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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



DEEPA KATHKAR

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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CELEBRATING OF PROJECT TIGER



Dear Reader,

We are all aware that India is celebrating the glorious 75 years of her independence. India has made remarkable progress in all sectors of growth and progress, particularly for such a young nation one of our most significant achievements is that we have been able to protect and conserve our forest and wildlife despite the constant pressures and demands of development. Few, however, may be aware that in 2023 India also celebrates 50 years of Project tiger.

The largest conservation effort of its kind, Project Tiger was started in 1973 in the backdrop of the severe depletion of wildlife populations due to overexploitation, hunting, and loss of habitat. To halt this degradation and protect wildlife and all ecosystems, the Indian government took a strong step in promulgating the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972. The year after, it launched the Project Tiger, a unique initiative to conserve a species for posterity. Hunting of all species was banned, except in exceptional circumstances of posing a threat to human populations. Though the lion was a strong contender, the tiger was declared India's national animal as it is an umbrella flagship species and has a wider range across India. Nine unique ecosystems located strategically across the country were chosen as Tiger Reserves, where special efforts to revive tiger populations were initiated with much fervour and commitment. The idea behind this strategy was an understanding that the presence of tigers indicated a healthy functional ecosystem and its protection would thereby protect the bio-diversity that these ecosystems represented.

There has been remarkable progress since 1973. India has 52 tiger reserves now covering an area of 98,000 sq km, about 2% of India's geographic area. The journey has not been all smooth. In the early 1990s, poaching peaked as demand for tiger bones shot up for use in Traditional Chinese Medicine. And even as India geared up for this challenge, came the shocking news of tigers being wiped out from Sariska Tiger Reserve, followed by the local extinction in another important reserve, Panna.

However, with a series of policy decisions like setting up of National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, prescribing several Standard operating procedures and strict guidelines along with rigorous science and technology-based monitoring protocol, the number of tigers has recovered from 1,400 in the year 2006 to more than 3,000 today. Central Indian states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have spearheaded this recovery by contributing to the largest rise in national tiger numbers. Tigers were also reintroduced in Sariska and Panna, and both now have breeding tiger populations.

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger reserve formally joined this network on 23rd February 1995, when it was notified as a tiger reserve, and has been at the forefront of tiger conservation. Today, TATR and the greater Tadoba Landscape including surrounding sanctuaries and territorial forests contribute more than 70 percent of Maharashtra tiger numbers and have emerged as a critical source population of tigers for the central Indian landscape owing to its good connectivity with the protected areas in the states of Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh.

As we mark our 28th Foundation Day this month, it is essential to recognize the efforts of foot soldiers and local communities, who have made sacrifices for the success of conservation efforts, physically as well as metaphorically. Communities living inside the reserve's core area have voluntarily relocated outside the reserve, and this has provided inviolate areas for tigers. As they move out of remote villages, the communities also get access to better facilities. As we mark our 28th foundation day, the last village located in the core area is voluntarily relocating outside the reserve leaving behind their home, and leaving the land undisturbed for tigers to thrive.

Equally creditable are the sacrifices being made by the village communities who coexist with tigers with remarkable tolerance in spite of losses they suffer—of their crops, livestock, and tragically even human life. Considering the centrality of maintaining population meta-population dynamics for long-term conservation, it is these communities who own this success in the rising number of tigers.

Tiger has also emerged as an undisputed king of wildlife tourism which supports thousands of community members and other businesses. The eco-tourism model being implemented around tiger reserves, especially at TATR, has helped build strong community stakes in the conservation of tigers and other wildlife. At Tadoba, we are aware that to sustain this success, we need to redouble our efforts in terms of intensive on-field protection efforts and cutting-edge research. We are well on the way to using the most advanced technologies for protection and monitoring, and stepping up efforts to reduce losses due to man-animal conflict. Our vision is to ensure that tiger conservation must contribute to the welfare and upliftment of the communities that depend on these forests for their livelihood.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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Editor: Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar, CF & Field Director, TATR | Executive Editor: Anant Sonawane, Communications Officer, TATR.



Making of Meadows

- Sanjay Karkare
Assistant Director, BNHS

Wildlife management involves many aspects. This includes providing water for wildlife, ensuring that they have enough food, protecting the forest from fire, etc. In this regard, each protected area and tiger reserve works in its own way.

