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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



AMIT KRISHNA

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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More Space to Tigers

Green Desk

Dear Reader,

It is well known that tigers are territorial animals and require vast areas for breeding and exhibiting their range of behavior. In fact, tiger bearing capacity is a function of good prey density, extent of area available for establishing territories and extent of human disturbance. Scientific guidelines suggest that for a viable population of tigers to survive, an inviolate area of 800-1,000 Sq. km is required. Human habitation negatively affects the potential of all tiger-bearing forest areas. It is due to these dynamics of habitat quality, that the process of voluntary relocation of villages from within the core critical habitats of tiger

reserves was started and supported by Project Tiger (Now National Tiger Conservation Authority).

Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve today comprises of 625 Sq. km of forest area (116 Sq. km of Tadoba National Park and 509 Sq. km of Andhari Sanctuary). Around 750 families of five villages (one partly) have voluntarily relocated since 2007 onwards vacating 482 ha of land within the tiger reserve. But more than the land that becomes part of the reserve, what significantly contributes to habitat recovery is the easing of human influence and biotic pressure from vast areas surrounding the villages. It would not be incorrect to say that no tiger reserve can realize its full ecological potential unless the biotic pressure exerted by human disturbances is completely removed.

It is important to understand that the relocation of villages is intended not only for ecological objectives, but also from the human welfare perspective.

The rising aspirations of people living within the forest areas cannot be met fully within the constraints of legal framework which places several constraints of communication and limitations on development of public infrastructure. Therefore, it becomes all the more important for villages located in remote areas of the tiger reserve to get relocated to their place of choice, leaving behind inviolate areas for wildlife.

It is in this context, that the recent order of the Supreme Court, on 15.12.2021, allowing the relocation of Rantalodhi, the last village located inside TATR's core area is significant. A 2019 directive of the Hon. SC had held that the forest land used for relocation outside the reserve could not be more than the land that the Protected Area gets within the reserve as a result of relocation. Although the directive of the Hon SC was in right spirit, the court has accepted the significance of the area within the Tadoba- Andhari Tiger Reserve as compared to the forest area outside the reserve. This has paved the way for making entire core area of the tiger reserve inviolate from human disturbances. In the next step, eight villages close to the boundary of core areas, will also be studied for relocation to expand the area of the reserve to match the ecological requirement of tigers for long-term survival.

The government and the management of the tiger reserve through the Tiger Conservation Foundation is also making efforts to reduce intensive agricultural practices and promote community nature conservancies, that can further boost the area expansion for tigers and other wildlife. Such conservancies can provide alternate income to farmers who lose considerable share of their crop to wild animals.

It is our endeavor that the sacrifices of the people who are making way for tigers by relocating themselves does not go in vain. The land vacated by villagers are being scientifically restored as grasslands and are already home to abundant prey population. We have also recorded tiger presence in these areas!

At the same time a positive impact is being made to the lives of relocated families by providing them the best of facilities for better education, health and other civic amenities and faster means of communication.



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

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Celebrity Guest



Mesmerized!

— Girija Oak
Actress



How did you feel when you visited TATR for the very first time? Mesmerized? Well, so was Girija Oak, the famous actress. Girija was at Tadoba in December 2021 with Kabir, her eight-year-old son. We caught up with the Taare Zameen Par, Shor in the City and Ladies Special fame actress at Moharli when she was back from a safari. Excited, Girija spoke to us at length about her enchanting experience.

Q: How was your safari? What all did you sight?

A: It was simply great! It was very well organized and properly guided. We saw half a dozen crocodiles around the lake. One of them had its mouth wide open all the time we were there. We saw sloth bear while it crossed the road. It stopped for a while, stared at us before moving ahead, and this experience was special! Unlike my experience in other parks, here we got to see sambar and spotted deer at a close distance. I had been to the Valencia Bioparc (a zoological park) in Spain in 2019. I saw the wild animals in the simulated habitat there. I have realized now that the animals are different in the wild as against the ones in the zoo, and what you feel when you see them is also different. They are free, and wild and that feels good! Tadoba helped me understand this difference.

