

Process Framework for Involuntary resettlement

Project title - **Distribution and assessment of the population status of Critically Endangered Kondana Soft-furred Rat *Millardia kondana*, with special emphasis on implementation of the conservation management plan at Sinhgad.**

Potential protected areas, government and local communities.

The Kondana Soft-furred Rat has been only recorded from three plateaus in the northern Western Ghats (unpublished). We planned to explore the similar plateau habitats in this region to investigate the occurrence of the species. Most of these plateaus have historical importance in the form of forts; therefore, they have some level of protection. Though, in recent years increasing biotic pressure and various threats to these habitats has been reported. Watve (2013) mentioned agriculture, tourism, windmill farms, mining and land use changes are key threats to the rocky plateaus habitats. Our previous investigation at the proposed study sites revealed that the tourism and associated land use changes seem the immediate threats to the species and habitat, but other threats mentioned above will affect the habitat in future. We found that to increase the tourism, the activities such as clearing of natural vegetation, plantation of exotic species to enhance the aesthetic value of the place; forest fire; and building rest houses/resorts are carried out by local people, the Forest Department (Social Forestry) and the Archaeological Department.

In this mountainous landscape, these plateaus comprise of very small fraction of total habitat available for the local communities for utilization; therefore, increasing the protection level will not lead to the scarcity of the natural resources. However, it may affect the local people depend on the tourism for their livelihood. The number of people involved in this business varies from site to site: it depends on accessibility, distance of the site from nearest town/city and its historical importance. In Sinhgad livelihood of 20 local families depend on tourism throughout the year; on the contrary, in forts such as Torna and Rajgad less than 10 families engaged in tourism, and it was only limited to monsoon and post-monsoon season; and in less historical important fort such as Pandavgad, there is no tourism business.

To improve the level of protection of the areas and take the suitable conservation actions without causing large negative impact on the local communities, the existing area of occurrence of species would be divided into two broad categories: the plateaus under

ownership of the Forest /Archaeological Department and plateaus under private ownership (Watve 2013).

1. Plateaus under ownership of the Forest /Archaeological Department

- The area is protected against wind mills, mining, heavy tourism, fires and unsustainable constructions and other habitat alterations.
- Regulation of landscape changes such as plantations, construction of bunds, ponds and tourism by scientific methods and active involvement of the local communities in this process.
- The only local communities will permit for tourism business, grazing/fodder collection and other minor natural resources utilization under a strict condition of 'sustainable way' without causing damage to the habitat and species.
- Local people and guards engaged in the site are trained for sustainable activities; and also instructed to monitor the tourists to follow the strict guideline develop for them such no smoking/alcohol drinking, use the regular paths to avoid trampling of the habitat and proper disposal of the garbage.
- local people made aware of habitat destructive activities such as forest fire, clearing of native species and plantation of the exotic species ; and these activities are strictly banned.

2. Plateaus not under ownership of the Forest Department

- Identify the ownership of the land and provide the protection through an appropriate conservation category. Considering the distribution of WLS and NP in this region it seems to be practical to declare these areas as community reserves.
- The community reserves management committee would consist of people from Grampanchayat and the Forest and Archaeological Departments.
- Discouraging quarrying, mining, power plants and other larger scale developmental activities those causes destruction of the habitats.
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proper disposal of the garbage.

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References

Watve, A. (2013). Status review of Rocky plateaus in the northern Western Ghats and Konkan region of Maharashtra, India with recommendations for conservation and management. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 5(5): 3935–3962; doi:10.11609/JoTT.o3372.3935-62.