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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



VENKATESH KATTA

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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PREVENTING FOREST FIRE : A CHALLENGE

Green Desk

Dear reader,

We have all seen the images of devastating wildfires in Australia, North America, Canada and other countries in recent times, which destroyed thousands of hectares of forests besides threatening human habitations. Precious forest resources including carbon locked in the biomass is lost due to forest fires every year, which adversely impacts the flow of goods and services from forests. It also causes great amount of human and wildlife casualties. Intensity of these wildfires has only increased over last few years owing to factors such as climate change.

In our country as well, forest fires are a regular phenomenon often observed during summers. Although most fires are ground fires, fires burning down entire forest ecosystems are not uncommon. All fire incidences cause loss of precious bio-diversity, release of CO₂ in the atmosphere, negatively affect natural regeneration and forest productivity. A look at the statistics of fire incidences recorded by remote sensing satellites reveals total 52,785 forest fires by MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectro-radiometer) sensor and 3,45,989 forest fires by SNPP-VIIRS (Suomi-National Polar-orbiting Partnership - Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) in forest fire season from Nov 2020 to June 2021. Most of these fires are caused by human activities in the forest such as collection of Tendu, Mahua flowers among others.

Severe fires occur in many forest types particularly dry deciduous forest, while evergreen, semi-evergreen and montane temperate forests are comparatively less prone (ISFR 2015). Vulnerability analysis of forests has revealed that more than 36% of the country's forest cover has been estimated to be prone to frequent forest fires (ISFR 2019).

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve being the typical dry deciduous forest ecosystem dominated by teak and bamboo is highly vulnerable to forest fires. Gregarious flowering of Bamboo in the reserve has left majority of bamboo clumps in completely dry state and is being exposed to temperatures as high as 46°C. A single incidence of fire in such a situation can engulf thousands of hectares of critical tiger habitat and threaten wildlife populations. In order to prevent such incidences, the park management has created an extensive network of over 6,000 kms of fire breaks/lines by cutting and burning all vegetation in the width of the fire line ranging between 6 meters to 30 meters. Getting fire alerts and communicating it to every corner of the park is critical to preventing and responding to fire. To ensure timely alerts a special Fire control Room has been made operational in Chandrapur which collects real-time fire incidence data from various satellite-based feeds. This is complemented by an efficient wireless communication network covering every corner of the park area.

Around 600 fire watchers have been deployed in over 100 temporary camps to prevent fire in their vicinity and extinguish any fire observed in minimum response time. Entire staff of the tiger reserve has been on their toes in this scorching heat to protect forest from fire.

Support from communities living in and around forest is also critical in preventing fire incidences in forests. This has been ensured by taking active and often voluntary support of all stakeholders such as farmers, nature guides, safari gypsy drivers, members of primary response teams of all the villages and members of eco-development committees. These efforts have so far resulted in keeping Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve largely free from any big fire incidence. Successful prevention of fire in this testing season will result in good regeneration of bamboo and maintaining the integrity of entire ecosystem in the interest of this complex web of life in Tadoba. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our management team and members of the village communities.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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Celebrity Guest



REJUVENATING EXPERIENCE

- Avadhoot Gupte
Singer



Legendary Tigress

For popular singer and musician Avadhoot Gupte, it was an immediate connection with wildlife at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, when he visited in April 2022. Tadoba Diaries spoke to him at Tadoba Jungle Camp Resort.

Q: What made you plan your trip to Tadoba?

A: It was my first visit to Tadoba. I have always been fascinated by the forest and wildlife. I used to see some posts regarding Tadoba on Instagram. I often planned to visit Tadoba, but it wouldn't pan out for some reason or the other. I am so pleased that it happened, finally!

Q: How was your overall experience at Tadoba?

A: It was simply amazing! It is evident that the forest is well-protected and for this, I must appreciate the efforts of the Forest Department. I found that the foresters and other people associated with Tadoba are very dedicated. I was fortunate to sight a tiger on both of my safaris. I saw the legendary tigress Maya and heard her roaring. I also saw Sonam, another famous tigress. My naturalist Himanshu Bagade made my trip memorable with his vast knowledge on Tadoba and wildlife.

