  
Nature Conservation Foundation, Member, Standing Committee, National Board for Wildlife

Ms Prerna Singh Bindra  
Member, Standing Committee, National Board for Wildlife

**BACKGROUND**

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department had tabled a proposal seeking clearance for a set of roads to be constructed in and around Protected Areas in the state, some of which had been examined earlier, and whose site visit reported has subsequently been submitted in June 2013.

Three proposals in and around Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary & proposed Tiger Reserve, and Sardarpur Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh were yet to be examined and a site visit for the same conducted between 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August 2013. These included:

- Diversion of 9.06 ha for 8.55 km road from Bineka to Borpani in Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary and proposed Tiger reserve
- Bhimbhetka Road: Upgradation from village Bhiapur to Amchhekala Dam Road
- Widening of State Highway 59 from Indore to Gujarat Border (through Sardarpur WLS)

All the above proposals were discussed in the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, where it was felt that the information pertaining to the proposed roads was incomplete, and the decision was suspended till such time complete information was received. These were then subsequently discussed in the 25<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

The minutes read as follows:

*The Member Secretary informed the Committee that as per the decision of the Standing Committee of NBWL, the State Government had submitted the status of each of the said roads, the details of which had also been circulated among the members.*

*Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda reminded the Standing Committee that earlier it had taken a decision that existing roads in National Parks and Sanctuaries would only be allowed to be repaired, and certainly not permitted to be broadened or converted to hard top roads. He emphasised that this should be kept in mind before taking decisions.*

*Ms. Prerna Bindra informed that as earlier communicated by mail, by non-official members in a letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> October 2011 that 'in principle approval' was not accorded, according to their understanding. Instead, information was sought on maps, kind of work for which permission was required, and besides, it was decided that no gravel road in PAs would be converted to black-topped roads, though existing roads, could be repaired as long as these remain in the same original form, i.e., with no widening, new construction or diversion of forest land.*

*Shri Kishore Rithe suggested that site specific reports may be obtained with respect to each of the said roads as was done earlier in case of the proposal for 12 roads involving Bagdara Sanctuary.*

*The Committee after discussion, decided to carry out a site inspection by Ms. Prerna Bindra, Dr Madhusudan, NCF, Mysore, and one representative from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (in case of tiger reserve) to enable it to take a view in the matter."*

### **Field visit**

Ms. Prerna Singh Bindra, Member, Standing Committee, National Board for Wildlife and Dr MD Madhusudan Member, Standing Committee, National Board for Wildlife inspected the present status of the roads, the wildlife habitat through which the three roads pass/are impacted by the three roads during a site visit from 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

## RATAPANI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



### **WILDLIFE VALUES**

Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary covers an area of 907 sq. km. Important species found in the sanctuary include tiger, leopard, hyena, sloth bear, pangolin, wild dog, four horned antelope, sambar, long billed vultures, and white backed vultures, to name a few. The sanctuary has been proposed as a tiger reserve and has been accorded “in-principle” approval by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Field staff have been consistently reporting the presence of breeding tigers, a fact clearly evidenced by camera traps deployed this year (see picture above). The last tiger census, conducted by the state in 2006, indicated the presence of 17 tigers. The park is very close to the capital city of Bhopal at a distance of about 40 km. Ratapani is contiguous to forests abutting Bhopal (via the Kerwa- Ratapani corridor).

The Singhori Wildlife Sanctuary also shares a 4.5 km long border with Ratapani WLS. Overall, Ratapani forms a block of about 1,000-1,200 sq km of tiger habitat

**The field visit** to Ratapani WLS was conducted on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Officials met:**

Shri SS Rajput, CCF, Bhopal

Shri Sharma, DFO, Ratapani  
Shri Raghvendra Singh, ACF  
Shri DS Rajput Range Officer, Barkheda  
Shri JK Gupta Range Officer, Dilewadi  
Shri Badri Prasad Nagar, Deputy Ranger, Delawadi Pankaj Jhavar GM, MP rural Road  
Development authority (Raison) Madhya Pradesh  
Villagers, Binekha village

**1) Proposal : Upgradation of 8.55 km road from Bineka to Borpani in Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary and proposed Tiger reserve.**

**The area requested for diversion: 9.06 ha.**

**Applicant Agency:** MP Rural Road Development Authority (Raison) Madhya Pradesh, the purpose being to connect Borpani village.

