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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Message from the Regional Vice-Chair	1
Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in South Asia	2
NEWS	
BANGLADESH	3
Tiger census in Sunderbans	
INDIA	3-4
Loss of Mangroves at Thane Creek—NASA Study	
Odisha imposes restriction on fishing to conserve sea turtles	
Fauna of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve recorded and published for the first time	
Dugong Scholarship Program: conservation awareness through incentivizing local communities	
MALDIVES	4
Coral reefs in Maldives show resilience, says study	
MYANMAR	5
Locally Managed Marine Areas in Myanmar	
Status of Irrawaddy dolphin raised to 'Endangered'	
PAKISTAN	6
Astola island declared as Pakistan's first-ever Marine Protected Area	
Giant blue whale, calf sighted near Churna Island, Karachi	
SRI LANKA	6
EVENTS	
BANGLADESH	7
5-day expedition to Swatch of No-Ground in Banga-	
INDIA	7
International Training Workshop on Pilot Testing of Management Effective Evaluation (MEE)	
MYANMAR	7
Workshop to draft a Myanmar Marine Conservation Policy	
SRI LANKA	8
Sri Lanka joins #CleanSeas campaign	

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL VICE-CHAIR

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It gives me immense pleasure to bring out this issue of WCPA South Asia region newsletter on "Coastal & Marine Conservation in South Asia". It is well known that coastal and marine habitats are one of the most ecologically and economically productive ecosystems in the world. These habitats provide multiple ecosystem services which contribute to food security and socio-economic wellbeing of coastal and island dependent human populations. Numerous economic activities in these habitats such as fishing, tourism, aquaculture, shipping etc. provide livelihood opportunities to millions of people around the globe.

South Asian countries including Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have a coastline spread over 13000 km in length encompassing key marine habitats such as estuaries, mangroves, coral reefs, intertidal mudflats, seagrass beds and islands amongst others. Several of these habitats have been brought under protection through government legislations in each country under various categories of Marine Protected Areas like National Parks, Marine Sanctuaries, Fishery Managed Area, Ecologically Critical Area etc. In this scenario, the role of PA managers is paramount to manage these MPAs using an integrated participatory approach towards marine conservation. Moreover, assessing the effectiveness of these MPAs is crucial for preparing future strategies to conserve the rich tropical faunal and floral diversity of these ecologically important areas.

The current issue highlights various conservation stories, news, capacity building, training and outreach initiatives in South Asia region to conserve globally threatened marine species. I take this opportunity to request all those WCPA members in South Asia who have not renewed their membership to do so at the earliest. Please fill in the online application form and submit it at <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/membership/become-wcpa-member>. The WCPA membership Guide 2017 and Code of Conduct are also provided on this web page. For those who are interested in becoming new members of WCPA, they may also submit their applications via the web link provided above.

The theme of the next issue (August, 2018) of WCPA South Asia Newsletter will be "Deserts and semi-arid areas in South Asia". Contributions may please be submitted to Dr. S. Sathyakumar, Scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun (ssk@wii.gov.in) by 1 July, 2018. Happy reading, and I look forward to receiving your valuable feedback.

Dr. V. B. Mathur,

Regional Vice-Chair, IUCN-WCPA South Asia

&

Director, Wildlife Institute of India

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South Asian countries are endowed with long coastlines, islands and oceanic areas under their EEZ. Several of these areas are diverse marine ecosystems like mangroves, coral reefs, intertidal mudflats, seagrass meadows and other biodiversity rich habitats. India has a long coastline of over 7000 km consisting of 131 MPAs. Bangladesh holds charismatic diversity of fauna and flora within the large Sundarbans mangroves shared with India. With over 4000 km² of coral reef area, marine resources provide immense economic services to Maldives. Myanmar has created fish refugias and fishery managed areas as part of their MPA network along with other national parks and sanctuaries. Pakistan has recently declared the first Marine Protected Area for the country and is well on the path to securing its rich marine resources.