Q: What was the best moment of your trip?

A: You will perhaps be surprised to know that the best moment was not when I saw a tiger. It was when I was having dinner with Himanshu and a few others working for forest and wildlife conservation. I was introduced a person, who threw a party because he had become 'Mama'. Later I came to know that his favourite tigress had delivered cubs and he celebrated the occasion as if his own nephew was born! Meeting such genuine people and getting to know about their life was a great learning experience for me, and I'm awestruck by their passion and dedication.

Q: You Have been to many other forests in India. Did you find Tadoba any different from others?

A: Tadoba has its unique characteristics: its trees, animals, the lakes... everything is so beautiful! What makes Tadoba different from the other reserves is the people taking care of it. They treat their work as their responsibility and not a job. You feel this warmth when you enter the forest, it's like being welcomed into their own homes.

Q: How did the musician in you perceive the raw beauty of nature in Tadoba?

A: To me, music is not Sa Re Ga Ma or the Ragas. It is around us in nature. There is music in the falling rain, in the sea waves, in the birds' chirping and in the sound of the leaves. The music is the wind blowing through the forest. That music is way superior to any music that we musicians create with our songs and instruments. The music in Tadoba forest touched my soul. It completely rejuvenated me and inspired my creativity. In fact, that helped me come up with a couple of compositions as well! A very big thank you to Tadoba!

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR

Tadoba Beyond Tigers



ELUSIVE PANGOLIN

Have you ever spotted an animal with an earth-brown pointy face, pine-cone skin that blends with its surroundings, a very long and sticky tongue, strong front claws for burrowing, and feasting on insects and termites? Not yet? You are not alone. People have spent years in the forest and not seen this animal, the elusive Pangolin. The name pangolin is derived from the Malay word 'pengguling', which loosely translates to 'something that rolls up'. When it feels threatened, as a defence mechanism, a pangolin rolls up its body and takes the shape of a ball! Out of eight extant species of pangolin, two are found in India: the Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*). In Tadoba, one can find the Indian pangolin.

Pangolins, are one of the most elusive creatures of the forest. They are nocturnal and insectivorous i.e. they feed on insects, mainly ants and termites. They use their large, curved claws to excavate ant and termite mounds, and for pulling bark off the trees and logs to find their insect prey. It's believed that a single pangolin consumes more than 70 million insects per year, serving as a natural pest control.

Pangolin is a unique creature whose body is covered with hard, plate-like scales. Pangolin scales and body parts are illegally traded internationally to use in traditional medicine practices. The trade is lucrative, and the pangolin is considered the most trafficked animal globally. Despite its benefits to humans and nature, Pangolin is one of the most trafficked wildlife species.

- Prajakta Hushangbadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



JUNGLI CHIKOO

If you have never tasted a Temburni fruit, then you are missing something! Plan a visit to Tadoba in April-May and observe fruit bats, hornbills, langurs, sambar, chital and sloth bears feasting on these 'jungli chikoos'. These fruits have an astringent effect and the seeds can be intoxicating. These have traditionally been used as a cure for mental disorders, nervous breakdowns and also for palpitations of the heart. The tendu tree (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) itself is a handsome tree from Indian and Sri Lankan forests, that appears to be deciduous in dry areas and evergreen in moist areas.

Despite these uses, tendu's claim to fame is on account of beedis. Tobacco is rolled in tendu leaves to prepare the famous desi-cigarettes! Beedi smoking is one of the most relaxing pastimes in rural India. Commercially, this leaf collection makes tendu one of the highest revenue-generating trees of India. Over 550 billion beedis are rolled in India annually, generating employment for over 10 million people. The leaf gatherers are mostly tribals, for whom the tendu leaves provide income in lean summer months, when no other livelihood options exist.

But did you know that this leaf collection activity is one of the major causes of forest fires in Central Indian forests? As March approaches, the tendu-patta collectors roam in the forests in search of the known tendu trees. Logically, they are supposed to denude the short tendu trees so that in around 45 days, the trees will bear new mature leaves without any insect damage and can be harvested. However, the collectors usually collect dry material at the base of the tree and set it on fire, thereby destroying all old leaves. People are known to move on in search of the next tendu tree without dousing the fire. The consequences of such fires is devastating for the entire forest!

