



Issue 14/Jan. 2023

# Tadoba

## DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

CAMILLA MALVERN



Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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# Understanding Tiger Mortality



Dear Reader,

**G**lobally tigers are an endangered species and functional populations are limited to just eight tiger range countries today namely India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, and Thailand. Overall tiger numbers in the wild have declined drastically largely due to unrelenting pressures from habitat loss, poaching, and retaliatory killings. In recent years, tigers went functionally extinct in Cambodia (the last capture in a camera trap was in 2007), tiger presence remains uncertain in Lao (PDR) and Vietnam, Myanmar numbers have dipped to an alarming 20 and just about 30-50 wild tigers are believed to survive in China. As a species, tigers have already lost about 93% of their historical range and are now restricted to the remaining 7% of their habitat. In India, tigers are found in 18 states segregated broadly into five landscape complexes depending on the forest types. The 2018 All India Tiger Estimation has reported a population of 2,967 tigers in the country. Although the numbers are significantly better as compared to the 1,706 tigers reported in 2010 a similar estimation, it is still very low for the species whose number was more than 100,000 in the not-so-distant past. The present numbers are not sufficient to safeguard the species for the long term unless sustained efforts are continued with the same rigour and every individual of the species is given the same importance as if the survival of the species is dependent on it.

Every tiger death, therefore, is taken with utmost seriousness by the National Tiger Conservation Authority—and at the state and the tiger reserve level. The NTCA outlined Standard Operating Procedures for dealing with and reporting a tiger death followed by all the tiger reserves. Unless proven otherwise with conclusive evidence, any tiger death is considered to be a case of poaching. This abundant precaution is exercised with the purpose of not letting the guard down in terms of protecting every single individual tiger not only in our tiger reserves, and other Protected Areas but also in territorial forests which are mostly fragmented, usually densely populated, and have a great degree of biotic interference.

But for all living creatures, death is inevitable. And, despite every effort to monitor and protect each animal, tigers do die due to various reasons. Usually, they succumb to natural causes, though tigers are also killed by trains and vehicles in accidents or by poachers.

Unfortunately, we at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger reserve have lost six tigers in a span of one month, all due to natural reasons. One among them was tigress T-75, who died of old age. The death of five cubs in our buffer area due to infanticide by

male tigers was particularly met with much distress in social media and among the public. But this is a natural process. Male tigers may kill cubs that have been fathered by other dominant tigers so that they can mate with the female, and develop their bloodline.

At the national level, this year 115 tigers have died in India from various causes.

An analysis of tiger deaths in the last ten years has revealed that most of the deaths are within the tiger reserves (53%) whereas 35% of deaths have happened outside the tiger reserves. The rest are poaching cases, where tiger body parts have been seized.

There are various specific reasons and patterns of death among tigers. Like all living beings, tigers die at a rate that is termed a 'population death rate' that directly depends on the population size and average life span of the species. All tiger deaths can be categorized as either natural or unnatural. Natural causes are mainly intra-specific aggression between individuals including cub mortality due to infanticide by males, and inter-specific aggression involving other species like Gaur, Dholes (wild dogs), wild boars, porcupines, and even domestic livestock. There is also cub mortality due to starvation after the cubs may accidentally get separated from the mother. About 15% of the cases of natural death were attributed to the senility of death due to old age.

Among unnatural causes of tiger death, there are cases of poaching (66% of unnatural deaths) that included mainly deaths due to poisoning, electrocution, injuries from snaring and trapping, and also due to direct shooting. Accidents (trains or vehicles) accounted for about 23% of the unnatural deaths whereas legal elimination for conflict mitigation was attributed to 10% of the cases. Surprisingly, 10% of the deaths were attributed to diseases such as canine distemper and pneumonia among others.

While mourning the loss of tigers, especially those in the public eye is understandable, this pattern of mortality shows us that every death of a tiger is not a reason for panic. While keeping a close watch on unnatural deaths due to poaching, we must also understand the biological characteristic of the tiger as a species and other reasons for its mortality. Hopefully in times to come, with better management practices and protection, awareness, and public support we can minimize and eliminate the threat to tigers by controlling unnatural drivers of population decline.

**Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar**

Field Director, TATR  
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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## An Amazing Experience

Sayaji Shinde  
Actor

We all know Sayaji Shinde as one of the versatile actors in the Indian film industry. His roles in Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, and Bhojpuri films are highly appreciated by the audience. However, that doesn't complete his introduction. Sayaji Shinde is also an environmental activist and his NGO Sahyadri Devrai actively contributes to tree plantation and the conservation of sacred grooves.

Tadoba Dairies spoke to him about his recent visit to Tadoba.