Development of grass pastures, proper management of edible and non-edible plants and most importantly attracting herbivores to village areas rehabilitated from protected areas need a lot of effort from the management and the ground staff. I have seen how this work has failed in many places.

The work done in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve since last year regarding the development of grass pastures is unique and exemplary. The contribution of the Grass Man of India Dr. Gajanan Muratkar is very important in this regard. The management of grasslands in Tadoba involves everyone, right from the Field Director to the Forest Rangers.

Recently, I saw a Forest Ranger collecting grass seeds in the forests of the Kolsa range. While talking to him, I got very useful information about different kinds of edible grass, the importance of grass, which animals eat this grass, and when they eat it. Recently, this picture was seen in many ranges.

In the last few years, Navegaon, Jamani, Palasgaon, and Kolsa villages in the core area of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve have been rehabilitated. A very good management of grasslands can be seen in all these vacated areas. As a result, there is a noticeable increase in the number of spotted deer in the Jamani, Palasgaon, and Kolsa areas.

Grass pastures have been managed well in the core area of more than eight hundred and fifty hectares last year. This includes many activities like clearing out non-edible species and creating pastures of native forage grass species, harvesting and transporting native forage grass seeds as they mature. Locals have been involved in all these activities. As a result, they have also got a large number of employment opportunities.

Eliminating non-palatable plants in the forest is a huge challenge. In this regard, the Tadoba administration has done a great job. It has uprooted non-palatable plants in an area of nearly three thousand hectares.

Today, this tiger reserve has accumulated a large number of local grass seeds. Assistant Forester Mendulkar from Kolara has made a remarkable contribution to this. He has accumulated 15 quintals of grass seeds of 15 species.

One can witness the eradication of non-palatable plants and grasses in many places like Teliya, Pandharapauni, Jamunbudi, etc. The grass swaying in the wind at Kolsa, Jamani, and Navegaon and the increasing number of herbivores there are extremely pleasing to watch. In many places, the work done concerning grasslands and the registers prepared for each grassland show that it is a meticulously planned and efficiently implemented initiative.

Credit for all this work goes to Field Director Dr. Jitendra Ramgaonkar and his entire team, Deputy Director Nandkishore Kale, Assistant Conservator Mahesh Khore, Bapu Yele, Forest Range Officers, and Forest Guards. Of course, the financial support provided by the ICICI Foundation is equally important.

**WILD PIG**

If you were born before 1930, there is a strong possibility that the toothbrush that you used had bristles made up of wild boar hair from its neck region. However, it was soon realized that it was not the best from the oral health point of view, as these hair dried slowly and hosted a number of bacteria.

Wild boars also referred to as swine or wild pigs, find a place in many old stories. Being small, strong, and brave made them challenging game animals since old times. Males have large tusks that protrude from their mouths, thus they are feared by many predators including leopards! Many humans too have been inflicted with serious injuries by charging wild boars.

Across Asia to Europe, wild boar meat is consumed as a delicacy. It is more so since these animals have always been important agricultural pests and nighttime farm raiders. Today, if you are a farmer, it is very much possible that this 'Varah' avatar of Lord Vishnu must be your worst nightmare. Compounding the farmer's woes is the fact that these animals breed profusely. While there is no doubt that they are a menace to agriculture, these animals are actually great survivors, eating almost anything that can fit their snouts. These animals have very poor eyesight but an excellent sense of smell. They can detect their favourite tubers from 25 cm below the ground. Also, being excellent diggers, they can dig roots and tubers out of the ground. At the same, they also relish worms, insects, and even snakes. Believe it or not, they are often seen scavenging on a kill done by a tiger!

**MOVAI**

One very important tree in Tadoba is a very common tree locally known as Moi or Movai. *Lannea coromandelica* is also known as the Indian Ash Tree.

My special memory is associated with this tree because Gajraj, our elephant at Tadoba used to love to eat the branches of Movai. During his 'musth' time we used to feed him with Movai and he enjoyed eating the tender bark of the branches. It seemed to have a pacifying effect on him.