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Safari

TIGER IN THE TEMPLE

This tourism season has been phenomenal in terms of sightings in Tadoba Buffer.. One morning we headed to the Nimdhela Buffer - one of the most beautiful buffer areas at Tadoba. My friend, also a photographer, spotted a huge tiger and brought it to my attention. It was T-126. Our driver whispered, "Sir, this is Chhota Matka!"

The tiger was in a little pool of water, very close to the safari road. After quenching his thirst, he started his royal walk towards the famous Ramdegghi Temple. But, we were shocked to see him heading towards a house with an open door. We felt helpless as we couldn't shout out to the people inside the house and warn them. It could have scared or disturbed the tiger, making his movements unpredictable. T-126 was almost at the open door when he suddenly diverted his route towards the temple. We could heave a sigh of relief knowing that the people inside the house were safe but were concerned if there were people at the temple! Our driver then called the caretaker of the temple and were assured that there was nobody inside.

After the completion of our safari, we spoke to the Field Director, TATR and narrated our experience and voiced our concerns. He made us aware of the efforts being undertaken by the department to restrict human activity in the area and informed us that the matter is pending a court decision to enforce legal action. As a wildlife lover, I just hope that the issue is prioritised in order to avoid any human-wildlife conflict.

- Makrand Pardeshi
Tourist, Chandrapur



Gypsy

A UNIQUE FIGHT

It was a pleasant morning last November. I was on a Safari with my guest from Bangalore and we had not had any great sighting, despite driving around for two odd hours. We were waiting at the Hill Top trying to listen to any calls indicating the presence of a big cat. One of the guides casually informed me that there was a fight going on between a wild dog (dhole) and a barking deer at Kuhipaath for at least an hour.

I could not believe that an animal as shy as a barking deer was fighting with an aggressive animal such as a dhole! I decided to go check for myself.

On reaching the spot, we saw the dhole sitting roadside, and the barking deer behind the bamboo. The dhole got up and attacked the deer. The deer, instead of sprinting away, counter-attacked and the dog came running out of the bamboo. This went on for half an hour. I was extremely surprised to see the way the barking deer was fighting for its life. It was an unique experience seeing the barking deer giving a tough fight to keep the dhole at bay. After a long fight and struggle, the dhole was successful in grabbing the neck of the barking deer during one weak moment, and a brave fight met with an expected end.

- Mangesh Shende
Guide, Moharli Gate



Face - Off



HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

The 17th of March 2022 seemed like our regular safari days at Tadoba when we had to get up before the sunrise, get ready and start early in the morning to spot wildlife. Our guide planned to take us through the Kolara core zone, but somehow our instinct told us that we should try the Telia zone near the Mohorli gate which was almost a 16 km drive in the jungle. On our drive, we met at least 12 jeeps coming from the Telia zone and each of them confirmed no movement of tigers in that area. Our guide kept suggesting we should still go there and we had a strong feeling that we would definitely have a good sighting.

As we reached near the Telia Lake, we turned left from the main road and in 100 meters, we met one of the cubs of T-19, popularly known as Lara, followed by another who came looking for her sibling. We kept photographing the cubs when suddenly T-25, Lara's sister – Sonam came out of nowhere! She sensed trespassing by Lara and her cubs and started looking for them. In a few moments, she found the cubs and started growling and pounced on one of them. For a few minutes, we were dumbstruck! Only my fingers on the camera were working mechanically. Sonam went for

the cub's throat and would have killed it, but hearing its screams, Lara came rushing to the spot from the other side of the clearing and charged at Sonam. The two sisters fought for a while. It is impossible to forget the roars and growls of the two tigresses as they fought, especially as it was witnessed from a short distance. We felt nervous, and for a moment had this crazy idea to tell them that we were only tourists and were not coming between them! After almost 15 minutes, they withdrew, perhaps feeling that a truce would be better. Lara sat down and kept watching Sonam circling her, both growling.

