

SPOTTED: Ajoba's trek from Malshej Ghat to national park

For First Time In Maha, Leopard's 120-Km Trek To Mumbai Was Tracked

Simit Bhagat | TNN



LIVING FREE: Ajoba was rescued near the Pune-Nashik Highway, and fitted with a tracking device

Mumbai: For the first time in Maharashtra, wildlife researchers working with forest officials were able to track a leopard's extraordinary 120-odd km journey from Malshej Ghat in the Pune District to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in Borivli. The leopard, named Ajoba, took four months to cover the terrain, and did not shy away from crossing railway tracks, highways, and pockets of civilisation, said researchers of Project Waghoba who are studying the man-animal conflict in the Pune and Nashik districts. The story began a year ago when Ajoba was rescued from a well in Alephata near the Pune-Nashik Highway by forest officials. Researchers from Project Waghoba fitted it with a collar that had a tracking device, and released the ani-



A LONG JOURNEY FOLLOWING THE SPOTS

- The leopard called Ajoba who was rescued last year and fitted with a tracking device, travelled around 120 km in 20 days from the foot hills of Malshej Ghat to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Borivli
- Though Ajoba began his journey in May 2009, the initial findings of the research team was released only early this week
- Ajoba crossed Malshej Ghat, Ajoba Peak, Ratangad, Kasara Railway Station, Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, Wada, Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Navghar, Vasai Industrial area and Nagla Block in Sanjay Gandhi National Park
- When forest officials and researchers of Project Waghoba rescued the leopard they attached a collar with a tracking device around its neck
- The collar had a Global Positioning System (GPS) and Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM). The readings of the leopard's position were stored in the collar and transmitted via SMS to the server whenever the animal reached an area that had mobile connectivity
- The device costs around Rs 2 lakh and has been imported from Germany
- The tracking device, however, malfunctioned after four months. Ajoba was last seen at the National Park in 2009

mal near Malshej Ghat. Though the experiment took place in 2009, it was only this week that the researchers released their findings. "By following Ajoba's movements, we discovered that leopards do not al-

ways shy away from areas inhabited by humans," said Vidya Athreya, wildlife biologist and in-charge of the project Waghoba. "Though there is no continuous forest corridor between Malshej Ghat and SGNP, it covered great distances." Over a period of four months, Ajoba—believed to be around four

to five years old—crossed the railway station at Kasara and headed to Tansa and Tungreshwar sanctuaries. When it reached Nagla Block, the northern part of SGNP, Ajoba remained there for two months. One night, it even swam across the Vasai creek, and crossed the busy Ghodbunder Road to enter the main area of SGNP. "During its stay at Nagla Block, the leopard went to the residential Vasai industrial area, but did not attack hu-

mans," said Athreya. It was hunting stray dogs. This is the first time in Maharashtra that researchers were able to track the animal's movements. The tracking device malfunctioned after Ajoba crossed Vasai creek, and researchers have failed to make contact with it. "But the information we have sheds new light on leopard movement. It also helps us identify biological hotspots," said researchers.

'Mangroves near Dahisar will die soon'

Panel Report Points To Massive Destruction At Gorai Creek

Viju B | TNN

Mumbai: The latest report by the committee appointed by the Mumbai suburban collector exposes the massive destruction of mangroves at Dahisar adjoining Gorai creek. The report (a copy of which is with TOD) notes that the land holder of survey number 344 carried out large scale destruction of mangroves and obstructed the natural flow of salt water in the mangrove area. Due to this, the vegetation and mangroves here will die soon, the report stated.

the land holder had extended the bunds and dumped debris over mangroves in gross violation of the Bombay high court order. "The Borivali-Dahisar stretch has seen one of the biggest encroachments in recent times, with hundreds of acres of mangroves destroyed on the banks of Vasai creek," said Harish Pandey, member, IC Colony New Link Road



CHOKED UP: Debris is being dumped on bunds, destroying mangroves at Gorai creek

On Monday, Union minister Jairam Ramesh had said that the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) had written to the state chief minister, Ashok Chavan, asking the government to take action against violators.