Country	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Myanmar	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Number of MPAs#	40	131	35	6	1	30
Area (km ²)	5098.02	9,795.82	894.48	391.66	6.7	774.52
National Park	17	13		1		7
Wildlife Sanctuary	20	117		3		14
Fishery Managed Area/ Fish Refugia			2			9*
Ecologically Critical Area/ Special Biodiversity Conservation Area	1					
Mangrove/Island/Reserved Area/ Community Reserve/ Marine Protected Area	2	1	5	2		
Dive Site/ Closed Season Area			28			

#Source: BOBLME Programme; Fifth National Report of Bangladesh to CBD; ENVIS Centre on Wildlife and Protected Areas (Wildlife Institute of India)



NEWS

BANGLADESH

Tiger census in Sundarbans

The Forest Department of Bangladesh is conducting the census of tigers using camera trapping methodology to determine the overall tiger population in the world's largest mangrove forest, of which around 60 per cent lies within the country. The most recent census which concluded in 2015 recorded a tiger population of only 106 in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans, down from 440 in 2004. To know more, visit

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/tiger-census-in-sundarbans-to-confirm-population-by-2019/story->



Sunderbans, Bangladesh

📷 Mohammad Aminul Islam, ACCF, Bangladesh

INDIA

Loss of Mangroves at Thane Creek—NASA Study



📷 **Thane Creek 1988**
Nasa Image



📷 **Thane Creek, 2017**
Nasa Image

NASA's Earth Observatory has released LANDSAT images which compare The Thane Creek or Mumbai's Flamingo Sanctuary in 1988 and 2017 and bring into light how urban development has encroached into the mangroves on the northern portion of the creek. The Sanctuary is a winter home ground for migratory birds. The satellite images, ironically also illustrate the increase of mangrove cover owing to siltation at certain pockets. To know more, visit

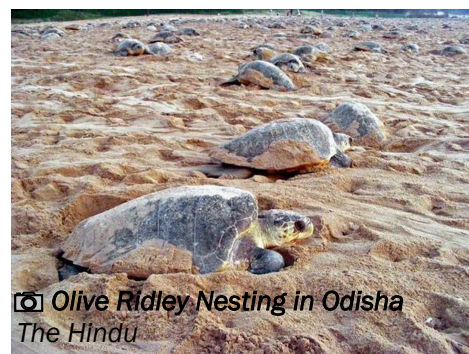
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/nasa-study-highlights-loss-of-mangroves-at-creek-near-mumbai-over-three-decades/story-ly1fQMC5E13r9xZJVGRtlK.html>

Odisha imposes restriction on fishing to conserve sea turtles

The Odisha government imposed a seven-month ban from November 1, 2017 to May 31, 2018 on fishing along the coast to protect the endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles as they arrive during winter for nesting.

The endangered Olive Ridley turtles arrive every year during winter for mass nesting in Rushikulya river mouth and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. They arrive for mating off the Odisha coast and lay eggs in March while most hatchlings emerge by May. The forest department has imposed the restriction to ensure that the fishermen don't fish within 20 km off the coastline along the turtle nesting sites. To know more, visit

<http://odishatv.in/odisha/body-slider/odisha-imposes-restriction-on-fishing-to-conserve-sea-turtles-251798>



📷 **Olive Ridley Nesting in Odisha**
The Hindu



INDIA

Fauna of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve recorded and published for the first time

A detailed record of the animal and protozoan species of the Sundarbans of West Bengal has been published for the first time by the Zoological Survey of India. The compendium is called *Fauna of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve* and lists 25 diverse phyla under two large animal kingdoms — *Protista* and *Animalia* — and 2,626 species in all.

Sunderbans forests, are one of the richest biodiversity hotspots in India. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its mangroves forests that serve as a biological buffer between the land and sea. The unique ecosystem is famous for the royal Bengal tiger, Gangetic dolphin, and estuarine crocodile. It also provides shelter to a large variety of birds, fishes, spiders, reptiles, oysters, and crabs. The forest forms a part of the Ganga Brahmaputra delta. To know more, visit

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/10/biodiversity-of-indian-sunderbans-recorded-for-the-first-time/>



📷 **Gangetic Dolphin**, Contributors of the Compendium by the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, India

Dugong Scholarship Program: conservation awareness through incentivising local communities

Dugong populations in India are critically threatened and lack of awareness is an impediment in their conservation management. Under the CAMPA-Dugong Recovery Program, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun initiated a Dugong Scholarship Scheme to target school-going children of the fisher folk communities which come into regular contact with Dugongs, often resulting in negative interactions. Based on public awareness campaigns and a written examination, 150 meritorious students were selected as *Dugong Ambassadors* in the coastal villages/towns of the Dugong range states i.e. Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. These students are supported with a 'Dugong Scholarship' of 500 INR/month for a period of two years. To know more, visit http://wii.gov.in/campa_Dugong