**Observations**

- We visited the site at the height of the monsoon, and the region had been witnessing incessant rains for the previous few days. In this weather, the current 'road' a forest road, had become impassable beyond about 0.75 km from the main road at Borpani. We walked to the nearest village Lulka about 2 km from the main road and also met with the villagers there.
- While this forest road is serviceable during summer and winter, it becomes unusable for the villages of Lulka and Borpani (comprising Umariya, Mukalbada, Geruga and Kukratola) to be connected to Bineka. This causes severe hardship to villagers who need the road for medical emergencies, access to education and markets for their agricultural produce which is their main source of livelihood.
- We noticed the villagers had also cut their own paths (at least two) at some stretches parallel to the existing 'road', to ply their tractors and thus maintain connectivity.
- It was noted that this area is a prime valley, the core of the park and of high ecological value. Forest staff has reported tiger presence, especially near Borpani.
- In coming to a decision on this proposal, the members have considered both the high ecological value of the area, as well as the difficulties faced by the villagers, who have no road connectivity during the monsoon period.
- It is also pointed out that the SC, NBWL in its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2011, took a decision that "*No widening of existing roads shall be permitted, and the status of finishing of the surface of the repaired road(s) shall remain same as that of the original road(s), i.e., untarred roads shall remain untarred after repairs, and only originally tarred roads shall be repaired and tarred.*"

**Recommendations:**

- We therefore strongly reject the proposal that the road be developed as a black-top road.
- Keeping in view the difficulties faced by the villagers, and to allow accessibility to forest staff for patrolling and other protection purposes, we recommend that the current road, in its current width be upgraded to a gravel road, with suitable culverts (constructed box-like with minimal structures) over *nullas*.
- However, we recommend that the proposed diversion of 9.06 ha in favour of the applicant not be granted and the current status of the land as a Wildlife Sanctuary be maintained. The upgradation of the existing path to a gravel road may be done in active consultation with the state/ local forest authorities, and subject to the general mitigative measures given below.

#### **Terms & conditions for upgradation of existing road:**

- All repair work must be carried out within daylight hours, and must be closed between 6 pm to 8 am.
- No labour camps may be set up within the area of the sanctuary or in its immediate vicinity.
- Labour/workers must not enter the sanctuary.
- No fuel, firewood, water or other forest produce may be collected by the labourers or for the construction of the road.
- No waste, garbage, rubble, debris etc shall be deposited within the limits of the sanctuary, or any river, *nullah*, or waterbody.
- No taking of any material (sand etc) from the PA, and all materials should be brought from outside.
- No vegetation/tree should be cleared/cut during the maintenance.
- Movement and usage of heavy machinery is to be minimised. Noise to be kept at minimum decibels
- The work should be carried out in a speedy manner so as to minimise the duration of the work and cause minimal disturbance to wildlife
- By no act of the labour and other workforce should the flora and fauna of the sanctuary be harmed

It is also recommended that after the construction of the road, adequate care be taken to ensure that detrimental effects of the road and traffic be minimised. We recommend that timing, speed and traffic volumes be regulated, and a night ban is advised, while ensuring that the villagers/ communities living within the PA. A check post at the entry point is advised.

#### **General recommendations**

The team recommends that the notifying of Ratapani Tiger Reserve be expedited for more focused wildlife protection and conservation of tiger, and crucially, for management of human-tiger conflict that is an issue here considering the proximity of the sanctuary and its adjacent forests to Bhopal.

## **Proposal 2: Upgradation from village Bhiapur to Amchhekala Dam Road**

**Applicant Agency:** PWD, Raisen

### **Observations**

There was some confusion regarding this road, as we were informed that the concerned local PWD officials had communicated that there was no such proposal. It was then requested that the PED communicate the same in writing. However, that was not done.

The team traversed the length of this road, and found it to be in excellent condition, even in the height of monsoon, and vehicles could travel at reasonable speed. Talking to one or two villagers revealed that the road was “not a problem”, and was perfectly serviceable even during the monsoon. Hence, we find that though the proposal claimed that local residents and tourists find it very inconvenient to travel on that road, that was not the case from what we saw. This road was also not used by tourist much as it is outside of the main Bhimbetka caves.

### **Recommendation**

We are, therefore, unable to see neither reason nor justification to upgrade the current road, and recommend that it remain as it is, in the current form.

## SARDARPUR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



### **Wildlife Values**

Legendary ornithologist the late Dr Salim Ali had visited the area in 1981, and recognising the importance of the area from the point of view of the lesser florican had initiated a survey. The survey indicated that the *kharmor*, as it is known locally, was found over 300 sq km, including in what is now the town of Dhar. When Sardarpur WLS was notified in 1983, the florican was present in agricultural fields and the precincts of 14 villages, which were, therefore, included in the WLS notification, which covers an area of 348.12 sq km.

Sardarpur Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the very few PAs in India notified for the endangered lesser florican.

### **Proposal**

**Diversion of 28.518 hectares of revenue land for the widening (from two lane to four lane) of State Highway 59 from Indore to Gujarat Border**

Applicant Agency: National Highway Authority of India (NHAI)

Area proposed for diversion/denotification: 28.518 ha. of Revenue Area

**The field visit** to Sardarpur Wildlife Sanctuary was conducted on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2013.

