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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



PRITAM GURAV

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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COUNTING TIGERS

Green Desk

Dear Reader,

We are all now familiar with the declaration of India's tiger numbers every four years. The figures are usually announced on the Global Tiger Day, 29th July by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change through National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun. This quadrennial exercise is a result of the widest ranging and systematic sampling of all of India's potential tiger bearing habitats and is known as All India Tiger Estimation Protocol.

Counting tigers involves four components or phases. Phase- I is an intensive six-

day exercise. It involves extensive movement on foot for gathering data regarding different signs of carnivores and herbivores in a sampling unit called 'Forest Beat' on specially marked transect lines. Phase- II is entirely based on remotely gathered data such as satellite images. In phase- III, camera traps are used extensively and strategically in tiger bearing habitats. Phase- IV is intensive monitoring of source populations of tigers in Tiger Reserves.

In fact, so extensive is the exercise, that in its fourth iteration in 2018, it was recognized by Guinness World Records for being 'the largest camera trap wildlife survey' globally. It was the most comprehensive to date, in terms of both resources and data amassed. Camera traps (outdoor photographic devices fitted with motion sensors that start recording when an animal passes by) were placed in 26,838 locations across 141 different sites and surveyed an effective area of 121,337 square kilometres. In total, the camera traps captured 34,858,623 photographs of wildlife (76,651 of which were of tigers and 51,777 were of leopards; the remainder were other native fauna). Each tiger has a distinct stripe pattern. With the use of stripe-pattern-recognition software 2,461 individual tigers (excluding cubs) were identified using (Jhala et al., 2020).

Along with an unprecedented camera trap usage, the 2018 'Status of Tigers in India' assessment also conducted extensive foot surveys that covered 522,996 km (324,975 miles) of trails and sampled 317,958 habitat plots for vegetation and prey dung. It is estimated that the total area of forest studied was 381,200 square km (147,181 square miles) and cumulatively the collection and review of data equated to nearly 620,795 labour-days.

We, at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, have recently completed the survey as per ALTE protocol against all the challenges of moving on foot in a high-density tiger habitat. It was not without a major setback as we lost one of our brave hearts- Smt. Swati Dhumane, a forest guard, who was attacked by a well known tigress while she was conducting the survey in November last year. We had to suspend the exercise due to safety concerns but we could later resume the exercise and have now completed it without any untoward incidences. We owe this to the commitment and immense courage of our frontline staff who covered a total of 3,197.48 km on foot in 110 beats. A similar exercise was carried out in neighbouring Gadchiroli district, a huge tiger habitat bordering Chhattisgarh and Telangana, in spite of its own set of challenges. The data so gathered is now set for analysis at the specially designated 'Tiger Cell' of National Tiger Conservation Authority at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

