



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Water crisis, fires take toll on wildlife

Forest Dept To Supply Water Through Tankers

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Bengaluru: The water crisis and forest fires that raged through forests have taken a heavy toll on wild animals. With water drying up in ponds, lakes and reservoirs in forests across the state, as a result of consecutive years of extreme drought, followed by forest fires that have ravaged Bandipur Tiger Reserve recently and Biligiriranganatha Swamy Temple Wildlife

MORE ANIMALS COULD BE IN DANGER

► Wild animals running for cover, thanks to forest fires and water scarcity caused by consecutive droughts

► In drought years, large wild animals migrate to Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala

► This year, all southern states are equally affected, and more animals could be in danger

► Threat to wildlife from hunger and thirst assumes alarming proportions

“Since culling is not a culturally acceptable option, adverse climatic conditions like this drought may also help in natural regulation of the population. We must curb the urge to ‘play god’.

Praveen Bhargav | FORMER MEMBER, NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE

Sanctuary on Sunday, there are reports of an alarming number of deaths of wild animals — langur, lion-tailed macaque, deer, reptiles and many tiny animals.

With temperatures soaring, several small water re-

servoirs are parched while others are on the brink of drying up. Migration of large wild animals like elephants from drier forests in the state into neighbouring forests in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala has been the

norm. But this time, with all southern states facing drought, more animals are feared to be in danger. Forest fires have only compounded the problem.

To add to their misery, a number of waterholes and usually perennial streams have dried up at a time when the demand for water and fodder has gone up.

The threat to wildlife from hunger and thirst has assumed alarming proportions, say forest officials.

The wildlife deaths, even before the start of summer, have given rise to grave concern among nature lovers as well as the forest department.

► ‘May lead to mass deaths’, P5

‘Situation could lead to mass deaths of elephants, tigers’

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The situation is going from bad to worse. There are reports of small animals dying but if the situation continues, there could be mass deaths, especially of elephants and tigers, which require a large quantity of water,” said Joseph Hoover, member of the Karnataka State Wildlife Board.

Hoover, who has been visiting the forests ever since the fire broke out, said he found at least 15 langurs and some five lion-tailed macaques charred to death in Bandipur. The toll may go up as a fire was again reported on the southwest slopes of BRT Tiger Reserve in Punajur wildlife range on Sunday. “The deaths may rise in the coming days. It’s a scary situation in the forest, especially if it doesn’t rain in the next two weeks,” Hoover said.

Animal rights activists are not fully convinced with the forest department’s plan to supply water through tankers and solar borewells. They said measures adopted by the state government were few. “Due to the heat wave, several small water reservoirs have become parched while others are on the brink of drying up. Animals need water not only for drinking but also for playing and bathing in dry weather. The state government should have tried to make arrangements earlier so that these wild animals do not suffer,” said SN Girish, a wildlife activist.

Principal chief conservator of

LET’S NOT PLAY GOD

“National parks constitute a mere 1% of India’s landscape, where the goal is to allow natural ecological processes to continue with the least amount of human interference. Wild animals have evolved over thousands of years and survived severe droughts. If there are mortalities of some weaker animals, including charismatic species like elephants due to a lack of water, it is part of the natural process and there is no cause for alarm. Since culling is not a culturally acceptable option, adverse climatic conditions like this drought may also help in natural regulation of the population. Therefore, this does not call for any action to fill up waterholes, much less the drilling of 100 borewells announced by the government. We must curb the urge to ‘play god’ and reduce such unscientific interventions. Are we setting out to convert Bandipur and other national parks into safari parks or zoos with a maze of pipes, borewells and solar panel arrays?”

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forests (wildlife) B J Hosmath claimed that not many wildlife casualties were reported due to water, but certainly due to forest fires. “Some of the wildlife reserves and parks, in-

DRONES TO TRACK DISASTER

The forest department has introduced mini-drones designed to keep track of potential forest fires. These drones will help record atmospheric conditions in the event of a forest fire too, said a forest official in Bandipur Tiger reserve. These self-steering drones are sensor modules that can be dropped over a forested area to relay environmental data that could show through camera or indicate potential for fire, they added.



TIMES VIEW

The death of wildlife assets in Karnataka — small in number, but could increase dramatically if correctives aren’t taken in the coming harsher months of summer — was a tragedy waiting to unfold. Though experts argue it’s ‘the natural regulation of population’ and one needn’t be alarmed, the ground situation in these reserve forests is far from satisfactory. Forest fires and water crisis are a lethal combination. The state government can’t credit itself with glory on its failure to address these issues without losing time. Staff shortage in the forest department is equally debilitating. Besides praying for rain, Karnataka must do something substantive — filling waterbodies, checking forest poachers — to see results on the ground.

cluding Bandipur, are facing acute water shortage this summer. But what else can we do other than make temporary arrangements like digging borewells?” he said.