The report was compiled by a six-member team comprising senior forest and civic officials who visited the area following complaints from residents. It was observed that debris was being dumped all along the bund portion. "The bund was constructed by digging out the mud for the surrounding creek filled with mangroves," the report said.

The report also observed that the land holder had submitted the completion report, but the bund was being filled the help of donkeys. A senior official said that though permission was given only for repairing bunds,

Residents' Forum. There are around 1,200 acres of mangroves adjoining the Gorai creek, of which hundreds of acres have disappeared due to encroachments. "Massive filling is seen along the boundary of survey number 344. The existing bund has been widened up to about 8-9 m. The mangroves along the bund were buried under the debris," the report said. The report noted that culverts and gates have blocked the entry of tidal water in the plot and there was no provision given to these gates to regulate the entry of water.

'Translocating leopards not the best solution'

Simit Bhagat | TNN



well-received by many wildlife activists. Krishna Tiwari, the project officer of the City Forests Department (BNHS) said: "It is a good initiative that gives insights into leopards and their

Mumbai: Ajoba was not the only leopard to be tracked. Researchers and forest officials also fitted a tracking device on a female leopard, Sita, who had strayed into a village near her natural habitat at Surghana in the western part of Nashik. Sita was released at Jawahar, nearly 50 km away from her home. One of the goals of the project was to study the effect of translocation of leopards to unknown habitats, a practice that is commonly followed in India. Based on Sita's movements—she was pregnant at the time—researchers believe that translocation may not be the best solution to the man-animal conflict. The findings of the year study have been

own and known territories. Around three to four years ago, leopard attacks on humans in and around Sanjay Gandhi National Park, made headlines. What was not widely known, though, was that many of the leopards had been translocated to the national park from other parts of Maharashtra. Tiwari said, "One of the prime reasons for these attacks was translocation of leopards. So such practices should be stopped."

travel patterns. Such initiatives should be encouraged and the forest department should launch a similar study for animals at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park." While weaning her cubs, Sita remained at Jawahar. "She was pregnant at the time, and her movements were therefore restricted. From the information we gathered from nearby villagers, we know that Sita remained in Jawahar for four months," said wildlife biologist Vidya Athreya who was in-charge of Project Waghoba. Interestingly, after four months, once Sita's cubs were able to walk longer distances, she returned to her home at Surghana, validating researchers' views on the importance of releasing rescued animals to their

own and known territories. Around three to four years ago, leopard attacks on humans in and around Sanjay Gandhi National Park, made headlines. What was not widely known, though, was that many of the leopards had been translocated to the national park from other parts of Maharashtra. Tiwari said, "One of the prime reasons for these attacks was translocation of leopards. So such practices should be stopped."

BMC gets tough on litterbugs

Sharad Vyas | TNN

Mumbai: Over two weeks after the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) announced to crack the whip and penalise citizens and commercial shop owners found clogging nullahs meant to carry rainwater into the sea, the civic clean-up drive has now gathered momentum.

Cleaning up clogged nullahs

Taking the issue of keeping nullahs free of blockages seriously, the BMC teams have fined over 146 industrial units as well as individuals for throwing rubbish into the nullahs in the last 12 days. The collective fine amount stands at Rs 1.35 lakh, said officials. "Of these, at least 12 were individuals who were caught and fined for throwing waste into the drains in the eastern suburbs; the drives were carried out by our teams in the mornings," said a senior civic official in-charge of the drive. In his announcement on June 12, municipal commissioner Swadheen Kshatriya had said that the BMC had had enough. "No matter how much we clean the drains, people keep throwing waste into them every day," Kshatriya had said. Most of the action took place in eastern suburbs; at Kurla, Nehru Nagar, Chun-

abhatti, MbPT nullah at Wadala, Laxmi Nagar nullah at Ghatkopar, Nahur nullah, Usha Nagar nullah at Bhandup, Mulund nullah, and Mithi river near Kalpana Talkies and Kranti Nagar, the officials said. Deputy municipal commissioner (special) R Bhosale said individuals and offenders were fined between