Q: Could you spot a tiger?

A: Yes! We had two safaris and spotted tiger in both! The first day, we saw a tigress lazing on the grass a little far away. With binoculars we could see her through the bushes and bamboo. A few tourists saw her crossing the road. A few other sighted another tigress with cubs. We were not so lucky. However, there was so much excitement in the air. The tourists present there stood alert, whispering, pointing fingers, clicking pictures... and me? Half of my attention was on Kabir to make sure he did not scream in excitement! He was so thrilled. Yet he contained his emotions. Full marks to him for that!

The second day, we got T- 24 tigress, popularly known as Sonam on the road! It was only us who could watch her cat walk exclusively for 15 minutes! Such a beautiful animal!

Q: What made you bring your son to Tadoba?

A: I was born in Nagpur and I often come to the city to visit my family members or attend functions. I was in Nagpur for a wedding, and visiting Tadoba was on my wish list. I had heard about many good things like the growing population of tigers here, superb sightings, and the efforts by the park management. So, I decided to grab this opportunity. I wanted to introduce Kabir to the forest and wildlife. I would like him to develop a curiosity and interest in nature, so wants to keep coming back. I love traveling with him; but due to pandemic he has been mostly homebound for the past two years. I also believe it is important for parents to develop a sense of responsibility in their children, that they understand that there are sensitive areas where you just can't make noise, demand chips or throw garbage. Then, you take them to havens like Tadoba to implement what you preach.

(continue on page 10)...

Tadoba Beyond Tigers



Dog That Doesn't Bark

Tadoba is home to three sympatric carnivores Tiger, Leopards and Wild Dogs. Sporting a long, bushy tail and lean frame the Dhole or Indian Wild Dog is a stunning creature with a short muzzle and tawny or red-brown fur coat. It may not have a powerful jaw like a tiger or a leopard, but it is famous for being a fierce hunter. Dholes are social animals that live in packs and prey upon medium-to-large-sized animals like sambar, chital and rarely even gaur. Dholes have been known to attack even tigers when the situation demands!

They don't bark. Instead, they make whistles call "Koo - Koo" for long-distance communication, such as getting the pack together after a hunt or waking up members from mid-day naps. This whistle earned them a nickname 'The Whistling Dogs'.

In Tadoba, their packs have varying numbers of members up to 20 members. They are mostly sighted during dawn and dusk.

They also defecate together which help them to mark their home range. Dholes show a very remarkable behaviour trait for a wild animal by allowing the youngest member of the pack to eat first. Like our domestic dogs, dholes are often seen eating grass and herbs to get rid of endoparasite. As stray and feral dogs from human settlements sometimes venture into the forest, the Dholes face a high risk of diseases like canine distemper and parvovirus transmission.

Astonishingly, an animal that is so agile, cooperative, and successful at taking down prey is facing extinction, with less than 2,500 left in the wild.

So next time you meet this ghost of Central Indian forests, consider yourself lucky.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



Meet a Good Ghost!

If you have explored the Central Indian forests, on a full moon night, I am sure you would have seen the dancing ghost... I am not a believer in Ghosts, but am actually in love with them.

It is impossible that you would have missed seeing the handsome Karu tree. In the green forest, its bright white trunk stands out with its characteristic dancers pose, giving it the interesting name of 'Dancing Ghost' tree. You have to be in Tadoba forest, on a full moon night to understand the real meaning of this eerie name.

Another interesting name for this tree is the 'naked tree' of the forest, for its characteristic bark shedding nature. In monsoons, the tree is adorned with a fresh green bark. As the heat increases, the bark starts to change colour towards pink and eventually with the summer approaching, even this starts to peel off, transforming the tree into complete white!!!

Karu or Karaya Gum tree (*Sterculia urens*) is a very useful tree for the adivasis of Central India. Its gum has multiple medicinal usages such as denture adhesive, laxatives and also diabetic medicines. Pharma companies buy the Karaya gum in large quantities from the adivasis. Every year approximately 3,000 to 4,000 tons of Karaya gum is processed.