This tree enjoys immense respect from the local Gond community. During weddings in Gonds, the main pole of the tent is always made from the Movai tree. Interestingly, the Movai tree cuttings root very easily- even those of thick branches. Often the poles embedded during the weddings grow up to become lofty trees. This has prompted me to tell my newly married Gond couple friends to look after the tree cutting well to ensure that their marriage also blooms equally well!

Tadoba has many of these trees. It is also called the Gurjon tree in North India and is used in the manufacturing of plywood, owing to its termite-resistant properties. The tree also has other commercial and medicinal values because of its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, hypotensive, and wound-healing properties. The plant gum that is yielded from cracks, is useful in treating sprains and asthma.

If you still don't know which tree I am referring to, meet one of our safari guides and ask for an introduction to this unique tree.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

Those 30 Seconds!

Tadoba is my home! It is the place where I lose my mind and find my soul. It is the magic of Tadoba that pulls me here every month. You may not believe it, but since February 2022, I have enjoyed 66 safaris in Tadoba and I have enjoyed each one of them! The only regret I had was that I had never got an opportunity to click Blackie- the black leopard in Tadoba.

It was my second evening safari of January 2023. I was in a Canter guided by Amol Meshram and Kajal Nikode. At first, we visited Telia lake and looked for T-24 Sonam and her new mate Chhota Dadhiyal. Then we checked Ambodi and then moved to Pandharpauri. We waited for T-12 Maya and her cub, but could not see them. Then we moved to Tadoba lake. Time was ticking fast. Tourists in one of the vehicles were

lucky to spot Maya. Another gypsy had sighted the male T-103 Rudra in Navegaon. And I had this dry safari. Yet I was not disappointed, because I knew patience is the key to enjoying the wildlife.

Though I had a lot of patience, what I lacked was time. It was almost 5.00 pm and we had to start our return journey in the next 10 minutes. We waited and those 10 minutes were over! We had to leave. Our guide Amol said, "Let's take the Crocodile Breeding Centre road (Magartaka) instead of the Panchdhara road." As soon as we crossed Magartaka, we saw a black spot on the road. Another guide Kajal exclaimed, "It's Blackie!" It was indeed the most elusive black leopard. There was a pin-drop silence in the canter. I found myself sweating with excitement. Blackie walked across the road and disappeared into the bushes. By then I could get a few good images. Those were the last 30 seconds of my safari and they gave me one of the most exciting experiences of unpredictable wildlife.

- Wrushabh Jiwar
Tourist, Wardha

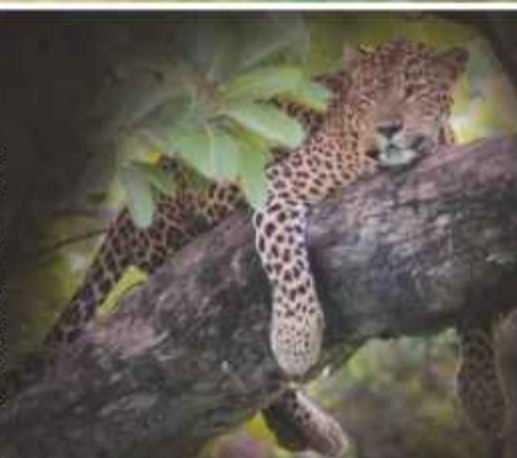


A Frozen Heart

It was the most memorable night of my life. It was the winter season in 2021. As usual, I entered from Junona gate for the night safari. I had a group of senior citizens as my guests. As we reached Adegaon village, we spotted a leopard pair sitting on the road. We enjoyed the sighting for almost five minutes. Then the male stood up and went towards the Z. P. school premises. The female also got up and entered the compound of a house. As soon as both of them disappeared, I heard spotted deer's alarm calls coming from the backside of our vehicle. Hence I asked the driver to reverse the gypsy. We had hardly travelled 100 metres and we saw another leopard crossing the road. Three leopards within a few minutes! My guests were extremely happy.

As the third leopard went out of our sight, I decided to go back to the spot where we had spotted the leopard pair and try our luck again. And guess what? As soon as we reached the spot, the female leopard emerged from the dark and crossed the road in front of us! Anticipating the arrival of the male, I asked the driver to park the gypsy under a tree from where the female had crossed the road. All our eyes were looking for the slightest movement in the darkness around us. Suddenly I heard a very soft and low sound of leaves coming from the tree above. I looked up and my heart was frozen! The male was right up there, staring at us! My guests also noticed him and before they could react, he jumped from the tree... right next to our vehicle and vanished into the jungle! My guests were scared, but also excited. It was indeed a lifetime experience for all of us!

