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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



SHANKAR IYER

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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A New Beginning

Tadoba- Andhari Tiger Reserve is happy to present you its official newsletter Tadoba Diaries. Not many of you are aware that the management of wildlife areas, especially tiger reserves is a complex work wherein multiple stakeholders are involved. The work of its management has many aspects like protection of forest and wildlife, management of specialized habitats like grasslands, water availability, fire protection, preventing wildlife crime and most importantly earning goodwill of communities living in and around the park through eco-development and activities like eco-tourism.

However, for a visitor, it is mostly about tourism and sightseeing. Rarely does a visitor gets an opportunity to get educated and experience the behind-the-scenes activities of park management. A visitor is on a brief visit and is not able to appreciate seasonal changes and year-round happenings in the park. It is with the intention of filling this void in visitor experience, we are presenting you Tadoba Diaries. It will bring to you the stories of the stakeholders, most importantly the field staff/foot soldiers and the stories about the issues concerning protection and conservation. Apart from the hard work of the field staff, it will also reflect the unique experiences of our safari guides, naturalists, resort staff, wildlife lovers, visitors and celebrity guests. It will provide a platform to all the stakeholders to express themselves. It will also provide a channel of communication/feedback about visitor experiences.

It also gives me an opportunity to communicate with you all. I wish to inform you that we are preparing a 'Vision-2040' document with the support of all stakeholders to address a host of issues. National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has started an exercise to evaluate the functioning of tiger conservation foundations across the country. Having a long-term vision for the landscape has been considered as a sign of vibrant and purpose-oriented foundation. Taking a cue from this process, we began with the effort to make a vision document for TATR Conservation Foundation. Considering the overlap of activities of the Foundation and the TATR, it was but natural to extend the exercise to all activities and all the stakeholders. Therefore, now we are moving in the direction of preparing a vision document covering all aspects of management that will impact long term conservation of wildlife in this landscape and people's participation and support towards coexistence with wildlife.

This is not achievable in a short time. Hence we felt the need for guidance and new ideas from local communities, public representatives, wildlife managers, scientists, NGOs, and media persons. We've received encouraging responses. We hope that we will be able to put together a holistic document.

Looking forward to your continuous support.

A landscape photograph of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve showing a grassy field with several blue and orange birds in the foreground and a large tree trunk on the right.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar
Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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Celebrity Guest

A Spiritual Experience

- Supriya Sule
Member of Parliament

I texted Mrs. Supriya Sule, Member of Parliament requesting her ten minutes for a brief interview for Tadoba Diaries. Very next moment I received her call. "I just love Tadoba!", she began before I could utter a word. Extremely excited, she kept on talking about her relationship with Tadoba for next half an hour.

Excerpt-

Q: What makes you love TATR so much?

A: Every time I come here, I meet myself. No mobile. No hectic routine. No stress. You have to get up early to go for the safari, follow the Reserve's rules and enjoy the beauty of nature. The whole exercise gives a new flavour to the life. The pure oxygen in the air refreshes my brain. It gives a push to my creativity and I go back with a few fresh ideas. For me, Tadoba is not only about forest and tigers. It is a spiritual experience which connects me with the nature. It connects me with the God. It gives me real experience of inner peace.

Q: Where did this love come from?

A: It has come to me as a Sanskar from my father. I am very thankful to my parents who introduced me to Tadoba when I was only two years old. Since then this beautiful forest has become an integral part of my life. Every year during the winter session of Assembly at Nagpur, Pawar Saheb used take the entire family to Tadoba on off days. He always loved forests and wildlife. The baton has been passed on to the next generation also. Our entire family visits Tadoba every year. My daughter too is in love with wildlife.

(continue on page 10)...



SUPRIYA SULE & FAMILY

Tadoba Beyond Tigers



Honey Badger

In the moonlight; silver line glittered on the forest road,
Tiny pugmarks pasted on mud floor,
Months passed and years over year; One has never
seen them marching over,
He is a runner and hunts down the prey with power,
Some say honey badgers don't care; he has earned the
reputation being fierce.