We were stupefied at this sighting and stood rooted to the spot relieving the epic fight just moments before. This was a lifetime experience for all of us!

It is said that history repeats itself! In 2012, Sonam and Lara's mother T-10 Madhuri had four female cubs and today Lara has four female cubs. Telia witnessed an aggressive Sonam defeating and ousting her mother Madhuri and three sisters – Lara, Geeta and Mona a decade ago. We were the chosen ones who witnessed the two sisters facing each other and Sonam emerging victorious once again!

- **Abhijit Bandyopathyay**
Chartered Accountant

- **Nandini Bandyopathyay**
Geologist
Kolkata, West Bengal

Special

FLASH OF COLOURS

Indian Pitta

MANISH KERKAR

We were on an early morning safari in the Vasant Bhandara area of TATR. It was late May 2017 and we were searching for forest birds in the dry deciduous forest ranges within the park. The forest was filled with bird calls, but one particular dual-tone call caught our attention!

"Listen, Sir! The Navrang bird is calling," informed our guide.

We were busy scanning the trees when suddenly a flash of riotous colours greeted us. Not one, not two, but a fantastic medley of nine colours - brown, black, white, green, blue, orange, pink, red & buff, all coming together superbly into a beautiful ball of feathers! A buff-coloured crown stripe, black coronal stripes, a thick black eye stripe, and a white throat and neck added extra highlights to an already pretty attire. The upper parts were green, with a blue tail, the underparts buff, with bright red on the lower belly and vent that instantly caught the eye. The tail was short & stubby, with long, strong legs and a stout bill.

That was Navrang- the Indian Pitta!

There are more than 40 Pitta species in the world, ranging from Africa to Australia & South-East Asia. The Indian Pitta was the first bird from the group to be described scientifically, way back in the 18th century thus lending the bird an Indian name. The word 'Pitta' in Telugu, means 'small bird'. Its present-day scientific name is *Pitta brachyura*. The Latin species name *Brachyura*, refers to its short tail.

The Indian pitta has many local names in regional languages, as this beauty travels across the Indian peninsula & forests of its neighbouring countries during its annual migration. The best of all these, is the Tamil name - 'Aru-mani Kuruvi', or the "6-o-clock bird": the name referring to the bird's characteristic two-noted whistle call at dusk and dawn.

Many local legends are associated with the bird and the best of them is the story that says that the peacock, at one time a plain bird of sober plumage, borrowed the brilliant coat of the Pitta to attend a wedding, and did not return it ever. It is said that the disconsolate Pitta wanders through the jungle calling on the peacock to restore its dress, all the while complaining about the theft of its dress by a peacock!

The dual-tone call, a 'wiiiiiii tu...' is characteristic of this bird. Often, the pitta can be spotted after following these calls to its source- a sudden burst of colour revealing its location. They call in the morning and evening to mark their presence and territory. At the commencement of the breeding season, the birds become increasingly vocal till the end of June and are known to call the whole day at intervals.

The Navrang inhabits deep-dense forests and green jungles where it forages on forest floors with thick undergrowth, catching insects in the leaf litter. The pitta's typical behaviour is to walk on the ground, upturning leaf litter to gobble insects. It is otherwise a shy bird, seldom revealing itself in human presence, instead preferring to sing from leafy boughs.

The Indian pitta shows north-south migration within the Indian Peninsula. The timing is unlike any of the wintering migrants. From October to March, these birds largely keep to the broad-leaved deciduous or semi-deciduous forested tracts of Southern India and Sri Lanka. Usually, around mid-April, they begin their voyage North. The flock disperses into the forests of the lower Himalayas, Central and Western India and the Western Ghats up to Karnataka, for breeding between May to July. Some of the birds continue their Northward journey, making their way up to Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Nepal. Others move East towards West Bengal and Bangladesh and still others, begin nesting activities in Central India in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The Tadoba landscape is an important breeding ground for these birds. In winter during September and October, they migrate back to the Southern peninsula and Sri Lanka. When the Pittas reach South India and Sri Lanka, they are completely exhausted, especially by the flight over the Palk Strait. The reverse migration to their breeding areas in the North takes an equal toll on them. At this time, they often turn up in curious places. Besides gardens and groves, young birds may accidentally bang against windowpanes or be found exhausted in housing societies. Presumably, this happens due to confusion from artificial illumination as they have been known to migrate through the night.