- Akash Khatri
Guide, Junona Gate



The first month of the new year was full of happenings at TATR. Here are the highlights of January 2023. All the images are contributed by our readers.

Big Fight!

With the sun fading over the illustrious reign of mighty T-44 Bajrang, the dynamics of Moharli buffers are changing faster than ever. Having visited Tadoba multiple times, for me, it was a usual evening safari in the Agarzari zone. Paras and T-127 Chhoti Madhu were seen mating. The next news we heard was T-185 Taru coming and resting near a water body diagonally opposite the mating pair. After a wait of a couple of hours, Taru suddenly emerged on the road and started to move towards both the tigers sitting in the bushes. Sensing there could be a fight between two males, we moved our vehicle backward to get the best angle. As they say, luck favours those who are prepared! I was prepared, and this rare incident took place in front of me! A dream came true!



Tiny Show Stopper!

Though not an uncommon tiny animal in Tadoba, Tree Shrew is difficult to photograph. Often mistaken for a palm squirrel, this tiny mammal is a treat to watch.



Thirsty Tigers!

While Roma introduced her cubs to the tourists in Moharli core, T-82 Junabai with her two cubs pleased tourists with a photo opportunity at a water body in Madnapur buffer.



Blackie & Jackie!

It was almost getting dark in the evening. We were on our full-day safari and hence we got an extra 15-minute time than routine safari vehicles. We decided to take one last chance to track the tiger. Suddenly noticed some movement on the road. It was in colour. Could it be a sloth bear? As soon as we reached closer, we realized that Blackie, the black leopard was sitting right in front of us with his mate whom we fondly called Jackie! We were awestruck yet emotional for a while. Then we somehow picked up our cameras and captured this adorable mating pair. What a new year gift we got from nature after a long wait!



The Feast!

A Crested Hawk Eagle feasting on the cattle kill in Nimdela buffer. The kill was done by the mighty tiger T- 49 Chhota Matka and he too was sitting at some distance while the eagle was enjoying the feast.





LET'S RACE! Every night in the forest is magical. It brings out many unseen, unheard interesting aspects of wildlife. Through this section, we try to give our readers a glimpse of the nightlife in Tadoba captured on the camera traps. An Indian black-naped hare and a bat are seen here in the same frame. A camera trap is also seen in the background.

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Tadoba

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Recently i.e. one and half months back, while I was on patrolling duty in Aswalhira area, a sub-adult tigress charged at our team. All five members of my team hold the ground and eventually, the tigress retreated. This incident took me back to a more horrifying memory of my encounter with a full-grown tigress.

1st October 2019. The first day of tourism season in the core zone of TATR. While the department staff in the tourism area was busy in managing the tourist vehicles, I was on duty in the non-tourism area of the forest. That morning, my task was to clear the patrolling route. I was riding a bike along with a forest labourer as my assistant. As we reached the Ambegad Kuti road, we saw a few branches laying in the middle of the road. Hence I stopped the bike, both of us got down and walked two steps toward those branches. As soon as we lifted the branches, we heard a loud growling! A tiger was very close to us! We had clearly failed to notice his presence and he had undoubtedly disliked our presence. With that realization, I could feel the rapid palpitations in my heart. I looked at my assistant. He was equally scared. The very next moment we saw a full-grown tigress running toward us!

How did we miss the tiger? Later when I synchronized the events, I realized that the tigress was sitting in the grass by the roadside. She had killed a sambar deer and was enjoying her feast when we reached there. We did not notice her presence because she had camouflaged in the grass. Unfortunately, I stopped the bike only 50 metres of distance from her, and that made her extremely angry. As

Face to Face with a Tigress

soon as we got down from the bike, the tigress stood up, growled, and started running toward us.