Excerpts from his interview:

**Q: How was your visit to TATR?**

**A:** It was an exciting trip. This was my second visit to Tadoba. I was not able to see a tiger during my first visit which happened two or three years back. But this time I got to see a huge male tiger on my evening safari. Initially, at around 4 pm, I could see a part of his body and tail only. However, post 5.30 pm, when he crossed the road in front of me, I got to see how big he was! What a sight it was!

Earlier, during the morning safari, apart from spotted deer, sambar deer, and wild boars, I was lucky to see a pack of wild dogs playing on the grass. The most exciting sighting was a fresh kill. A leopard had killed a barking deer and kept it on the branch of a tree. The kill was so fresh that the blood was still dripping from its neck and the grass was still there in its mouth! I am sure the leopard was somewhere very nearby though we could not see him.

The night safari was also an exciting experience. I enjoyed observing nocturnal wildlife like a nightjar.

**Q: Where did this love for wildlife come from?**

**A:** I think, it was always there in me. Since childhood, I have loved wandering in mountains and forests. During my college days, I have done multiple treks to the forts in Maharashtra. The most memorable among them was a day-long trek from Sinhgad to Rajgad. I have been to reserves like Pench, Chandoli, and Radhanagari. Five years back, I camped inside the Chandoli National Park for three days with IFS Ben Clement during the tiger census. I was also appointed as the brand ambassador for Chandoli. In short, my love for nature and wildlife has a long history.

**Q: After visiting TATR twice, what is your impression of Tadoba?**

**A:** I love being at Tadoba. The forest is amazing. The wildlife is rich and healthy. The stay is comfortable. The guides are knowledgeable. Most importantly, the management is systematic. The discipline is highly appreciable. The rules are followed and there is no scope for nuisance.

The buffer area is as rich as the core area when it comes to bio-diversity. The communities in the buffer are sharing space with the wildlife. I witnessed the co-existence when a tiger got into a field. I just wish the villagers take good care of themselves and continue contributing to the conservation of Tadoba and its tigers.

- Anant Sonawane  
Communications Officer, TATR







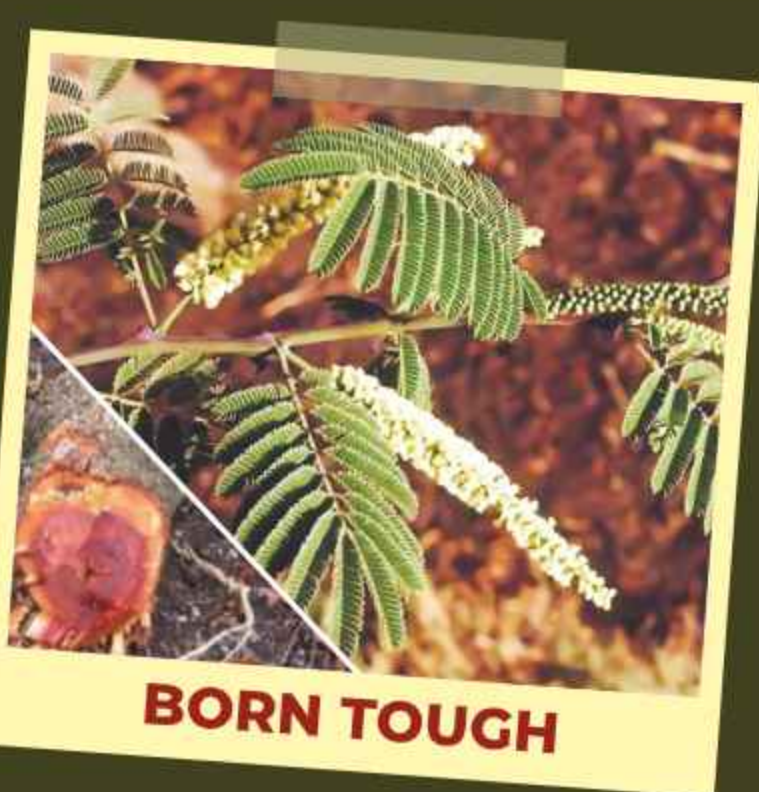
## LITTLE WARRIOR

**T**he Indian Porcupine or Indian Crested Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) is an Old World porcupine, which has quills embedded in clusters, as opposed to New World porcupines which have single quills interspersed with bristles, underfur, and hair. The Indian porcupine is quite an adaptable rodent, found throughout Southern Asia and the Middle East. It can be found in several types of habitats: mountains, tropical and subtropical grasslands, scrublands, and forests. This is a large rodent whose body is covered with multiple layers of quills. The longest quills grow from its shoulders to about a third of the animal's length. Its tail is covered with short quills.