The Indian Pitta is sexually monomorphic i.e. both sexes look alike. The nest itself is in the shape of a globe, matted

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Trapped in Camera



NIGHT WALK! A porcupine family taking a night stroll in the forest, proudly displaying its lethal weapon- the quills, seemingly giving a few survival tips to the new member in the family! Captured on a camera trap installed in TATR.

Eco-Tourism

LOGHUT STAY

Staying in a log hut inside the forest has been a cherished dream for many nature lovers. You can now live this experience at selected locations at TATR Buffer Zone. The log hut is clean and offers basic facilities of a room and toilet. After nightfall, you would be able to hear the sounds of the forest and also possibly see wildlife if you are silent and alert enough!

Location: : Junona and Palasgaon Gates

Booking: Online@mytadoba.org



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On Duty

BETWEEN LIFE & DEATH



It was the fourth day of our All India Tiger Estimate Survey on foot in the Kolara range of TATR. We had completed three days of sign surveys and were about to begin a two kilometre transect survey. I was leading our team of seven labourers and a forest guard. We walked across the transect line, noted down our observations and were on our way back after completing the task. We were less than two hundred metres away from our vehicle when suddenly I spotted a tigress sitting on the fire line, just behind our parked vehicle! I instructed the team to stop and stand still. It was a very tricky situation! Any sudden movement from us would likely disturb her, and the situation would have been beyond our control. The first thing I did was to call our driver on the wireless and alert him of the danger. Thankfully, he was aware of the presence of the tigress and was sitting in the vehicle with all the windows shut tightly. Later when we measured the distance, I realised that the tigress was 167 metres from us and only five metres from the vehicle. She was sitting between us and our only hope of rescue i.e. the vehicle.

One of the team members suggested that we should take a detour to the vehicle. I remembered the incident in November 2021 when one of our female colleagues met an unfortunate death under similar circumstances. I immediately rejected the suggestion and asked everybody to stick together regardless of the circumstances.

While I was contacting the driver, the tigress got up and started walking towards us. We were worried, and at the same time alert. I asked the team to stand side by side, with the lathis in our hands. After walking 10-15 metres, the tigress stopped and sat down. Meanwhile, I contacted my senior officials and updated them about our situation. They asked us to withdraw from the location and arranged for a rescue team. Our Field Director Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar was also in the field, and immediately started for our location. Meanwhile, the tigress had walked away from the vehicle, and was sitting down. I took the opportunity and asked the driver to take a U-turn and start driving towards us. As soon as the vehicle took a U-turn, the tigress once again came and stood between us and the vehicle! I asked the driver to keep the vehicle running, and all of us waited for the tigress to make her next move. She stood there for some time looking at us. A few moments later, she started walking toward us and this time we were truly apprehensive, almost frozen in fear, unsure of her next move. She was almost upon us, when she suddenly changed direction, left the fire line and went into the jungle! As soon as she disappeared, the driver drove the vehicle to us. We hurriedly jumped in and left the place quickly. We counted our blessings and thanked God for our narrow escape!

- R. D. Shende
Round Officer, Kolara, 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.

WINDOW BIRDING



Since I joined as an Intern at the TATR Conservation Foundation in March this year, I have been observing birds and their behaviour. Interestingly I observed 15 species of birds perching on the railing of the windows of the Foundation office. Birds like Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Ashy Prinia, Yellow-throated Sparrow, and Spot-breasted Fantail are frequent visitors and some of the rare visitors are White-browed Bulbul, Jerden's Leaf bird, Brahminy Starling.

According to their behaviour, I divided these bird species into two categories.

