STATUS OF BLEWITT'S OWL IN ARAKU VALLEY AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN IN VIEW OF THE PROPOSED BAUXITE MINES

Report Submitted to

ANDHRA PRADESH MINERAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, LIMITED, HYDERABAD

PA Azeez, S Bhupathy, SN Prasad, Rachna Chandra and T Selva Kumar

Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- The Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation (APMDC) proposes to exploit the vast bauxite deposits available in Araku Valley area, in the Eastern Ghats of Vishakhapatnam district. Three locations namely Rakthakonda, Galikonda and Chitamgondi are identified for the mines. However, in view of an unconfirmed report of Blewitt’s Owl from the Araku, the APMDC, requested Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) to investigate the presence of the species in the mining areas, and if the species is present in the area to propose an appropriate Environmental Management Plan. SACON undertook the study during October 2006 to February 2008. However, expanding the scope, detailed surveys of the biodiversity of the area was conducted to strengthen the EMP.

- The target species of study the Blewitt’s Owlet *Athene blewitti* was not recorded in the proposed mining sites. The species was also not recorded from the whole area of Araku Valley during the study period spanning over one year.

- The study area is rich in wild biodiversity. In all, 151 species of birds were recorded. 414 species of plants, 12 species of mammals, 70 species of butterflies, 8 species of spiders were also recorded there. It may be noted that the Araku valley is rich in owl species; 11 species are encountered from the area, several of which were nesting.

- The mine activities are likely to have impact on the local environment, especially on the biodiversity and wildlife. Proper work plan, management plan for debris and waste disposal, appropriately minimizing and scheduling blasting activities, controlled vehicular activity and safeguarding the slopes and valleys from the spill over impacts may help to mitigate the impacts.

- As the species targeted of the study was not encountered, an EMP for the conservation of the species seems redundant. However, it was felt that utmost care should be taken to eliminate stress on the slopes and valleys, and hence a general
EMP is proposed. It is appropriate that the slopes and valleys are shielded from the impacts during mining. The large trees and rocky cliffs along the slopes of the hillocks are important for several species, especially the owls.

- From that standpoint of precautionary principle, we have supplemented some of the probable impacts of the mining activity and also deliberated upon applicable mitigation methods that may help to reduce the impacts.

- Looking at the need for resources in the country, the proposed project assumes importance. Nevertheless, the project construction and operation is likely to have notable impact in the area. It may be possible to lower the impact on the environment, biodiversity and wildlife with proper planning and implementing appropriate measures.