The popular belief that the porcupine shoots its quills is incorrect. When irritated or alarmed, the porcupine raises its quills and rattles the hollow spines on its tail. If the disturbance continues, the porcupine launches a backward attack and clashes its rear against the animal. This action drives the spines deep into the enemy, often leading to severe injury or death. The majority of the damage is done by the short quills that are hidden beneath the longer, thinner spines on the tail and back. Quite often, these quills dislodge and remain in the victim's flesh. The porcupine is a nocturnal animal and seeks shelter in caves, between rocks, or in its burrow during the day. In Tadoba, we also have a red morph of porcupine which is commonly found in the central Indian landscape.

Many conservationists, most notably, Jim Corbett and Kenneth Anderson, have documented that the tigers and leopards became man-eaters after having fought with and getting injured by porcupines. This indicates their ferocity. One such example was the death of a tiger reported in Katarinaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh due to severe injury after its fight with a porcupine. Of course, an encounter with a porcupine is not always fatal. In Tadoba, a cub of T-24, popularly known as Sonam, was found playing with a porcupine on camera trap images. After monitoring, we found the cub safe and healthy!

- **Prajakta Hushangabadkar**  
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



## BORN TOUGH

**I** am sure, as kids, all of us loved getting our lips and tongue red after chewing a paan. Little did we know that had it not been the Kattha, our tongue would have remained pink! We surely didn't know that for generations, post lunch we would eat Kattha-applied paan to support digestion. Ayurvedic and Yunani medication value Kattha very highly, including as a cooling agent for ulcers, boils, and even eruptions of the skin. Similarly, it provides respite to the throat, mouth, and gums. So then, what is this Kattha?

Kattha is obtained by boiling the heartwood of the tree called *Acacia catechu*. Also called Khair, the Catechu tree timber is among the hardest with a density of 0.88 gm per cm. This dense wood makes it difficult for termites and even stem borers to attack. The toughness also finds use in heavy-duty operations such as building house pillars, cartwheels, plows, etc.

Khair wood has a very high calorific value making it a good quality fuel wood. Also, the coal thus produced from Khair wood is used by jewellers and iron smiths for specialised heating.

Branches of the tree are quite often cut for goat fodder and are sometimes fed to cattle. The heartwood, bark, and wood extract (catechu) are used in traditional medicine. The concentrated aqueous extract, known as khayer gum or cutch, is astringent.

I personally love this small stunted and thorny tree, as it is a preferred nesting tree for tiny birds like the Munias. Have you seen this tree in Tadoba? If not, ask your guide next time you visit Tadoba.

- **Anirudh Chaoji**  
Senior Naturalist



## A Lifetime Memory

**D**espite December, it still felt hot. We reached Alizanza gate at 2:00 pm. As soon as we started our Safari, our guide shared interesting information about the tiger. We were moving into a buffer area. The other gypsy drivers and guides were exchanging information about tiger sightings.

Finally, we reached a site, where a tiger was taking an afternoon siesta. The place was surrounded by bushes and grasses. He was behind a water body in the grasses. Hence we could not get either any proper photographs or the satisfaction of watching him. We were told that he was years old male popularly known as Chhota Matka.

Along with other tourist vehicles, we waited for some time for him to wake up. Then disappointed we moved further to look for the other animals. After 20 to 25 minutes when we came back to the spot, there was neither a single gypsy nor a tiger!

When we moved towards the road, other tourists told us that they had watched the tiger for good five minutes while passing by the water body. We were so upset about missing the golden opportunity! Many more visitors like us were waiting eagerly for Chhota Matka to come on the road again...and he did! But alas! Again only a few could get a glimpse of him. We were not among those lucky ones!

However, our guide and driver both were very sure that he



will come to the water body. Hence we moved to the water body at around 5 p.m. We hold our breath with our hearts beating fast. A peacock sounded an alarm. The guide told us to keep the camera ready... and finally, the King emerged!

Completely neglecting our presence, Chhota Matka kept walking confidently. He was just ten feet away from us. He looked at us for a second. That first eye contact with the tiger froze our hearts! He walked to the water body, drank water, and sat comfortably in the water. We could get some fantastic photographs. We fell in love with the well-mannered Chhota Matka who gave us a memory for a lifetime.

- Dr. Suvarna Chavare  
Vibhishan Chavare

Director, Cultural Affairs, Maharashtra

## The Blackie

**I**t was the most memorable day of my life. As usual, I entered from the Madnapur gate for the afternoon safari. At the very beginning of the safari, my guests asked, "Can we get to see Blackie today?" Though I answered, "Let's try", I knew Blackie- the famous black leopard's movement was in the core zone and our safari was in the buffer.