📷 **Dugong Ambassadors in Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

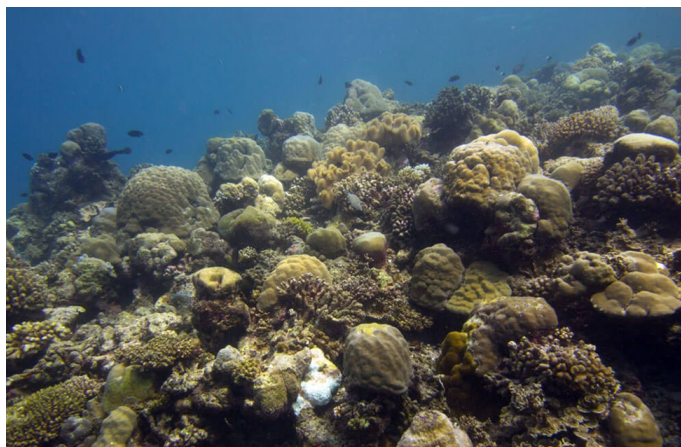
MALDIVES

Coral reefs in Maldives show resilience, says study

US-based research group Coral Reef CPR, who have been studying a multitude of locations throughout the Maldives, report that some regions have demonstrated a remarkable resilience to elevated water temperatures, whereas others have been subjected to stress from other causes.

Bleaching in the Maldives was first reported in 2015, but most areas rebounded quickly. As the unusual weather patterns associated with an El Niño event persisted throughout 2015 and worsened in 2016, reefs bleached again. Coral Reef CPR measured the temperatures at a depth of 10m in lagoonal, channel and outer reefs on Baa Atoll and South Malé Atoll and found them to be abnormally high, and steadily increasing between March and April that year. To know more, visit

<http://divemagazine.co.uk/eco/7792-coral-cpr-from-the-maldives>



📷 **Radshoo Atoll showing a high coral cover in August 2016**
Coral CPR



MYANMAR

Locally Managed Marine Areas in Myanmar



📷 *Coral reef, Fauna & Flora International*

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) in collaboration with the Fisheries Department of Myanmar has undertaken comprehensive marine ecosystem assessments to identify and prioritise the remaining intact marine ecosystems such as coral reefs for their conservation and implementing sustainable fisheries management. On World Oceans Day, 8 June, 2018, the Myanmar Fisheries Department would inaugurate the country's first three Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) to protect some of the most diverse coral reefs and marine habitats in the Myeik Archipelago. This would be the first time in Myanmar's history that long-term management of marine areas would be granted to local fishing communities. These communities would receive exclusive fishing rights, and would be responsible for protecting local marine habitats and biodiversity. To know more, visit

<https://phys.org/news/2017-06-myanmar-marine-areas-local-fishing.html#jCp>

Status of Irrawaddy dolphin raised to 'Endangered'



📷 *Irrawaddy dolphins, Agence France-Presse*

According to the latest Red List of threatened species produced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the status of the Irrawaddy dolphin has been raised from "Vulnerable" to "Endangered" as its numbers have fallen by half over the past 60 years due to human activities. Irrawaddy dolphins can be found in rivers, lakes and seas across southern Asia, from the northwest Bay of Bengal, in India, to the south of Indonesia. To know more, visit <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/status-irrawaddy-dolphin-raised-endangered.html>

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/breakingnews/30304282>



PAKISTAN

Astola island declared as Pakistan's first-ever Marine Protected Area

Government of Pakistan has issued a notification designating Astola Island as the country's first-ever Marine Protected Area. It is a first major policy step towards protection and conservation of the marine life. The Astola island is located approximately 25 km off the coast of Balochistan province, and is Pakistan's largest offshore island spanning 6.7 km².

It is an ecologically important island as its beaches provide nesting ground for the endangered green turtle and hawksbill turtle, and also support a large variety of migratory birds. The island's marine ecology supports a variety of corals, creating a breeding ground for a vast range of marine species. To know more, visit

<https://nation.com.pk/16-Jun-2017/govt-declares-astola-island-as-pakistan-s-first-ever-marine-protected-area>

<https://nation.com.pk/16-Jun-2017/govt-declares-astola-island-as-pakistan-s-first-ever-marine-protected-area>



Astola Island, The Nation

Giant blue whale, calf sighted near Churna Island, Karachi

A gigantic mother blue whale and her calf have been sighted off Churna Island, near the coast of Karachi on September 11. This is the first sighting of living blue whale, the largest animal of the world, in Pakistani waters. Earlier, a number of skeletal remains and beached blue whales were reported from Pakistani waters. The last such dead specimen was observed at Khuddi Creek along the coast of Sindh in August 2014. To know more, visit

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1506754/giant-blue-whale-calf-sighted-near-karachi-waters/>



The Mother Whale, Saeed Zaman WWF-Pakistan

SRI LANKA

Rare sighting of herd of five dugongs

In November 2017, a local tour operator of Sri Lanka, Samith Ishan Fernando was able to photograph a group of five dugongs, one of the most threatened marine mammal rarely seen in the wild.