Honey badgers, also known as ratels, are related to skunks, otters, ferrets, and other badgers. These voracious omnivores get their name from their fondness for feeding on honey and honeybee larvae. They also eat insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals, as well as roots, bulbs, berries, and fruits. The honey badger has a fairly long body, but is distinctly thick-set and broad across the back. Its skin is remarkably loose, and allows it to turn and twist freely within it.

Most honey badgers are active throughout the day, but near to human settlements they may prefer darkness. They are often seen alone, though it's not uncommon to spot mating pairs. Honey badgers mate all round the year and often have just one cub at a time.

If you are lucky, you may sight a Honey Badger at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



Dangerous Old Lady

Almost all of us have grown up chasing *Buddhike Baal...* translated as Old woman's hair. These are the hair like structures attached to the seeds of Rui, better known as Milk weed or *Calotropis*.

As kids, we probably were ignorant of the toxic nature of this plant, or else we would have kept a safe distance! It would surprise many of us now if we were told that the white sap was used to dip the tips to poison arrows. The presence of cardiac glycosides makes this plant sap a potentially dangerous cardio-toxic.

There is another very controversial use of this plant. Often snake bite cases are treated by traditional village healers. In some case of non-venomous snake bites, patients have been orally administered *Calotropis* extracts. The patients who would normally have only suffered pain from the bite have almost died of *Calotropis* poisoning!

Interestingly, this plant is poisonous for the cattle and insects also. On the other hand, many butterflies actually lay eggs on the leaves and their caterpillars grow up eating the leaves!

Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Safari

The KILL



We entered the Junona buffer gate for safari on November 2, 2021. It was a pleasant morning and we were hoping to see a tiger. Previous night we had heard deer calling-alarm calls- behind our home-stay. The tourists on night safari had sighted a tigress, popularly called 'Madhu'. Right now we were scanning the same area. At one place, we experienced a strong smell of territory marking. Then there were fresh pugmarks! That means she was somewhere nearby. We cautiously and slowly moved ahead and there she was! Madhu, mother of three cubs was taking a morning stroll.

She kept on walking and we drove behind her for almost 10 minutes. She stopped at a turn. We also stopped. She was looking alert. All of a sudden, she jumped to her right and entered the jungle. We immediately understood that she had done a kill. We moved a bit and saw her at the roadside with the kill in her mouth. It was a sambar fawn. Expecting her to come on the road, we moved back again. And she obliged! She not only came on to the road, but also started walking towards us. Head on with the kill in her mouth! The fawn seemed to be still alive. She might be taking it to her cubs to train them to make kill themselves. She kept on walking towards us for 17 to 18 minutes and then she got off the road. We waited patiently and she again came on the road for 7 to 8 minutes. I kept on clicking her. Ours was the only gypsy to witness this dramatic moment. When the other tourists came to know about it, their envious looks made us feel like celebrities!

Deep Kathikar
Tourist, Nagpur

Gypsy

The Dark Evening

I get goosebumps even today when I remember that evening in June 2016. I was a guide on a canter safari along with my colleague Shehnaz. We were on our way out of the forest after completing our safari. All of a sudden it became dark. The wind started blowing with great force. It started raining heavily. The wind was so powerful that it uprooted many trees. A big tree fell and our road got blocked. I had 22 tourists in my canter, of which ten were kids. Other safari vehicles had already gone ahead. The exit gate was 2-3 kms away. It was not possible to go back. There was no mobile network and we were stuck! What could we do? We were not able to think. Tourists' safety was our responsibility. But how to get the help?

