



JOANNA VAN GRUISEN

A BUTTERFLY BREEZE FROM MP

# Politics and the way of the tiger

In election season, our political parties seem to be side-stepping reality or are oblivious to the link between GDP and climate change

I grew up and lived in the UK for half my life but have now settled and been in India for the other half. I identify somewhat with the dhobi's dog (or donkey) of the well-known Urdu proverb, though I prefer to regard it as having a strong attachment to two homes rather than not quite belonging to either. However as far as the governments of the two countries are concerned, I am indeed that dog/donkey, as neither allow me a vote. While hoping for India to recognise dual citizenship, I have retained my UK passport. More than 20 years of residence elsewhere, Britain disallows participation in elections (now after 15 years abroad). And 30 years residence in India but without citizenship, disallows participation here.

I would not choose to be voteless but these days it seems no great disadvantage as the choices, both here and in the UK, often seem somewhat limited. As an environmentally conscious person and appreciator of the natural world, it is distressing to find so little empathy for such views in the political spectrum. It is also more than a little worrying to find, amongst the political parties, so little understanding of how close to the brink we actually are – ecologically and, thus, economically. Wishful thinking seems to outweigh rational thinking in a way rather reminiscent, on a scary planet-scale, of the local forest department's reaction to the poaching and extinc-



**Writing on the wall** Token presence at events highlighting the need to arrest climate change doesn't really compensate for the apathy of the political class s SUBRAMANIAM

tion of tigers in the Panna Tiger Reserve a few years back.

Although science and reason clearly spelt out the path the tigers were on, the wildlife authorities preferred to insist that all was well, that "the tiger density has never been better". Such wishful thinking took the Reserve to the brink, and over – only six months after this statement was published, the Reserve did not have a single tiger left. Extinction in this (local) case was not exactly forever as the park could be repopulated with tigers from other areas (though the specific Panna genes may be lost forever). What would happen if the whole planet thought like this?

We need not even look to the extremes to be concerned. Shortly before the election, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC, sometimes criticised by environmental groups as 'too conservative') published its authoritative and "responsible" report; one that has been produced by 1,250 international experts and approved by 194 governments. It unequivocally shows that climate change is caused by humans and poses a serious threat. But, cheerily, if perhaps surprisingly, it also reports that catastrophic climate change can be averted without sacrificing living standards. "It doesn't cost the world to save the planet," according to its economist leader, Ottmar Edenhofer.

But none of the main election manifestos even mention this report and give only unspecific nods towards the overarching, principal factor (the deplorable state of our planet) that should be at the base and heart of all our plans and visions for the future. The AAP at least seems to recognise some connection between ecology and economy as the two are combined in a section heading, but even they, along with both the BJP and the Congress party, stress the need for maintaining high GDP growth with apparently little to no understanding of its connection to our worsening climate change conditions and vice versa – attendant welcome nods to alternative energies



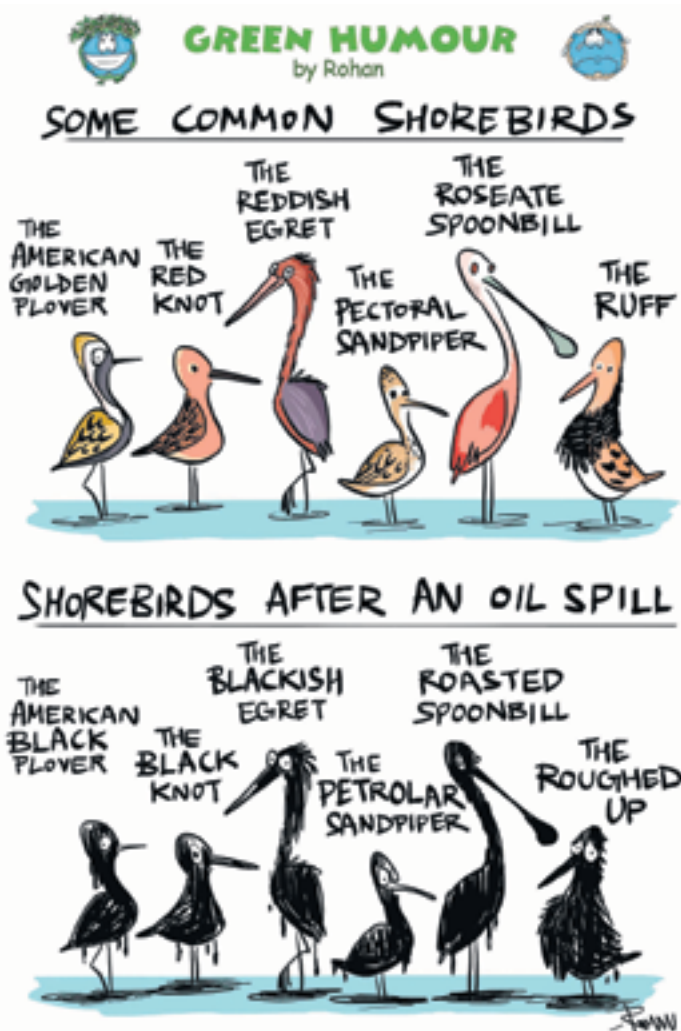
**Lost and found** Although Panna was repopulated with tigers, the forest department's decision to not raise an alarm in time has meant that the Panna genes may be lost forever R SREENIVASA MURTHY

by all notwithstanding. But to continue to aim for exponential growth as so many economists demand, and the manifestos envisage, is an unreal dream in a world of finite resources, based, as such growth is, on the use of fossil fuels. It works until you reach the end; or rather, until you reach the halfway point (see articles on Peak Oil). Then it does not. We have reached this point and now need to adjust 'wishes' to reality.

But this is our responsibility too; we should not just criticise the political parties. After all, to a large extent, their manifestos reflect the views of what they believe the electorate wants. Clearly they do not think mitigating climate change is much of a vote-winner. It is time we all made it so;

it is past time for us all to wake up to the looming abyss and recognise that now is the only time to demand, and to take, action. Science and reason tell us so. We must burst the fantasy bubble, lift our (ostrich) heads from the sand and look realistically at the 'Eearth' – as Bill McKibben renames our already changed planet – before our lives go the way of the Panna tigers.

**JOANNA VAN GRUISEN** is a wildlife photographer, conservationist and hotelier based near the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh



It doesn't cost the world to save the planet