In 2015, the "Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project" was initiated to conserve these mammals and their seagrass habitats around the world. Plans are being made to declare a Marine Protected Area with the aim of protecting dugongs according to Dr Lakshman Peiris of the Department of Wildlife Conservation. To know more, visit

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/171112/news/rare-sighting-five-live-dugongs-268084.html>



A close-up of a Dugong



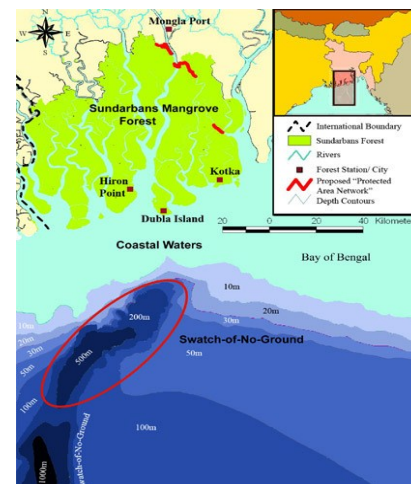
EVENTS

BANGLADESH

5-day expedition to Swatch of No-Ground in Bangladesh

RV Meen Sandhani, a survey and research ship, set out for an expedition to the Swatch of No-Ground from port city Chittagong's Marine Fisheries jetty around 11:30am on 19 November 2018. Isabela Foundation, a non-profit organisation based in Bangladesh, has launched the five-day expedition. The expedition is part of a joint research programme of the Fisheries and Livestock Ministry and Isabela Foundation. A total of 40 researchers from 12 departments under different organisations will delve into the submarine canyon with modern equipment to collect detailed information of its biodiversity. To know more, visit

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/11/19/expedition-swatch-no-ground/>



📍 Location of Swatch of No-Ground, MPAtlas

INDIA

International Training Workshop on Pilot Testing of Management Effective Evaluation (MEE) Framework for Marine Protected Areas

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are considered as a tool used to meet management objectives for the coastal and marine environment. Wildlife Institute of India and UNESCO C2C organized an International Training Workshop on "Pilot Testing of Management Effective Evaluation (MEE) Framework for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) including Coastal and Marine World Heritage Sites of India" from 15th -17th November, 2017 at Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, India. A total 17 participants and 08 resource persons attended the workshop representing site managers of coastal and marine sites in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives. The objective of the workshop was to standardize the protocol for the Assessment of Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) including Coastal & Marine World Heritage Sites of India. To know more, visit

http://wii.gov.in/unesco_category2_centre



📍 Workshop for MEE of MPAs, UNESCO C2C

MYANMAR

Workshop to draft a Myanmar Marine Conservation Policy

A workshop on drafting Myanmar marine conservation policy was held on 16 November, 2017 at NayPyiTaw. The workshop aimed at a Myanmar marine conservation policy (draft) which is the duty and responsibility of a central committee for the administration and management of natural resources in coastal areas (national level). Coastal and marine areas in Myanmar are 2,831 kilometers long from the mouth of Naf River in Rakhine State to Kawthaung.

Unsustainable fishing, pollution of the ocean and the destruction of mangrove forests are considered the main threats to Myanmar marine and coastal regions, marine experts said at the workshop. To know more, visit

<https://www.myanmarwaterportal.com/news/general-news/187-myanmar-marine-conservation-policy-workshop-held.html>



📍 Global new light of Myanmar



SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka joins #CleanSeas campaign



📷 *Fighting for #CleanSeas, UN Environment*

Chile, Oman, Sri Lanka and South Africa today joined UN Environment's CleanSeas campaign against marine litter and ocean pollution, announcing measures including plastic bag bans, new marine reserves and drives to increase recycling.

Among the commitments made by the newest #CleanSeas members: Sri Lanka will implement a ban on single-use plastic products from 1 January 2018, step up the separation and recycling of waste, and set the goal of making its ocean and coasts "pollution-free" by 2030. To know more, visit

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/chile-oman-sri-lanka-south-africa-join-cleanseas-campaign-against>

ANNOUNCEMENT

- ♦ To **renew the WCPA membership**, please fill in the online application form and submit it at <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/membership/become-wcpa-member>. The WCPA membership Guide 2017 and Code of Conduct are also provided on this web page. For those who are interested in becoming new members of WCPA, they may also submit their applications via the web link provided above.
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