Sterculia, the genus part in the scientific name, comes from the Roman God of stench Sterquilinus, attributed to the stinking flowers. The specific part of the name, *Urens* indicates the terribly spiny fruits which enclose the Karu seeds. The unripe fruit is almost impossible to handle, but not for langurs. I have often seen them relishing the seeds!

Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Safari

Tiger on **The Rock**



female and her three tiny cubs! Those two-month-old cuties were in playful mood. That was the first time I had seen cubs so young! Ours was the only gypsy present there. Maintaining a safe distance, I clicked a few pictures. Watching us, the tigress came on the road. By staying still and calm, I think we conveyed that we did not mean any harm to the cubs. I guess she got the message that we were safe, convinced and called her cubs. After a while, we sighted the cubs crossing the road. It was the best sighting I have ever had. Many thanks to Tadoba!

Aditya Mangrolia
Tourist, Nagpur

Gypsy

Training to **Kill**

Being a safari guide, I have seen tigers, leopards and many other animals in the jungle many times. I have been witness to many -almost--unbelievable incidences. What stands out is one unforgettable summer day in 2015. I was on an afternoon safari with guests in the Kolsa range. The guests were very keen to see a tiger. But we did not sight one in the first half of our safari. When we reached Ambeutara area, we saw a few tourists taking pictures of an Indian Gaur. The gaur, a full-grown female was standing in the grass. We also stopped there to see her. My guests started clicking her pictures. The gaur stood still as if she was modeling for the cameras.

All of a sudden, a tiger cub jumped on the back of the gaur! All of us present there were stunned with this unexpected happening. It must have been about 14-15 months old.. We could see its sharp nails cutting through the skin of the gaur. What surprised us more was that the gaur did not move even when attacked. Then came the next surprise—another cub joined the attack! Again, there was no reaction from the gaur. And guess what? Another cub jumped on the back of the gaur! Now it was a three versus one fight. We could not believe that it was happening in

We entered the Navegaon Ramdegi gate for a morning safari. Excited to have seen a male tiger's pugmarks as soon as we entered the park, we quickly started to follow them towards the Umarkhora area. As we lost the track after some distance decided to explore the park. Little did we know that luck was smiling at us! Later, we would not only spott that male tiger, but also had an opportunity to capture his royal walk towards the water!

While we were looking for the male, we heard the news about the 'Jharni tigress'. She had done a kill and was in the area along with her cubs. Till then no one knew how many cubs she had. As we reached the main road, we came to know that some tourists had sighted three cubs crossing the road. A few gypsies were waiting for them. We thought that the cubs would hesitate to come out due to the presence of vehicles. Hence, we moved forward on our journey to track the male, leaving behind those waiting gypsies. We had not gone too far, when suddenly, we noticed a movement on the black rocks. It was the Jharni



front of us! All three cubs were trying to bite the gaur in every possible way. But why was the gaur not retaliating? Very soon we got the answer. The gaur helplessly collapsed on the spot. At that moment, we realized that a tigress had the gaur's leg in her mouth. Clearly, she was teaching hunting skills to her cubs. The tallgrass had perfectly camouflaged the big cat – and so nobody could see that the gaur's leg was locked in the tigresses' powerful jaws that made her immobile even under attack from three cubs. As soon as the gaur fell down, the four tigers together launched the final, fatal attack.

Akshay Tiwade
Safari Guide, Junona Gate

On Duty

Close Encounter!

23 June 2021. It was 6.30 in the morning. I received a call from my Range Forest Officer (RFO) Manisha Jadhav Madam. She told me that a tigress had attacked a villager near Palasgaon and we had to move quickly before she enters the village. I was working with the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) of TATR then. I reached the spot along with my team of 13-14 members within half-an-hour. RFO Manisha Madam was leading us.

