

Additional Items for discussion in the Standing Committee meeting

1. Declaration of Kolamarka Sanctuary

With the interbreeding of wild and domestic buffaloes throughout the range of the wild buffalo in South Asia, the only population that has not suffered this “genetic swamping” is the one in the Indravati National Park of Chattisgarh. The other surviving herd is in Udanti in the same state, but with seven bulls and just one cow and that too in captivity, this particular relict herd has little hope for survival. The Indravati population is less than forty, but with the severe Maoist problem prevalent there which does not allow forest staff to even enter the PA, the only surviving group across the Indravati River in Maharashtra has possibility the only hope that can be held for the future survival of this magnificent animal.

A recent survey showed about eight animals in the Kolmarka Reserved Forest in the Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra. It has been proposed as a Sanctuary of approximately 100sq kms for some years now. When MoEF of the recommendation of the Standing Committee had agreed to the reduction of the Solapur Bustard Sanctuary in Maharashtra, the reciprocal notification of Kolamarka and of Mansinghdeo Sanctuaries had been proposed. Mansinghdeo has been notified, but not Kolamarka.

The most numerous domestic animal in the world is the water buffalo. Considering the genetic importance of wild counterparts of domestic plants and animals in biodiversity conservation, it can be stated that the most important wild animal in the world for the welfare of mankind, is the genetically truly wild buffalo. From that point of view, it is crucially important that the surviving herd in Kolamarka be preserved and this can only be achieved by declaring this area as a sanctuary. The Standing Committee may resolve to request MoEF to pursue with the State Govt. of Maharashtra to have Kolamarka declared as a sanctuary within this calendar year.

2. Implementation Protocol on Critical Wildlife Habitats to be approved by the Standing Committee

With the reluctance of State Governments to declare new sanctuaries, declaration of critical wildlife habitats is the only recourse to maintain linkages between PAs and to safeguard vital wildlife areas. The Implementation Protocol for critical wildlife habitats has been put on the website of MoEF and an expert committee for the purpose has been envisaged. In view of the circumstances mentioned above, the identification of critical wildlife habitats and their management is crucial for wildlife conservation. It is, therefore, essential that the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, which is a statutory body mandated to formulate policies and procedures for wildlife conservation, discusses and approves the Implementation Protocol for critical wildlife habitats.