Finally we took a decision. I and Shehnaz got down of the canter. My forest that always seemed so pleasant, now looked frightening as it was all dark around. We started walking towards the gate with our hearts beating abnormally fast. It was the territory of T-24 tigress. It was leopard habitat too. But we were more afraid of sloth bear



and wild boar than the tiger and leopard. We thought, we wouldn't be alive, if we faced any of them. We walked praying to our Gods, talking loudly to make animals aware of our presence. Somehow we reached gate. We narrated the whole story there and returned with help. When we reached the canter, the worried faces of the tourists were lit up with joy! They highly appreciated our bravery!

Kajal Nikode
Guide, Moharli Gate

On Duty

FOREST MARTYR

Nov 20, 2020 was the date finalized to start the All India Tiger Estimation at TATR. Before that the field officers and staff had undergone due training. They were to walk on foot in the forest for six days and note their observations. Each group had 3 to 4 persons and a wireless communication set. A vehicle with a team of forest staff was also kept ready to help these groups. Everything was in place.

That day, a young Forest Guard Swati Dhumane was on duty, just like all other well prepared forest guards. With her three male team members she chose her route for the first day - Kolara to compartment 97. They walked around four-and-a-half kilometers noting various observations on the way and suddenly they came across tigress sitting on the road! Now they were in a dilemma. Should we go ahead or go back? They decided to wait expecting the tigress to get off the road. They waited for 20-25 minutes. The tigress too kept sitting tight looking at them.

Finally the team decided to take a detour instead of going back or keep waiting. However there was no clear road to take a detour. So the three assistants got into the thick forest making a way and Swati Dhumane followed them. The forest was so thick that it was impossible to walk straight. They had to bend while walking. At one point of time, an assistant heard some movement. He looked back and his heart stopped. The tigress was just behind Swati. Hardly a meter away. Next moment the tigress jumped and caught Swati's neck. It happened within a flash of a second. Swati had no time to defend herself. The assistants started shouting, but the tigress did not loosen her grip on Swati and dragged her away.



Swati Dhumane
Forest Guard

Terrified, the assistants ran to the road shouting fanatically. They called for help on the wireless. The vehicle and the team kept ready to help was nearby. Deputy Director Nandkishore Kale who too was in the forest rushed to the spot. Within 10-15 minutes the search team entered the thickets. Disturbed with their presence and shouting the tigress left the spot. However, what the team could find was only the dead body of Swati...

The unfortunate incident highlights the difficulties and the risk involved in the work of the ground staff in the forest. Their work is no less than that of the soldiers guarding the borders of our country. It deserves the same respect. While paying homage to our martyr Forest Guard, let us recognize and appreciate the hard work and the efforts the ground staff is putting in to protect our forests, including your beloved Tadoba.

Shatanik Bhagwat
Divisional Forest Officer, TATR



Contribute to 'Tadoba Diaries'

Are you a forest department staff, tourist, guide, driver, working with a resort, managing a homestay or a community member from TATR vicinity? Do you want to join our effort to spread awareness on forest and wildlife conservation through 'Tadoba Diaries'? Please share your interesting photographs (not less than 4 MB) and experiences (not more than 250 words) on tadobadiaries2021@gmail.com. Your photograph/experience must be related to TATR only. The best content will be published with due credit.



Tribute to a Fallen Soldier

Like a lot of her colleagues, Forest Guard Swati Dhumane, had a soft spot for the tigress who would unfortunately, tragically, kill her as she walked in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve to survey its wildlife.



It was this affinity for her wards that probably kept her going in her job.

It wasn't that she didn't like her job, she did. Indeed, you could say she had inherited her love of the jungle from her father, also a forester. But being a Forest Guard was not a

cake walk. The hours were long, uncertain. In summers, fires raged and time had little meaning as they slogged to fight the flames that would snuff out the forest, and its animals. Such times, she never knew when she would reach home; most times when she did, her little daughter, Aaroshi, had fallen asleep waiting for her.

The work was gruelling, risky.

In the monsoons, vigilance was stepped up to tackle the increased risk from poachers. Along with her fellowmen, she waded through streams, trekked through long grasses and dense foliage. She walked the forest, treading the same path as tigers, bears, leopards, snakes and other wild creatures.