The highlight of this cycle of ALTE is that the entire exercise is being carried out digitally, in line with the theme of Digital India. This will help in faster and error free analysis and more accurate estimation. Nowhere in the world is such an extensive and sophisticated exercise carried out with such regularity for monitoring wildlife populations. Needless to mention, the snapshot of India's wildlife populations revealed through this exercise in the past, has led to many policy initiatives that has helped their management. The increase in tiger and other wildlife numbers is a testimony to it.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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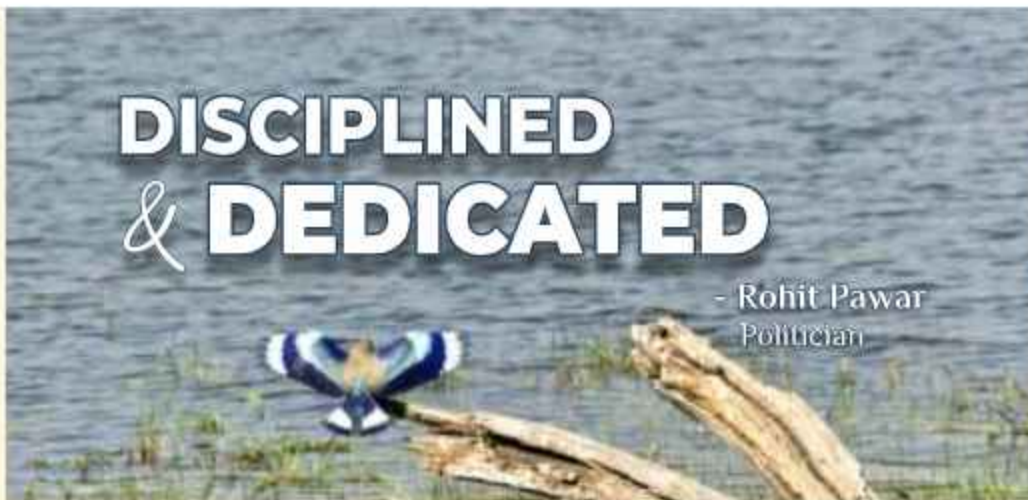
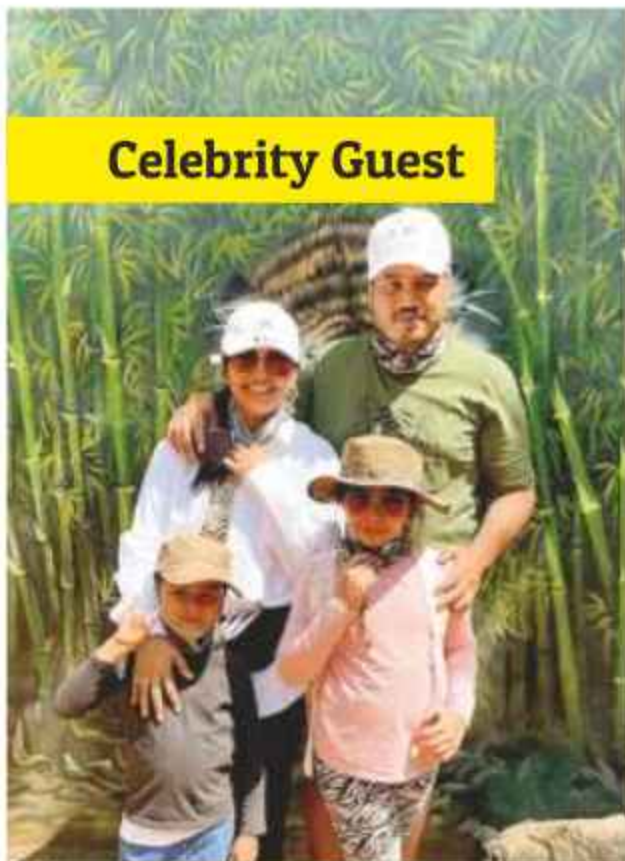
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Celebrity Guest

DISCIPLINED & DEDICATED

- Rohit Pawar
Politician



While veteran politician Sharad Pawar's love for TATR is well-known, it is heartening that his entire family, including the younger generation, are following in his footsteps. MLA Rohit Pawar, the grandson of Sharad Pawar's elder brother's son visited Tadoba in March 2022 with his wife Kunti, daughter Anandita, son Shivansh, mother Sunanda and father Rajendra Pawar. Tadoba Diaries spoke to Rohit & Kunti Pawar at Limban Resort near Khutwanda gate.

Q: How was your trip to Tadoba?

A: It was our first visit to Tadoba and it was a fantastic! We thoroughly enjoyed our stay and the safaris. The best part is, kids enjoyed it the most. We were pleasantly surprised to see them get up early morning, excited about the safari. They were curious, and answering their queries enriched our knowledge as well!

Also, we found people here to be warm and caring. The hospitality is amazing.

Q: Tell us something about your safari experience.

A: We could see spotted deer, sambar, barking deer, wild boars, and a sloth bear. We were lucky to see a leopard twice. We also saw tigress T-24 i.e. Sonam's two cubs. The tigress was sitting in tall grass. Hence, we could only spot her ears. The best sighting was of the male tiger T-103, called Rudra. We saw his pugmarks first. Then our guide and driver tracked him, following the pugmarks, alarm calls and other cues. We found him sitting in the lake water. Then he got up, growled and walked on the road. It was a good 10-15 minute sighting!

Q: You have been to other tiger reserves in India. How different did you find Tadoba from the others?

