

# A Rocha India *news*

**Issue: 3**

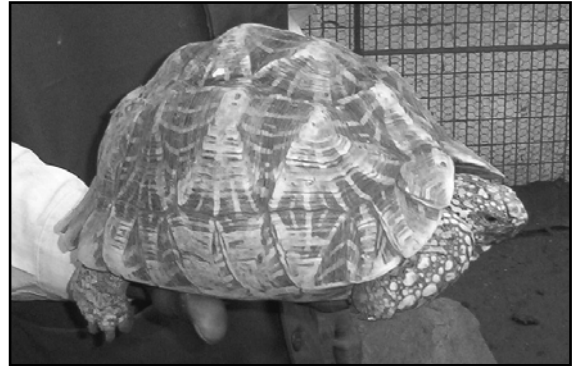
**April 2005**



**A ROCHA**

## *The Fading Star...*

The Indian Star Tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*), commonly seen in zoos has not been taken seriously in the wild. Illegal trading of these 'Starred Tortoises' in India has helped adorn many a home across the globe. Although not yet endangered, rampant trading of these animals would pose a serious threat to their existence.



The Indian Star Tortoise grows to around 280mm along its carapace (bony upper shield of the tortoise), the females being larger than the males. The carapace is striking with a black background, which is accentuated with radiating yellow streaks diverging from a yellow 'bump' called the areola. This gives a star-like appearance from where it derives its name 'Star Tortoise'. They are omnivores but inclined to be vegetarians. The diet consists mainly of different kinds of grass, fallen fruits, flowers and occasionally snails. Not much is known about their predators, thus leaving the food chain incomplete. The Indian Star Tortoise is specific to the Indian sub-continent. In the north they are found in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. In South India they are found in the Chittoor & Madanepalle districts of Andhra Pradesh; Kolar district of Karnataka; Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu; and parts of Kerala. Apart from India they are also seen in Southeastern Pakistan & Sri Lanka.

The number of animals could have reduced in the wild due to their trafficking from India to other parts of the world. Though not listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Indian Star Tortoise is listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Schedule IV of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, making the trade of the species illegal. In spite of this, these exotic animals are sold as pets to far off places for a whooping \$400 to \$800 each. They are captured from the wild and transported through different means to reach the trade market. Some are seized at various junctions and get released into the wild, from where they are captured again for selling. Many of the seized animals are also sent to the zoos. As not much information on the captive management of the species is available, there is a high rate of mortality in the zoos. A Rocha India has been carrying out research on the Indian Star Tortoise for the Wild Life Trust of India, New Delhi. It has been involved in gaining information on the species particularly their distribution, behavior and management in captivity. With a little concern and more information on the Star Tortoise we can prevent the entry of yet another species into the Red List. - *Amoolya Moses*

**IUCN**

The World Conservation Union

**A Rocha International is a member of IUCN, the World Conservation Union**

## Dave Bookless in India

The National Director of A Rocha UK, Rev. Dave Bookless was on an official visit to India in December 2004 – January 2005. The objective of the visit was to explore possibilities of extending A Rocha's work in Northeast India, which is one of the biodiversity hot spots of the world. During his stay at Mizoram he built contacts with several leaders of the local churches, educational institutions and government officials. He spoke at the *Synod Convention-Mizoram* and at a conference on *Nature and Environment Consciousness*, organized by the State Forest Department.



**The Bookless family at the Golden Temple, Punjab**

Dave and Vijay held meetings with educational institutions during his visit to Bangalore. Dave was also the speaker at *Caring for Creation* workshop organized by A Rocha India jointly with the CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee. Rt. Rev George Isaac (Chair, Ecological Concerns Committee) was among the representatives of the CSI Karnataka Diocese who attended the workshop.

Their stay in Bangalore ended with a dinner attended by the volunteers and their families and the Board of A Rocha India.



**Victor Tauro (Treasurer) & Prem Mitra (Chair) in Mudhumalai Wildlife Sanctuary**

### *Editor's space*

Salim works with the Bannerghatta Rehabilitation Centre, run by CUPA (Compassion Unlimited Plus Action). He currently has in his care a few Pariah Kites, a couple of Owls and three Jackals. He gets injured animals from all over the city for medication and rehabilitation. I happened to be there recently for the release of a few reptiles during which Salim echoed sentiments I have often heard, "...many families in the country can barely afford the medication I use on these animals. Sometimes I wonder why I am doing this... so often our work is not even appreciated...even the amount we do is so little..." Sometimes one wonders, how does one fight the cynicism that surrounds us?