Rs 100 and Rs 5,000 by the special squad formed for the drive. Two special squads have been formed to keep an eye on spots notorious for clogged drains. The BMC spends over Rs 50 crore to clean, widen and desilt 2,000-km of drains to ensure they are cleared before the monsoon. While it punishes contractors and officials for slow progress of desilting work, never before has it decided to punish people throwing waste into the drains.

'State law must change in keeping with RTE Act'

Anahita Mukherji | TNN

The Secondary School Code allows a school to throw out students who have failed for two years in a row. Many schools have used this to expel students. It is important that the government change earlier laws.

Arundhati Chavan | PRESIDENT, PTA UNITED FORUM

Arundhati Chavan, president of the PTA United Forum, said that it was imperative that the government amend the code so that it is in sync with the Right to Education Act. "The SS code allows a school to throw out students who have failed for two years in a row. Many schools have used this clause to expel students. So it is important that the government change earlier laws. It is not enough that the government issues

GRs announcing new laws," she added. While the code is applicable to both aided as well as unaided schools, Chavan points to the fact that private unaided schools usually ignore the SS Code in relation to fee regulation and teachers' salaries. However, they follow it for expelling kids who have failed two years in a row.

Dr Harish Shetty, president of the Counsellor's Association of India, who has been actively involved with schools, says that the code is, by and large, overly authoritative and takes a 'top-down' approach towards education. "The SS code is not child-centric, violates the Right to Education Act and should be amended immediately," adds Shetty. "The code is outdated and heavily favours schools over students. Failure, like fever, needs to be diagnosed early on by schools so that they can be put on the right course," he added. According to him, it is the responsibility of the school to find out why a child fails.

THE BIG CONNECT



WORK IN PROGRESS: Work in full swing to connect the Metro corridor to the central railway and the skywalk near Ghatkopar station

Popular diabetes drug raises risk of heart attack: Study

Rupali Mukherjee | TNN

Mumbai: In one of the largest studies conducted so far, Glaxo's anti-diabetes pill rosiglitazone (Avandia) reported an increasing evidence of heart risk, strokes and death, fuelling a debate on this hotly-contested drug, worldwide and in India, and raising questions on whether it should be banned by regulators. The issue assumes significance in India as rosiglitazone is a widely-prescribed diabetes drug, marketed by at least 10 companies, including Torrent, Dr Reddy's, Cipla and Glaxo-SmithKline (GSK) India.

Avandia has been under the scanner over the last three years, when one of the first studies reported that it increased heart attack risk in diabetics, after which the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a safety alert. Subsequently, the drug was marketed with a 'black box warning'.

The latest study commissioned by the FDA, and published in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) observed 2,27,571 Medicare beneficiaries aged 65 years or older, who initiated treatment with rosiglitazone or a related drug, pioglitazone, from July 2006 to June 2009, and who underwent follow-up for up to three years. A total of 8,667 heart attacks, strokes, heart failure and deaths were observed during the study period. Patients who were prescribed rosiglitazone reported 6% more heart attacks as compared to those on pioglitazone; 27% more strokes; 25% more heart failure and 14% more deaths. Dr David Graham of the FDA, the study's lead author, said the results are alarming. Dr Anoop Misra of Fortis Hospitals, Delhi, said, "In view of repeated and decisive data, rosiglitazone has no place in the management of diabetes. In India, this drug should be banned due to less than adequate knowledge of adverse effects by general practitioners in remote areas, and poorly informed patients."

A GSK India official declined to speak on the issue, while the drug controller general was not available for comment. The JAMA study was released two weeks before a crucial US FDA advisory panel meets to decide on the medicine's future. In India, the drug is more popular in towns, and widely prescribed in an estimated 20-30% of diabetics.

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