A: We loved the dedication and discipline maintained here at Tadoba. For one, plastic is not allowed inside the park. During one of our safaris, a driver saw a piece of garbage in the forest. He quickly got down and picked it up. We were very impressed! The guides and drivers know their job well. Unlike some other reserves, VIPs are strictly not allowed to enter the restricted area of the forest. We really appreciated it. Tadoba has immense tourism potential. We need to put in more efforts to promote it on national and international platforms.

Q: Would you like to visit Tadoba again?

A: Certainly! In fact we are planning to visit every year. Next on our wish list is Blackie – the black leopard!

Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



Tadoba Beyond Tigers

PEST CONTROL

My job as field biologist with Tadoba means long hours in the field, and I often return home late which provides a window to the beautiful nightlife of the forest. It is not just the bats that are active at night, not day? majority of mammal families are nocturnal or diurnal that are active at night, not. Civet is the most common argus-eyed you sight during the night drives. There are two species of civet in Tadoba - Palm Civet and Small Indian Civet.

Some of you staying in resorts or homestays near the forest must have wondered about the sound coming from the rooftop. You might have found half-eaten fruits littered on the terrace or? in the courtyard, gardens... Often, such mysterious sounds may turn into imaginary haunted moments. Well, there is no ghost, but the artist that creates these moments is a Palm Civet. It is both terrestrial and arboreal, showing a nocturnal activity pattern with peaks between late evenings until after mid-night.

While the Asian Palm Civet has blackish fur, the Small Indian Civet has brownish grey fur with dark brown bands on the back and spots on the sides. Small Indian Civet is nocturnal, terrestrial and insectivorous. It lives in holes in the ground, under the rock or thick bushes.

Civets are commonly called civet cats, but civets are not cats. They are more closely related to mongooses than to cats. Civets play an important role in seed dispersal. They swallow whole seeds while eating fruits and then defecate them, thereby helping to strengthen and improve the floral biodiversity of the forests. They also serve as a form of biological pest control by feeding on rats and pest insects, thereby quashing their populations. Hence, they are farmers' friends. Unfortunately, habitat loss and poaching have threatened their population in our country.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



TREE OF LOVE

Tamala tree's fresh leaves absorb the strong scent of deer musk. Flame tree petals, shining nails of love, tear at young hearts.

This is a very beautiful dedication of the Palas flowers, to the red nails of Kamadev, which wound the hearts of the lovers. While these lines from Gita Govinda pay the perfect literary tribute to the lovers, I have seen a very similar attachment that numerous birds, fluttering insects and even people like me, have towards the blooms of the Flame of the Forest (*Butea Monosperma*). Flowering months of February and March transform Tadoba and other Central Indian forests into a riot of orange and vermillion, setting them on an apparent fire! This is when innumerable birds are attracted to these trees, converting them into singing trees.

The fire in the flowers was also believed to reside in the wood, making it an integral part of the Agnihotra, the fire ritual. The flowers have long been used to prepare colours for Holi and for dying cloth. The leaves are made into plates called as Patravali used to serve the meals on. In a tradition, to be a son-in-law you have to pass a test of making good quality Patravali!

Did you also know that the Battle of Plassey was fought in the village of Palashi, named after these very spectacular Palas flowers? The name Palashi however got anglicised into Plassey and we all forgot the beautiful flowers that had originally lent its name to the place.

Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Safari

THE BEAUTY & THE BEAST

On a late evening in Tadoba last month, this bold sub-adult tigress walked towards us amidst the dense bamboo forest. Her colours are in perfect contrast to the red soil of Tadoba, as if she was walking on a red carpet! As we were admiring this magnificent scene, we were interrupted by a rustle to our left from where moments later emerged the gentle beast of the forest, a big black sloth bear.

It is impossible to describe how I felt. An emotion I had never felt before: Thrill, anxiety, excitement, all at once... and the big question, how would this turn out? The tigress had by now spotted the bear and was extremely alert as she sat on the path, carefully observing his every move. As the bear grazed and moved towards the tigress, she changed her stance to come into a crouching position.

The bear and the tigress were now face to face. This was unbelievable, what I was witnessing. It is an experience, I can never forget, a memory that I will always cherish. The raw reality of the jungle right in front of my eyes!

