

NEW ANT SPECIES

The study of five ant species at the Indian Institute of Science campus in Bangalore has thrown up a rare ant genus. The species *Dilobocondyla bangalorica*, named after the city, was one of the five worker ant species collected by Srihari K. T. and Sunil Kumar M. in 1996 on the campus. Unidentified then, the discovery has now been recognised as the first record of the species in the Indian subcontinent by Thresiamma Varghese. Measuring four millimetres in length, more details on the insect are emerging. Nests of the species are mostly located in *Plumeria alba* and *Plumeria rubra* trees and the ants have not been observed foraging on the ground. Another species, *M. urbanii*, has also been collected by Varghese on the IISc campus. This species, with distinct hook-like spines and large gaster, has previously been seen only in Kerala.

TIGER KILLED IN CORBETT

In August 2006, a seven-year-old tiger was shot dead on the banks of the Dhela river, Jaspur area close to the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Postmortem reports confirmed two bullets. One of the three villagers suspected in this poaching attempt has been apprehended, the other two are missing. In the last nine months alone, five tiger deaths have been recorded within the Park and its vicinity. The poacher claimed that the tiger was mistaken for a wild boar and officials have expressed their helplessness as the tiger had strayed out of park boundaries. Tiger deaths in other key reserves like Tadoba are disturbing evidence that Project Tiger is losing its moorings.



SACHIN RAI

CONSERVATION RESERVES ADDED TO PAS

The Jhilmil Jheel in Hardwar and Asan Barrage in Dehradun will receive Conservation Reserve status under the 2003 amendment made in the *Wildlife Protection Act, 1972*. Conservation Reserves are the new categories of Protected Areas that will seek greater community involvement in protecting wildlife. While Jhilmil Jheel, a 3,800 ha. wetland on the left bank of the River Ganga in the Chiriyapur forest range of Hardwar forest division is home to the endangered swamp deer *Cervus duvaucelli*, the Asan barrage at the confluence of the Yamuna hydel canal and Asan river is a well-known habitat for migratory waterfowl. Media reports suggest that more such Conservation Reserves will be set up in the near future. Some legal experts suggest that the recent dilution of the *Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972* to set up a Tiger Authority will result in turning all Tiger Reserves into Conservation Reserves. That would spell bad news for wildlife as the purpose was to conserve new areas not dilute protection to parks and sanctuaries.

LICENSE TO DESTROY

Bhushan Steel Ltd., a steel plant located at Thelkoli village, at Rengali in Orissa's Sambalpur district is destroying community forests in violation of the *Orissa Forest Act, 1972* and the *Forest Conservation Act, 1980*. The Orissa Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) handed over 1,300 acres (526 ha.), which included community protected forests of Thelkoli and Dhubenchapar villages to set up the plant. The Company had obtained Stage I forest clearance for 59.16 ha. in September 2004 though satellite images confirm that much larger areas have been destroyed. The dense forests dominated by *sal* are important wildlife corridors for species such as leopards and elephants that move between the Central Orissa forests of the Badarama/Ushakothi Sanctuary to those northwest of the Hirakud reservoir. However, the proximity of coal deposits and water from the Hirakud reservoir makes the area attractive for industry. Apart from Bhushan Steel, other companies such as Shyam DRI are also believed to have felled *sal* forests. Satellite images clearly show that large portions have been illegally cleared in the natural forests of Bhubura Dongar that had been protected by the villagers of Babu Khinda. The Company has erected high boundary walls all around the area allotted to it, and closed off access to villagers, who have received no official support and have instead been at the receiving end of threats.

KAZIRANGA DECLARED TIGER RESERVE

A century of protection has paid off – Kaziranga National Park and World Heritage Site has been declared a Tiger Reserve, making it the 29th Tiger Reserve in the country and the third in the state. Originally created to protect the endangered one-horned rhino, Kaziranga also supports the highest density of tigers in the country – 86 according to the latest census. The 430 sq. km. reserve has had to battle poaching gangs and floods but strict vigilance, improving the intelligence network and dedicated managers have turned Kaziranga into a success story. While this newly-acquired status is welcome, other threats to Kaziranga such as the NH 37 and the erosion of the Brahmaputra must also be looked into. Hopefully, the Assam government will not allow the declaration of Kaziranga as a Tiger Reserve to dilute physical protection.



KEDAR BHIDE