**People met:**

Shri DK Paliwal, Divisional Forest Officer, Dhar  
Shri Sur Singh Damor, RFO, Sardarpur  
Shri Ravindera Gupta, Astt Manager, NHAI ,

**Observations:**

- The project proponent has sought permission to widen and upgrade a stretch from Km 106+800 to Km 115+840 (9 km in length) from the existing two-lane road to a four-lane road passing through the Sardarpur Wildlife Sanctuary.
- We requested the NHAI to provide us information on alternate alignments considered, which bypassed the sanctuary, before the existing alignment was determined. However, detailed discussions with concerned authorities of the NHAI did not yield a satisfactory answer—or relevant documents—to appreciate if the applicant agency had explored alternative options. We were pointed to the application form which mentioned that alternate alignments would have ‘passed close to the core’ of the sanctuary (where such a core-buffer demarcation does not exist) or that the cost of such a realignment would have been prohibitive and not justified given the traffic load, without supporting information.
- During our drive on this stretch, we saw that the existing bitumen top width of 7 metres (with a two metre earthen shoulder) had not been maintained at all, and as a result, the road was in an abysmal state, considering this was the key highway linking Indore to Gujarat.

**Recommendation:**

- Given that the stretch of road passing through Sardarpur is just 9 km in length, and no convincing case was made that realignments that bypassed the Sanctuary had been seriously considered, we feel that an effort to properly lay and maintain the original two-lane 7 metre wide black-top road with two metre earthen shoulders would improve the flow of traffic on this important highway significantly without necessitating a further widening of the road.
- Further, we also base our recommendation on the decision taken in the SC-NBWL on 4th October 2011 against the widening of roads passing through wildlife protected areas.

**Terms & conditions for repair of existing road:**

- All repair work must be carried out within daylight hours, and must be closed between 6 pm to 8 am.
- No labour camps may be set up within the area of the sanctuary or in its immediate vicinity.
- Labour/workers must not enter the sanctuary.

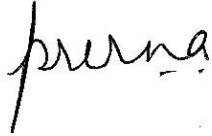


- No fuel, firewood, water or other forest produce may be collected by the labourers or for the construction of the road.
- No waste, garbage, rubble, debris etc shall be deposited within the limits of the sanctuary, or any river, *nullah*, or waterbody.
- No taking of any material (sand etc) from the PA, and all materials should be brought from outside.
- No vegetation/tree should be cleared/cut during the repair.
- Movement and usage of heavy machinery is to be minimised. Noise to be kept at minimum decibels
- The work should be carried out in a speedy manner so as to minimise the duration of the work and cause minimal disturbance to wildlife
- By no act of the labour and other workforce should the flora and fauna of the sanctuary be harmed

### **General Recommendation**

- It is a matter of deep concern and worry that, over the last three decades, the range of the lesser florican has shrunk drastically. Sardarpur appears to have lost the lesser florican from most of the villages (34812.17 ha). From all accounts available to us, it is now only found in the 568.4 hectares of the sanctuary (the only part of Sardarpur legally classified as forest, besides another 70 odd hectares which is revenue land, but managed by the forest department making it a total of 628 hectares of grassland). The numbers of the lesser florican seem to be in steep decline, with none having yet been sighted this monsoon. We therefore emphasise that urgent attention is needed, especially in terms of involvement of requisite expertise in the ecology and conservation of this species, to ascertain how the decline of this species can be stemmed, and its status revived within the existing grassland; and also hopefully in neighbouring agricultural landscapes through creative engagement of the local villagers in a conservation programme.
- As stated above, the bulk of Sardarpur WLS includes private agriculture fields and revenue land most of which, at least currently, seem to be missing the very species for whose conservation the WLS was created. By virtue of being revenue and private lands situated on a busy Indore-Ahmedabad corridor, the area has witnessed huge land-use transformations that have made parts of this WLS unsuitable for the florican. Nevertheless, the status of these lands as WLS has meant that many routine activities including sale of land, provision of amenities or the establishment of public infrastructure have been impeded. In particular, we heard of local farmers being unable to sell privately-held land within the limits of the WLS because mutations of land records in these revenue villages were not being permitted. With a view to resolve some of these issues, while strengthening the prospects this place holds for florican conservation, we recommend that some form of boundary rationalisation be taken up. It need not

be added that this must be done in a judicious manner with the active participation of experts, biologists, conservationists, and within the existing policy and legal framework. It is also recommended that the state may then notify potential lesser florican areas as Eco Sensitive Zone.



Ms Prerna Singh Bindra, Member, Standing committee, National Board for Wildlife

signed on behalf of MD Madhusudan NCF, Standing committee, National Board for Wildlife

30<sup>th</sup> August 2013