The tigress now was absolutely still with only her tail swaying as she stared at the bear who just then jumped and stood on his hinds in all his glory. Then he did it again trying to assert his dominance over a very surprised tigress who was taken aback by this act. At this moment, I was sure that this would turn into an encounter. But to everyone's relief, this sub-adult tigress who was still learning the ways of the jungle, decided not to pursue ending this episode peacefully. The bear walked away and the tigress slept at that very spot.

As for me, I am still in awe of what I witnessed!

Naman Agarwal
Tourist, Sitapur, U.P.



Gypsy

BATTLE OF VIGOUR

I was on an evening safari with a group of foreigner guests. We entered through Agarzari buffer gate, and went to check for tigress T-52, popularly known as Chhoti Madhu. Driving through her territory, we reached water body no 9. After waiting for a while, she appeared from the forest. She walked on the road marking her territory by spraying urine. We were observing her. All of a sudden, she stopped and started smelling the air. She became restless as she sensed something odd.

I could feel the change in her body language and it struck me that another

tigress had done a kill in that area a couple of days back! I knew that Tigress T-60, popularly known as Sharmili had crossed over her territory, and had made a kill in Chhoti Madhu's territory. Sharmili had four-month old cubs. Was she around? Were her cubs with her? I did not know. But Chhoti Madhu seemed to have got a sense. With an aggressive posture she walked towards the bushes near the water body.

Within a few seconds, we heard the loud noise of tigers' roaring. I could make out that a fight had erupted in the bushes. Hearing that sound itself was enough to frighten a weak-hearted person. We tried imagining what would be happening inside! After 10-15 minutes, the roaring increased and the two tigresses came out in the open! Chhoti Madhu and Sharmili were fighting ferociously. One was trying to protect her territory, while the other was securing her cubs. Chhoti Madhu was hardly four or five years old, while Sharmili was 11 or 12 years old. Yet Chhoti Madhu fought tooth and nail. Both the tigresses got several injuries on their bodies, but none of them was ready to retreat. This battle of vigour went on for 45 minutes. Finally, Sharmili gave in and walked towards her own territory. Chhoti Madhu rested for a while and continued her territory marking.

My guests were extremely excited to witness the fierce fight between two tigresses. To me, both were the winners as Chhoti Madhu succeeded in guarding her territory and Sharmili protected her cubs.

Manoj Bhalavi
Guide, Agarzari Gate





THE LIGHTNING STRIKE





The customary drive from the Kolara gate through the Jamni meadows and the Panderpauni waterholes, betrayed no signs of movement of the tiger or any other carnivores. Our collective intuition, however, led us towards the Navegaon gate as Maya was lately seen here. Ten minutes into the drive, we observed scores of herbivores grazing along the way with an occasional sounder of Wild Boars alongside startling newborns in toe. To our delight, we came across a pair of courting wild dogs on the road alongside a depleting rivulet. Oblivious of their surroundings, the usually vigilant dholes seemed unaware of not only our presence but also of something else that lurked nearby! Whilst trying to capture this unique animal behaviour, we noticed a slight flutter in the grass ahead. As if almost on cue, the hair on my back stood up as the reality of the situation dawned on me! I was sure I saw stripes!!

Camouflaged perfectly, she lay silently waiting for the unsuspecting couple to move into striking distance. With feverish anticipation, I hurriedly set up my camera to record this moment of remarkable natural history that was about to unfold in front of my eyes.

What happened next will be etched in our memories forever. Synonymous to a lightning strike, the tigress leaped towards one of the dholes with unbridled fury. A fraction of a second and a paw swipe later, she delivered a deathly bite to the dhole's jugular. What lasted a few seconds, transformed into a memory for life!

Sudeep Mehta

Owner, The Bamboo Forest Safari Lodge
Kolara Gate, TATR



Trapped in Camera



"PRECIOUS CATCH!" A Leopard carrying an Asian Palm Civet kill. The image was captured on a camera trap set up by the Forest Department in TATR.

Eco-Tourism

NIGHT SAFARI

You might have visited Tadoba in broad daylight. But have you ever enjoyed its beauty at night? Would you like to experience the thrill of those shining eyes staring at you in the dark forest? Tadoba buffer presents you this unique opportunity to explore the forest at late evenings. A three-hour safari will help you understand the nightlife in the forest.