- 1) Birds who perch for a long period - two to seven minutes –except Tickell's Blue Flycatcher who sometimes visit for about 20 minutes. They stare at their reflection in the window for a long time and aggressively hit the window glass with their beak, assuming some other bird has entered their territory. Even after exhausting themselves they sit there, stare, make calls and display their courtship features. Especially Spot-breasted Fantail shows this behaviour.
- 2) Another group of birds perch for a short duration - 15 – 30 seconds They also stare at their reflection, but they fly away or turn around as if they are not interested in it. Sometimes birds like the Yellow-throated Sparrow perch for a couple of minutes for shelter in the afternoon.

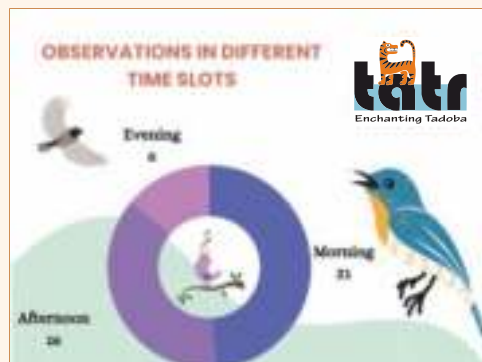
All birds visit in day time but in different time slots like morning, afternoon and evening.

This shows a good diversity of birds in the Foundation office surroundings. The constant visit of birds provides a very pleasant ambience to work and keeps you always connected to the nature.

- Shantanu Nagpure

Summer Intern, TATR Coservation Foundation

Birds visiting for a long duration	Birds visiting for a short duration
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Red-vented Bulbul
Jungle Babbler	White-browed Bulbul
Spot-breasted Fantail	House Sparrow
Ashy Prinia	Yellow-throated Sparrow
Purple Sunbird	Brahminy Starling
Purple-rumped Sunbird	Oriental Magpie Robin
Jerdon's Leafbird	Common Tailorbird Black-hooded Oriole



Continued from page 7

FLASH OF COLOURS Indian Pitta

together consisting of twigs, dry grass, and leaves, with a small hole located on the side for an entrance. The nest may either be found on the ground or on a tree. They usually lay four to six eggs, and the average incubation period is just under a month. It is an arduous period for the parents once the chicks hatch, as for the next few weeks, both the parents are engaged in bringing food for the new-borns until they are old enough to venture out and hunt on their own.

The Indian Pitta is a truly Indian bird flying across the length of India in its annual cycle of migration carrying its

nine colours along to enthrall the birdwatchers with its melodious calls & flashes of colours. Though the IUCN guidelines put the bird in the 'least concern' group, the actual population size of the bird is unknown and population trends are showing a decline. With climate change, deforestation and forest fragmentation in the sub-Himalayas, if care is not taken, it wouldn't be too long before this beautiful bird, emblematic of Indian civilisation, becomes a threatened species.

Dr. Prasad Kamath

Director, Indian EcoLogic Foundation
Dombivli, Maharashtra

Tadoba is currently a nursery of cubs! This year most of Tadoba's famous tigresses- popularly known as- Chhoti Tara, Collarwali, W-female, Junabai, Sonam, Kuwani, Lara, Sharmila and Chhoti Madhu are all rearing cubs! Other tigresses like Maya are seen mating with their respective males. In all, there is love in the air at Tadoba! It is interesting to know a few facts behind this festival of love.

Swiping right to the right choice

Tigers reach sexual maturity between three and five years; females mature at three or four years of age, and males when they are around four or five years old. Male and females detect each other's presence by their scent. When in heat, females scent mark their territory with a very distinct smell, different from the one that they would emit on 'normal' days. A male tiger can actually detect if a female is ready to mate by smelling a tigress's spray mark. They can detect and identify individuals with help of a special organ present in the roof of the mouth called the 'Jacobson organ' which plays an important role in mating, marking territory, and intraspecific communication. Tigers use the flehmen display (In German, the word flehmen means lip curl or curl of the upper lip) to allow different tiger scents to reach the roof of its mouth where the Jacobson organ is located.