As soon as we reached Palasgaon, we noticed that a crowd of around 2,000 villagers had gathered there. Some of them were angry. Some just wanted to have glimpse of the tigress. Our first task was to disperse the crowd. We wanted to save the tigress from the villagers, and also to save the villagers from the tigress. With the help of the police, we somehow managed to push the crowd away from the spot.

We knew that the tigress was a mother with two cubs-- fortunately they were not around. She had killed a bull two-days-ago and was sitting in a nallah near the village. The tigress was visibly -- and understandably! -- annoyed with all the unwanted attention she was getting from the crowd. In such a situation, there was a risk that she would enter the village. To tackle this situation, we formed two groups and started approaching her from two sides, leaving only one way for her to escape to the jungle. She was irritated and showing signs of aggression. During my 10 years in STPF, I have seen tigers doing mock attack to push us back. I thought she will do the same. This one, though, had something else planned for us! As we kept approaching her, she got up from her place and charged towards my group. She was so quick that before I could realize, she had pounced on me and my left arm was in her mouth! I screamed with unbearable pain as her sharp canines cut through my skin and muscles. Warm blood spurted from my arm. Next second, I felt her powerful paw on my neck and her canines on my head! I thought this was the end... Still, I struggled to escape from her strong paws.



My brave teammates came to my rescue. They pushed her with the sticks they carried, and this distracted the tigress. She left me and ran towards the fields. I fell on the ground soaked in blood. My colleagues immediately shifted me first to a hospital in Chimur and then to Chandrapur. I received no less than 75 stitches -- 35 on arm and 40 on head. I had to stay in the hospital for a month, and the treatment is still on. I got transferred to territorial division and resumed duty after two-and-half months of the incident.

And what about happened to the tigress? After attacking me, she ran towards the fields. The STPF team kept an eye on her for the entire day. She hid in the fields till evening and then silently slipped into the jungle. She was saved! And the villagers were saved!

I don't blame the tigress for attacking me because I understand how insecure she must be feeling surrounded by an agitated crowd. Even after this incident, I don't hate or fear tigers. In fact, I think I love and understand them more.

Sunil Gajalwar

Forest Guard, former member of STPF

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



Pride of TADOBA

Designing dairy and poultry development plans for Chandrapur District in his job with the Animal Husbandry department, **Dr Ravikant Khobragade** never imagined he would one day be working with wildlife. Till the day in 2011, when he attended an ailing tiger cub in an emergency. Seeing this powerful, beautiful wild animal helpless and in pain was a moment of epiphany. Dr Ravikant wanted to help them and set about using his skills to ease their suffering, a cause he has devoted, and risked his life, for. As veterinary officer of Tadoba, he has helped at least 100 animals including tigers, leopards and sloth bears in conflict situations—facing the ire, and angst, of agitated villagers, and the rage of traumatised animals caught in mobs. He has helped set free tigers and leopards trapped in snares. He has operated, alone, even when suffering from COVID to save a dying tigress, gone in a tense conflict location to fire a dart gun with a dislocated shoulder, and sat still in a cage for hours to tranquilise an especially crafty, and man-killing leopard. He has been injured by an elephant and mauled by a tiger—but his commitment remains unwavering.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar's love for the wilds is rooted in her childhood. Her home in Amravati was surrounded by open, bushy jungle where there lived mongoose, jackals, wolves and a diversity of birds—pittas, flycatchers, peafowl and owlets. She would observe wildlife for hours, and tend

to injured animals—domestic, and wild. Then, the city expanded, the animals thinned, almost vanished from the landscape, instilling a determination in Prajakta to work for their conservation. She started volunteering with local nature organisations, rescued snakes from homes and schools, partook in line transects in Melghat, monitored large mammal populations at Anshi-Dandeli Tiger Reserve—any way she could contribute and understand wild animals. A trained wildlife biologist, Prajakta has conducted vulture surveys in Pench (Maharashtra), studied otter presence in Balaghat (MP), researched tourism impacts on tiger reserves, monitored tigers in high altitude in Uttarakhand. Her research and in depth understanding of both people and wildlife dynamics has helped design conservation strategies for species and landscapes. Currently a wildlife biologist with Tadoba, Prajakta's core work is monitoring tigers and capacity building of staff. She finds her work on conflict management and community outreach—working out ways of peaceful co-existence most fulfilling. What drives her, she says, can be answered in simply one word: Tigers.