Sometimes, she did not know if she would reach home to her little daughter.

Yet, walk she did, for she knew it was this intensive monitoring and patrolling in the forest that kept its tigers and wildlife safe.

Only, one day, she did not reach home.

On 20th November 2021 Swati Dhumane was killed by a tigress she had sworn to save.

By all accounts, she was a committed worker, "who never shirked any task asked of her, and did everything with utmost sincerity." She was always up for any challenge—be it handling mobs in human-tiger conflict situations or fighting fires.

Swati laid her life on the line of duty, paid the ultimate sacrifice— as do so many forest rangers, guards and other forest labour across the country. Pitted against encroachers, wood smugglers, mining mafia, forest fires the life and the working conditions of forest staff are difficult and dangerous. India is considered the deadliest country globally for foresters with 162 killed between 2012 and 2017.

Most die unsung, their martyrdom rarely recognised. The best tribute we can pay Swati Dhumane is that her death not be in vain. India must stand by her forest staff, improve their working conditions and honour their sacrifices to protect the forests on which we are dependent.

Prerna Singh Bindra

Wildlife Conservationist and PhD Candidate,
University of Cambridge

Trapped in Camera



The Forest Department installs camera traps across TATR to monitor the movement of tigers and other wild animals. These camera traps capture many interesting pictures. A sloth bear scratching its back against the tree bark captured on one such camera trap.

Notice Board

Bird Week at TATR



TATR celebrated National Bird Week from 5th to 12th November and conducted an extensive survey on the avian bio-diversity of TATR. Nature guides and NGOs participated spontaneously along with the forest staff and officials. The systematic survey was undertaken using GPS technology and specially designed survey forms. The participants recorded different species of birds along with their GPS coordinates. They also noted the information on habitat types. The results of this survey are expected soon.



Eco-Tourism

Go Kayaking

Do you think wildlife safari is the only activity at TATR that takes you closer to nature? Well, there are a lot of other activities under our Eco-Tourism initiative. Most importantly, all of them are managed by the local communities!

One of the most enjoyable activities at Tadoba is Kayak Boating. You decide the pace, course and enjoy the thrill! Come to Moharli to watch birds, enjoy the sunrise, sun sets, or just to have a fun kayak boat ride. There are 15 kayaking boats at two locations. Village youth are trained to manage this activity and will welcome you and take care of your safety while you enjoy kayaking.

Location: Junona & Gondmohali - Belara buffer gates

Cost : Rs. 400 for two persons in one boat | **Ride Duration:** One hour

Booking: On the spot | **Contact:** 9579160778 / 8010539472





CONSERVATION **via** TOURISM

"Out of Clutter find Simplicity. From Discord, find Harmony. In the middle of Difficulty, there lies an Opportunity!"
– Albert Einstein

True to the above quote Tadoba has really come too far from what it was 20 years back. Once a neglected reserve, it has emerged as one of the best tiger reserves in India. Being a member of the tourism industry, I strongly believe that wildlife tourism and forest conservation are two sides of the same coin. A concept, an initiative or an incident can change the dynamics of their relationship. With respect to TATR, one tigress, T-12 popularly known as Maya proved to be a game changer. With her tourist-friendly sightings, she positioned herself as the showstopper.

I have witnessed how Maya achieved the status of the Queen of Tadoba and how she attracted the lakhs of tourists. Who can forget her fierce fight with her siblings for territory after untimely death of her mother? And her first kill of wild boar! She was hardly a sub-adult then. It took more than two hours for her to exhaust that boar and kill him finally! Her fierce and consistent persuasive attitude won hearts of wildlife lovers. After losing her litter to the wild dogs, she vengefully followed the pack of wild dogs and eliminated all the pack members one by one. Her mating with stronger tigers and protecting her cubs from other tigers by manipulating the stronger male is again a story in itself. One of the most revered stories of Maya is when she hunted a deer who had given an alarm call to entire herd about her presence. Leaving all other nearby deer in the herd, she hunted that specific deer considerably far from her! The tourists watching this drama were surprised and shocked! For more than a decade, Maya has done many such wonders.