Two aspects of A Rocha's list of core commitments came to my mind that evening:

1. *Christian*: We work to show God's love for all creation, even when it seems hopeless!
2. *Community*: We work with the community not forgetting that the human and planet needs are never far apart!

Glory be - the following news events drive home that point!

## In Brief...

### ***A Rocha India at the International Elephant Research Symposium.***

National Director Vijay D. Anand attended the *International Elephant Research Symposium*, held by International Elephant Foundation in collaboration with Fort Worth Zoo, at Texas, USA from 2-5 December 2004. Some of the preliminary findings from the on going research on human-elephant conflict issues at the Bannerghatta National Park, Southern India were presented at the symposium. We thank *Fort Worth Zoo, El Paso Zoo and A Rocha International* for financial support that made the visit possible.

### ***A small effort to save a large mammal....***

The research on the human-elephant conflict issues at the Bannerghatta National Park is progressing well with the conclusion of the second round of survey in January 2005. Gurudath R. Gurjal, one of the volunteers had to say this at the end of the survey, "...for the first time in my life I started to understand and accept elephants as an integral part of bio-diversity. I should thank A Rocha India for the most exciting thing I have done in my life. A huge thanks guys...!!

### ***Interview with the Tree Man***

Rev. Prem Mitra had the opportunity to interact with Mr. Sunderlal Bahuguna (leader of the *Chipko Movement*). This is what he had to say about our work. "Many species have become extinct and we are poorer than our ancestors as far as bio-diversity is concerned. 'A Rocha India' has taken up the work of protection of nature. When human beings serve their brethren they are noble, but when they serve all beings they are nearer to God. They fulfill the duties assigned by the Almighty, who has blessed them with a creative head, a compassionate heart and constructive hands to serve all and alleviate the miseries from this planet, thus bringing Heaven on earth."

### ***Live This Life!***

Rev. Prem Mitra spoke at a three day *CSI Synod Youth Conference* on the 5<sup>th</sup> March at YMCA Mangalore. The theme of the talk was *Live This Life*. It was attended by around 80 youth from all over Karnataka state. The talk focused on the need for a practical understanding of respecting creation.

### ***Research Collaboration***

A Rocha India had its first overseas visitor who joined the project in Bannerghatta National Park during November & December 2004, as part of her course study on International relations. *Cassandra Star McCray* from South Asian Centre of the Friends World Program (an accredited college program from Long Island University, NY, USA) completed her academic requirement of 120 hours of service/study under the supervision of Vijay D. Anand and Surendra Varma.



Vijay D. Anand in a meeting with Michael Fouraker, Executive Director, Fort Worth Zoo, USA.



Volunteers at the field survey



Prem Mitra in conversation with Sunderlal Bahuguna



Prem Mitra speaking at the CSI Synod Youth Conference

***A Rocha's five core commitments:***

***Christian:*** Underlying all we do is our Biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.

***Conservation:*** We carry out research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world and run environmental education programmes for people of all ages.

***Community:*** Through our commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, we aim to develop good relationships both within the A Rocha family and in our local communities.

***Cross-cultural:*** We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.

***Cooperation:*** We work in partnership with a wide variety of organisations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.

**Meet the Team**



**Vijay D. Anand**  
National Director



**Dr. K. S. Murali**  
Sr. Consultant



**Surendra Varma**  
Hon. Scientific Advisor



**Baruk S. Jacob**  
Coordinator & Editor



**Gopala Krishna S.P**  
Research Assistant



**Amoolya Moses**  
Volunteer

**To volunteer with our projects contact**

***A Rocha India*** ®  
#23 Anjaneya Street  
Austin Town  
Bangalore-560 047, India

Phone : +91 80- 55312324  
Email : india@arocha.org  
Website: www.arocha.org

***Donations to A Rocha India are exempted u/s 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.  
Our sincere thanks to Mr. A. Dhinakaran for all his support in our work in India!***

*The name 'A Rocha' is Portuguese, and means 'The Rock'*

*A Rocha is currently active in 15 countries – Portugal, Lebanon, France, Kenya, UK, Canada, Czech Republic, USA, Finland, Bulgaria, Netherlands, India, Ghana, South Africa and Peru.*



**A Rocha International is a member of IUCN, the World Conservation Union**

The World Conservation Union