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Booking: Online@mytadoba.org



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On Duty

FACING THE TIGRESS

August 20, 2021. I will never forget this day. I was leading a team of 11 forest workers (Van-majoor) in Moharli core area of TATR. We were on a mission to remove an invasive plant called Lantana. This plant inhibits regeneration of native species of plant on which the herbivores thrive and thus disrupts the ecosystem and biodiversity in the forest. Hence, we frequently undertake special drives to eradicate Lantana. That day, I was supervising as my team was busy doing its job of lantana removal. I left my place, briefly, to guide a worker. Suddenly, a tiger appeared from the bamboo thickets and stood discreetly staring at us! I was blissfully unaware of this dramatic development till a worker shouted frantically, "Tiger! Tiger!!" I looked back and my heart froze! It was a tigress aged around two years and was standing exactly the same place where I had been standing just a moment before! This shook me. But the tigress, unperturbed by the presence of 12 human beings, was boldly looking at us.

It took me a few seconds to come out of my initial shock, and to get alerted to the danger my team was in. I immediately gathered all the workers together and all of us started shouting loudly to shoo the tigress away. To my surprise, against all the learning that I had in my career, the tigress started marching towards us as soon as we began shouting! She stopped when we stopped shouting! She repeated this pattern every time we shouted. I instructed my team members to stay together and we started slowly, quietly marching backwards without any hasty movement.

Meanwhile, I called my Round Officer VK Kosankar and RFO SK Shende over the wireless and informed them about the trouble we were in. They immediately left with more men and two vehicles.

While I was trying to keep the team together and boost their courage, two of the team members panicked and tried to run. They stumbled upon me and I fell down. Thankfully,



the tigress did not charge at us. I stood up and somehow calmed them down, got everybody together and kept moving backwards. The tigress followed us.

The drama continued for half-an-hour. We reached a tar road, but there was no relief. The tigress also came on the road! Much to our relief, my seniors reached there at the same time to rescue us. All of us quickly hopped into the vehicles. My bike was left in the forest where we were working. I wanted to go and get that back. But the tigress sat in front of our vehicles and blocked our road! Half-an-hour later, she got up and went towards a canal nearby, allowing us to leave the place. We thank God and our rescue team for saving our lives.

That close encounter taught me a lesson for life - Never take anything for granted while dealing with wildlife. Courage and presence of mind is the best defence that you have in such a situation.

Meanwhile, the young tigress was later captured after getting into a serious human-wildlife conflict situation.

Pawan Mandulwar
Forest Guard, Moharli Core, 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.





Special

SONG OF WILDERNESS

I knew that music is the voice of the soul. In Tadoba, I realized that it resides in the wilderness. The flora and fauna exude the melody and enchants the planet with the chords and vibrations of their various tunes. Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve provides the ideal natural stage for the concert of nature. The birds and the animals of Tadoba are the real artists of Nature!

After a busy schedule in Nagpur performing before an audience of thousands, it was time for some much-needed rest. The best regale of locations for the same was unanimously suggested by every other Nagpurkar and many other friends. A jungle safari in Tadoba was also long pending in my wish list and I could not miss the chance being so close. We reached Tadoba in three hours from Nagpur. The stay and safaris were already arranged by my friends. So, I spent a sleepless adrenaline filled night waiting for the break of dawn for my first safari in Tadoba. It was the same rush I was feeling which I felt after my four-five hour long performances on stage.

The forests of Tadoba spread across the horizon in almost every direction my eyes could pan. On one side was the expanse of the Irai water body which again seems to merge into the forests on the other bank. The chill in the air and the cloudy skies made the open jeep ride very pleasant on a typical March morning which would otherwise be hot and sunny. What followed next was a jamboree of wildlife and wilderness. The predominantly bamboo forests of Tadoba welcomed us to the cacophony of birds and the rutting call of the spotted deer. This was occasionally interrupted by the distant alarm calls of the langurs and the sambar deer.



The winding roads of the forest were lined with the Palash flowers and the fragrance of the mahua fruits intoxicating the morning air. No wonder the sloth bear was one of the first animals we encountered. There was never a dull moment with the forest being a safe haven for the numerous species of birds and animals. And then there was the show stopper. A tigress with three cubs not older than three months! It was a pure bliss seeing the creation or art of God in the form of nature!