Within seconds, the tigress reached us. But at the last moment, she changed her course and crossed past us from only eight to ten feet distance. She turned back and prepared for the second charge. "Sir, just stay put", my assistant murmured. He was a brave man. "We will be dead if we run", he added. Before he could complete his sentence, she charged again. This time she went past a little closer than earlier. Now she started circling around us, continuously growling, expressing her anger. This was a critical moment. Our axe was left on the bike. What we had in our hands were the branches we had just lifted from the road. Both of us started banging those branches on the ground and shouting loudly. That puzzled the tigress a bit. We took the opportunity and started moving slowly backward, away from the tigress. It also allowed me to pass on the distress message to my senior officials via wireless communication set in my pocket. The tigress was still angry but did not come after us.

Within five minutes, first one of my colleagues reached the spot on a bike. Then a department vehicle also came to our rescue. Those five minutes were the longest of my life. Meanwhile, the tigress calmed down and went into the bamboo thickets with her kill.

Later, we checked the camera traps in the area and found that it was the Queen of Teliya- T-24- Sonam! I thanked her for controlling her anger and not doing any harm to us.

- Pawan Deshmukh

Forest Guard, Beat- Devdoh, Range- Moharli, TATR



Contribute to 'Tadoba Diaries'

Are you a forest department staff, tourist, guide, driver, working with a resort, managing a home stay 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.



THE ACHIEVERS (Dec. 2022)

Please join us in celebrating the achievements of the best-performing forest guards at TATR. These frontline soldiers of the forest department have done the maximum foot patrolling in their respective divisions.

We are happy to announce the top two achievers in December 2022

Forest Guard - Santosh D. Kakde
Beat - Zinganat-I
Round - Rantalodhi
Range - Karwa
Division - TATR Core
Duration - 20 Days
Target - 125 Km/ Month
Actual Patrolling - 228.02 Km.



Forest Guard - Geeta Chauhan
Beat - Cheknimbala
Round - Chantachawki
Range - Chandrapur Buffer
Division - TATR Buffer
Duration - 24 Days
Target - 125 Km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 303.90 Km

Best Performers of Tadoba!



On the occasion of Republic Day, the staff members of TATR were felicitated for their exemplary services toward the protection and conservation of forests and wildlife.



A Tiger Hoodwinked Me

This is the story of a tigress who tried to hoodwink me. In 2007, two of us were visiting Tadoba. Late in the evening, at a distance, we could see a tigress and cubs walking on a dirt track. As we moved closer, two tiger cubs entered into a clump of bamboo fifty feet away on our left. The other two kept moving. The tigress kept on walking without showing any sign of being bothered by our presence.

The other two cubs also went into the bush on the left and the mother kept on walking. I asked the driver to stop where the two cubs entered the bush. There was a sign of none. As we moved ahead after stopping for a few minutes, I turned back to look. The cub was looking through the bush to confirm if we had left. After clicking a few shots, we moved ahead. The tigress walked around two kilometres, then turned to the right and vanished into the bush. My driver and guide said, "The tigress is gone away so there would be no more sightings. Let's call it a day & go to the rest house."

I was not convinced. Cubs had entered the forest on our left. Tigress went ahead & went to the right side. If the tigress wanted to hunt alone it would have gone alone. It

won't change its plans & leave behind cubs just because we reached there. Guide & driver were adamant that the tigress had gone for good. I said, "Turn back and let's go where we left the cubs." We turned around and we were expected to go to the spot which would now appear on our right. Mrudul and Myself decided to stand in the vehicle and scan the surroundings. After close to a kilometre suddenly we sighted the tigress & cubs on top of a 12 feet high mud bund!

The driver and guide were sitting in the vehicle. Hence they couldn't sight the tigress and cubs who were at a much higher level than us. We stayed there for a long time till the light became very low. The guide said, "Sir, the tigress fooled us!". It was an honest confession by the guide. The driver nodded his head. The tigress purposefully entered the forest to our right whereas the cubs had gone left. The tigress then retraced her steps, called cubs, and went to a waterhole and sat on top of the 12 feet high bund so that we can't see them. And you think a man is the most intelligent species on earth?

We returned to our forest rest house with an honest appreciation of the tiger's intelligence and with a deep sense of respect.

Too often people believe what they see. However, what appears on the surface may not be the ultimate truth. Dig deeper. Keep on asking 'Why'. Apply your mind and soon your mind will start making connections between the disparate data points. You are likely to find the hidden jewels.

- Sabyasachi Patra
Cinematographer & Filmmaker



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