It is such dedication and commitment that makes Tadoba-Andhari a haven for wildlife, and it is this tigerland that, in turn, continues to inspire such warriors for the wild.

Prajakta Hushangabadkar and Ravikant Khobragade have done Tadoba proud and they have been jointly awarded the Sanctuary Asia Wildlife Service Award 2021.

Prema Singh Bindra

Wildlife Conservationist,
PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge

Trapped in Camera



Jab We Met! Once a year meeting between a local resident Crocodile and winter migrants Lesser Whistling Ducks at Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary, Gadchiroli. A beautiful moment captured by a camera trap. Contributed by Navratna Sonawane, Forest Guard, Chaprala.

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Birdwatchers of Tadoba



Five young women guides from TATR were awarded the Late Wing Cdr. C.M. Chaoji Award for Young Women Ornithologist 2021 by the Ran Mangli Foundation. Congratulations to birding guides Niranjana Meshram, Geeta Pendam, Vrunda Kadam, Aruna Sonule, and Divya Palangwar. TATR Field Director Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar (IFS) and Deputy Director (Buffer) Guru Prasad (IFS), gave away the awards that included a memento, cash prize, certificate and gifts on 20th December, 2021, at Agarzari Auditorium.

As is the wont of women here (and mostly everywhere!), these ladies were earlier homemakers, bringing up their children, looking after their families, cooking, cleaning etc. But they yearned to have their own identity, and took up the challenge –when few came forward—to develop birding skills in the land of the tiger! Trained by a past award winner Pooja Pawar, they soon started contributing to e-bird app. Today, they are amongst the best contributors to e-bird data, in number of lists as well as species documented from the Chandrapur district.

Under the initiative of empowering the local communities, the TATR Management gave them another challenging task; and they joined Tadoba's elite 'Lady Guides Team' and are now serving as guides for the Night Safari!

Eco-Tourism

Adventure Activities

Undoubtedly tracking a tiger or a bird in the wild is the most thrilling experience. How about adding a little adventure to your kids' TATR visit? If you have the adventure spirit in you, please visit the Agarzari Adventure Park and enjoy the host of activities especially designed for children.

You can do rappelling, zipline, zorbing, Burma Bridge and many other exciting activities here. The well-trained village youth will take care of your safety while you enjoy the adrenaline rush.

Location: Agarzari

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

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



The Big Fight



Every time I enter the TATR, I learn something new and I am always happy to share my learnings with my guests. We were all geared up for the afternoon safari on 28th February 2018 and I was explaining some basics to the guests. "Even for a strong tiger, it may not be possible to achieve 100% kill ratio. He too has to let go sometimes." My guests were not ready to agree with me. Our debate was on while we entered the jungle.

It was a very hot afternoon with temperature around 45 degrees Celsius. We were looking for the Queen of Tadoba-T12-(or Maya as she is affectionately called) and her cubs. She was not around, but her partner, T- 49 popularly known as Matkasur was taking a nap under the shade of a big tree. With his huge body, aggression and raw power, this hunk was ruling the territory. While taking an alert nap by a waterbody, Matkasur suddenly noticed some movement around the bushes. As soon as he saw the 'intruders', he was up on his feet., fully alert! Two sloth bears- a full grown female and her cub- were walking straight toward him. They merely wanted to quench their thirst, but handsome hunk took it as a threat to his dominance and challenged the bears with an aggressive roar.

Whoa! This was something unique! I, my guests, and a lot of other people were stunned! There was a pin drop silence at our end... interrupted only by sound of camera clicks.