While our morning safari was in the core zone, we chose to visit the buffer areas in the afternoon. The so-called unlucky number 13 also known as a 'baker's dozen' was the exact number of tigers I saw in a day's safari at Tadoba. Whoa! Quite an enviable beginner's luck you will agree. Indeed, one of the most memorable days in my life. My friend Dr. Jaydeep Das, a wildlife expert and his son Arenjay, were there all along so willingly, patiently, and seamlessly breaking down, interpreting and explaining these intricately interwoven musical pieces of nature, in a way so easily comprehensible to a novice like me. This made the mind-boggling experience even more interesting and memorable.

Tadoba is like a plethora of raw nature and it is the way it is because of the tremendous conservation efforts taken by the Forest Department and the stakeholders including the locals. I was pleasantly overawed by the knowledge of the guides and the overall hospitality of the resorts and the naturalists. Tadoba is a blockbuster hit album in terms of a theatre personality like myself. This is a song I will sing again and again. The song of nature and wilderness.

Sairam S. Iyer
Singer

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Super Click



CUBS' DAY OUT! Tadoba is currently blessing tourists with the glimpses of new cubs of its famous tigresses. T-24 (Sonam) and her cubs playing in the water and T-82's (Junabai) cubs following their mother on the stroll.



Foot Soldier

FEARLESS PATIRAM

Patiramji's association with Tadoba-Andhari run deep. He grew up in Navegaon village located in the core critical habitat of the tiger Reserve. As a child, he has memories of tigers walking through their fields and along the paths in the village! Patiram started working for the forest department as casual labour when just out of his teens. He did all manners of work: line katai or preparing forest breaks (gaps in vegetation) to prevent fire from spreading, and as the season turned dry, perching on machans to keep an eye out for fires. He spent months in anti-poaching camps regularly patrolling the forest. On one such patrol, some 15-years-ago, a metal jaw snare clamped onto his foot. This is a simple—but deadly—device used by poachers who place them in the undergrowth on well-worn animal paths. The snares trap unsuspecting animals as they step into them. Caught in its steely grip, the animals suffer a slow agonising death, or if still alive are brutally killed by poachers who come to retrieve their "kill".

In this case, it was Patiram who was trapped, but he lived to tell the tale. His shoe bore the brunt and his compatriots rushed to free him on hearing his desperate calls for help. This inadvertent misadventure also saved other wildlife, as an extensive combing operation by the forest department yielded a number of carefully concealed snares.

Patiramji has other stories to tell. "I was stalked by Katrina," he announces. Katrina, in this case, being a tigress, grandmother of the reigning queen 'Maya', and so named after actor Katrina Kaif for her lithe beauty! "I kept calm, was quiet and did not turn my back. Reverse gear

chalaya," he says.

Years of life in the forest has taught him to sense an animal's intent by the cues they offer. "If you are attuned, you can sense if an animal it intends to attack. Unkiankhon par dhyani do, an animal's eyes mirrors its mood." As per this Tadoba-veteran, tigers especially, usually warn you-- a sharp flick of a tail, bristling hair, a low growl. They may mock charge, just stopping short.

If bears rise up to stand on two feet—it signals trouble.

"Whatever be," Patiramji advises, don't give in to fear, hold your ground, keep calm and don't ever show your back to an animal."

Such wisdom is born out of years of walking the forest and observing animals; and has saved Patiramji, and hundreds of other frontline forest staff soldiers who traverse

forests on foot among tigers, bears, leopards and other potentially dangerous animals.

He knows no fear, and says that, "I can walk through the forest alone, armed only with my lathi."

Navegaon village shifted out of Tadoba in 2012-13 to 'new Navegaon' a few kms from the park. Patiramji now works as a tourist guide. He enjoys showing 'our Tadoba' to tourists, and meeting different people. He says he has the best of 'both worlds' – his job keeps alive his bond to the forest; while their new village is linked to a highway, and has all the facilities lacking in the remote forest.



Prerna Singh Bindra

Wildlife Conservationist,
PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge



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