A tigress in heat also uses frequent vocalisations consisting of roars, moans, and other malodorous excretions to alert males, who will follow her scent and find her. Sometimes, when the territories of two males overlap, one of the males will either withdraw or both will fight till one of them submits and runs away or is seriously injured. In Tadoba where tiger density is high, there is a greater probability of such battles over the sexual rights of a female.

Conscious Parents

A tigress gives birth 102 to 110 days after the successful conception. It is difficult to identify pregnancy in tigers until they show bulges and visible mammary glands. Females prefer concealed and safe spots to deliver cubs like caves and thick canopies deep inside the forest, with ample prey and water around. Tigress gives birth to one to five cubs (one to three is the average litter size). The cubs are born blind and are completely dependent on their

mother. New-born cubs weigh between 785 and 1,610 grams. Although tiger cubs open their eyes in six to 12 days, they do not develop complete vision for a couple of weeks. Tiger cubs are born with stripes on their body, and as they grow their stripes move farther apart.

No-Drama Discipline

The tigress is responsible for caring for the cubs. She spends nearly 70 percent of her time attending to the needs of the cubs and keeping them safe. The amount of time spent nursing reduces to about 30 percent by the time the cubs are a month old. The cub stay hidden until they are

about eight weeks old. Tigresses are extremely alert while caring for young cubs. If she finds too much disturbance or the movement of some other tiger or predator in the area, she immediately moves them to a secure place. The cubs learn important survival lessons later between 25 and 45 weeks of age when they go out with their mother. They follow their mother's steps and obey her instructions, although a few mischievous cubs do explore contrary to their mother's wishes! However, mothers communicate with cubs even from a distance and instruct them to behave like good kids!

On many occasions, we sight tigress and her cubs along trails, lying

underneath trees and the cubs playing around her. The cubs' play-fight with each other acquire the speed and agility that they will later need when completely independent. Cubs leave the safety of their hiding places and begin to follow their mothers at about two months. However, they do not participate in the hunt at this point. They wait in a safe place for their mother to bring the food back to them.

Tigresses are single parents, playing the role of a super mother, as males usually do not provide parental care. However, tiger reserves including Tadoba have recorded males accompanying the female and cubs for a short period of time. We have also seen previous litter cubs taking care of the new-borns!

You may be lucky enough to see a mating pair or very young cubs in the wild. Be silent, watch quietly and treat the animals with respect. There is always something new to learn!

- Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



VISUAL BANE

Super Click



PARITOSH SONAWANE

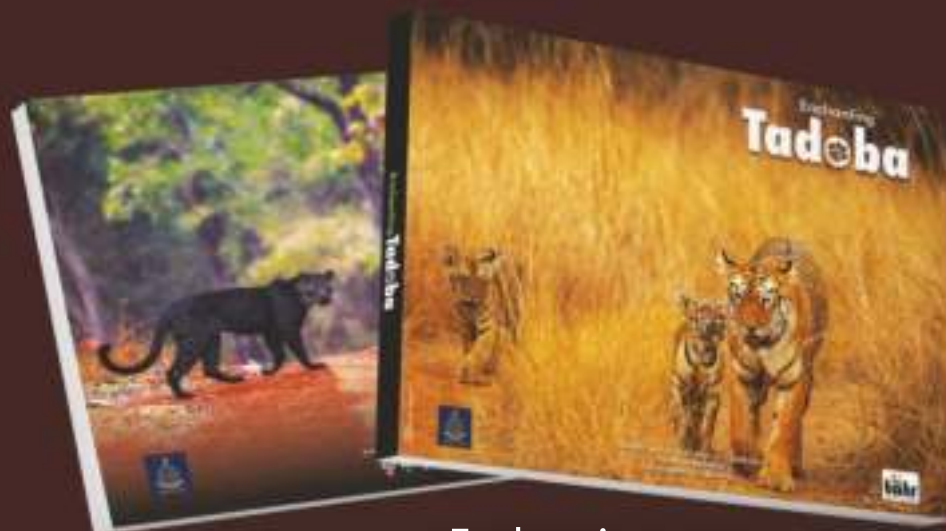
MOTHER CARES! A rare capture of Tigress T-7, popularly known as Chhoti Tara carrying her cub to a safer place.



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