As the hefty, seven year old tiger challenged her, the mother bear, signaled her cub to go away to a safe distance. And then began the fierce big fight! One was fighting for the dominance on the territory while the other was fighting with strong maternal instincts. They kept on attacking each other. At one point, Matkasur had it. Mother bear was totally down, and out. Matkasur had her wind pipe choked for what seemed like a long time. We thought, the game was over. But the mother bear too was strong enough. She stretched all her four legs with strong nails and used them all over Matkasur around his soft tissues and stomach. Matkasur's grip loosened. The mother bear got free from his hold and attacked aggressively. Both were fighting. Both were tired. Finally the mother bear started disengaging. Matkasur stepped back as well. He had bruises all over body, and big bite marks on face. The mother bear also had a lot of wounds on her body.

This whole drama lasted for say 15-20 mins but it was once in lifetime lesson for all of us! My guests who were excited, frightened, and stunned at the same time agreed with me when we reached back our hotel.

The incident made it clear that irrespective of how much perfect and strong you are, or believe yourself to be, Mother Nature will teach you a lesson in humility. Matkasur learnt his lesson hard way. The mother bear's accomplishment was the toughest one- remaining alive from the jaws of a powerful tiger like Matkasur. However, after spending ten minutes in water, this powerful tiger was back to his mojo. His royal walk and fiery eyes conveying, "I am the real King and Superstar of Tadoba!

Himanshu Bagde

General Manager
Tadoba Jungle Camp, Moharli Gate, TATR



— continued from page 5

Q: What did you like the most in Tadoba?

A: While undoubtedly tiger is the most attractive USP of Tadoba, I would say it is the park's rich biodiversity what makes Tadoba what it is. Tadoba has got. Different parts of this forest make you feel different. Even the temperature changes depending upon the kind of trees and vegetation of the area. . During the safari, we took a turn and there was this Ghost Tree... completely white... standing out on the lush green background! It was so beautiful! It looked like a film set! Then there was a brown tree with dried leaves and a green creeper climbing on it half way through. Felt like it was wearing a nice green skirt with pink flowers on it and a brown top! Tadoba has so much to offer. Each element of the eco-system, each creature great and small, gave me a thrilling experience. I saw a big spider web with a female spider at its center. The entire web was shining in the sunlight and it was a treat to the eyes. The beautiful architecture of the tall anthills was fascinating. I am completely mesmerized! So many different smells, sensations, shapes and colours of nature!!

Q: You have visited other parks also. Did you find Tadoba different in any way?

A: I am extremely impressed with the fact that I did not see PET water bottles here. I personally never buy those bottles. I observed that PET bottles are strictly prohibited not only inside the forest, but even at the rest houses, steel bottles are used. I am really happy to see that somebody is taking efforts in the right direction. Collectively we can make our forests trash free. No matter who you are, don't carry or leave your trash in the forest. Don't leave your footprints here. Leave your city life habits like having biscuits, chips, listening to loud music behind. . Come here with an open mind. Be one with nature.

Mesmerized!



SHANESHA SHIRDI

Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR

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Super Click



PRITAM GURAV

NEED A RIDE? A mother sloth bear, carrying a baby on her back and both giving a perfect look to the photographer.

Development VS Conservation

Elevated Highway

Today, our wildlife is threatened not as much by poaching, but by developmental projects. Many linear projects like roads, express highways, canals, railway tracks have become the single largest killers of our beautiful animals. If not kill them, very often, such projects prevent animals from crossing to the other side. Thus, the same forest that was the home for the wildlife - suddenly becomes split into two water-tight separate compartments.

To address this very important issue, the National Highway Authority of India, established an elevated highway within the Pench Tiger Reserve. Today a number of animals are using the connectivity under the elevated highway to carry out life normally. Tigers crossing over or wild dogs making a kill under the bridge is the 'new normal' now.

Similar is the case with the road between Khadsingi and Chimur outside Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. This area is very rich in wildlife and often animals as large as the Indian gaur, tigers and leopards are seen crossing the highway. Field studies would have proven the same. Fortunately, now the state highway will have an elevated section. The construction of the same is going on at a good pace. This proves that the development and conservation can go hand in hand. Hopefully such mitigation methods will be implemented on other sensitive areas too.



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