Maya was born in 2010. Tadoba had only three resorts then and 100 odd locals were earning their livelihood from tourism. In 2021, more than 40 resorts are thriving along many gates of TATR and more than 2,000 families are supported directly or indirectly by tourism related activities. The number of tigers also increased from 19 in 2010 to 106 as per the 2018 census. The Reserve's area also increased from 625 to 1700 sq km. Thanks to the consistent efforts by dedicated forest officials and their visionary leadership, both tigers and tourism flourished simultaneously.

Flourishing tourism, in turn, contributed in conservation efforts by supporting forest department's various initiatives. The Reserve protects its flora and fauna and the tourism drives the economics around TATR. Going forward, conservation via responsible tourism will continue to be our motto.

Himanshu Bagde

General Manager
Tadoba Jungle Camp, Moharli Gate, TATR



A Spiritual Experience



SUPRIYA SULE & FAMILY

Q: What was the most memorable experience Tadoba offered you?

A: Those days elephant safari was on at Tadoba. Once I wandered through the forest consecutively three days, looking for the tiger. But could not sight one. On the third day evening, waiting on the banks of Tadoba Lake, I was feeling low. I had lost hope. Suddenly a tiger family emerged at the lake! After drinking water, the cubs started playing. I can't tell you how happy I was! It was a treat! And when I had an eye contact with the tigress, I could feel the affection, aura and energy within her! I can never forget that experience which made me speechless.

Q: Doesn't this happen with many tourists? They come here only to see tigers and get disappointed if they don't sight any.

A: Yes, I have seen it. Over the years, I have realized that looking for a tiger is as exciting as actually sighting one. Nobody can guarantee the sighting. But that's the fun. Tracking the big cat, looking for the signs of his existence, following the alarm calls...Isn't it thrilling! And finally when you get to see him, what will you compare that happiness with? Look into his eyes. See his elegance. Feel his aura. I think everyone should experience this game of hope and despair. You won't get this experience in watching a tiger at zoo.

Rafiq Mulla

Senior Journalist, Mumbai

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Super Click



SWAGATAM! We not only alert other animals on tiger movement, but also keep watch on our beloved forest. Always looking forward to welcome you at TATR.

“NO PLASTIC PLEASE”

Single use plastic (SUP) also called as disposable plastic is usually used for packaging and include items intended to be used only once before it is thrown away. Grocery bags, food packaging, water bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery are made of SUPs. Such items thrown irresponsibly cause a big menace and pose a serious threat to environment and wildlife. According to an estimate based on a survey, every year approximately 32 tons of plastic waste is generated only through consumption of 13.93 lacs of packaged water bottles in entire region of TATR including the resorts and hotels situated therein. Hence TATR management has taken an important step to make the Reserve plastic-free.

TATR management has banned SUPs inside the Reserve and appealed to all tourists, resort owners and local residents to stop using the SUPs. The Act has a provision for penalty of Rs.5,000 to 25,000 for littering the SUPs in public places near the Reserve. Packaged plastic water bottles are banned. The tourists are expected to use steel, glass or good quality plastic bottles for drinking water and stop carrying meals and snack in plastic inside the Reserve. The resorts in the vicinity too have supported this initiative.

The ban is being strictly implemented from the beginning of the tourism season i.e. Oct 1. Automatic water vending machines have been installed at Moharli and Kolara gates. Water coolers are being installed at the gates which do not have this facility. Packaged glass water bottles also are made available by ZEWA. The water is sourced from Tadoba forest and zero waste filtration technology is used to keep all the essential minerals intact which are present in the natural water.

So next time you visit TATR, please do not carry SUPs in any form and be a part of the effort to protect environment and wildlife from plastic menace.





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