While I was taking my guests through the forest, explaining how one can't guarantee a specific sighting in the wild, I heard a single alarm call given by a sambar deer. We were

near the water body number 102. I asked my driver to take the gypsy to the water body. We reached there. But there was neither any movement of a predator nor an alarm call. Yet I decided to wait for some time. After five minutes, I saw something which I could not believe initially. A black leopard appeared and walked towards the water! This was my first ever sighting of Blackie. Till then he was never sighted in the buffer zone. He walked slowly, quenched his thirst, walked around the water body, and then walked to the core zone. We were watching him for more than five minutes and all of us were speechless!

My guests were extremely happy because Tadoba had fulfilled their dream!

- Bandu Choukhe  
Guide, Madnapur Gate





# In Search of The Big Cat

Our trip to Tadoba began with hopes that it will be here that we might finally get to sight the mighty cat. After all, we had been unsuccessful thrice at Corbett and twice at Ranthambore! Friends and family had time and again mentioned that if one has any chance at sighting a tiger this was the place!

And with these thoughts, we set out on our night safari in the buffer zone in Moharli. Sighting began with birds and wild boars, but no tiger or leopard was in sight. It didn't take long for us to realize that trying to search for a tiger was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. And this needle had a mind and body of its own!

One and a half hours into the safari and our guide suddenly heard calls from langurs. In the dead of the night, we couldn't discern anything besides the usual jungle sounds. I even tried to brush it off by saying that the sounds we were hearing were more as if someone had an upset tummy! But our guide persevered because he knew what he had heard. Hence we waited near to where we assumed the sounds were coming from, and lo and behold! A leopard was seated

on one of the branches of a tree, eyeing his potential dinner! The leopard granted us good sighting for a few minutes without moving except for occasional yawning.

The tiger gave us a miss the next day when we were in the core zone, but our resort mates had a successful sighting again in the buffer zone.

A word of advice to others planning a visit – don't go by hearsay, book whichever zone you are able to core or buffer, both are overlapping to a great extent and the tiger doesn't know this man-made division!

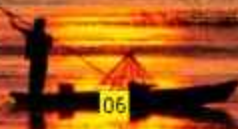
As our trip ended, we weren't a tad bit disappointed. We will definitely revisit and am sure we will get to see what we had set out for. Looking forward to our next visit.

**- Dr. Shilpa Singh**

FRCS (Glasgow), FICO, M.S., D.N.B., M.N.A.M.S.  
Ex-Fellow -Medical Retina, Royal Free Hospital  
London, UK

## 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](mailto:tadobadiaries2021@gmail.com). Your photograph/experience must be related to TATR only. The best content will be published with due credit.





# "Dhemsas" by the Gonds

The tribes of India are central to the explicit diversity that India preserves. One of the most prominent tribes in India is the Gond tribe. This tribe is spread out over Central India predominantly in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. In Maharashtra, they are concentrated in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts. The Gond tribe is native to the Tadoba landscape.

The Gondi dialect is considered to be a part of Dravidian languages. It has a rich treasure of folk literature that is preserved through oral tradition. Gond mythology has many religious songs known as Dhemsas. The community members perform and dance to these songs on auspicious occasions. The Gonds sing the Dhemsas songs narrating the tales about their tribe, forefathers, deities, etc. Traditionally 16 Dhemsas songs are sung. During the celebrations, the Gonds dance to the beat of a big drum. Women wear sarees and men wear dhotis. Both wear ornaments and put feathers on their heads.

Recently, a small group of people had an opportunity to enjoy the Dhemsas dance performed by the young members of the Gond tribe. The occasion was a reunion trip at Tadoba by Maharashtra police officers' 1975 batch. It was indeed a spectacular moment and the dancers received appreciation from all. The chief guests of this event were Rina Janbndhu, Additional SP- Chandrapur, and Nandkishor Kale, Deputy Director- TATR Core greatly appreciated the performance and shared their regards with the dancers.

- Himanshu Bagade  
Naturalist



## Thank you Tadoba

A visit to Tadoba is not only about sighting a tiger and other wildlife. It teaches one the immense value of nature and its conservation. It also gives us a wider and more inclusive perspective on life. Tadoba brings many more positives to young kids. Here are a few reflections on Tadoba in the minds of some little guests.







**IN THE SHADOW OF MOM!** A peahen walking through the jungle with her chicks. The camera trap image captures her motherly instinct of protecting the kids from the sun rays.

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## A Risky Rescue Operation

It was 18th May 2018. I was a Range Forest Officer (RFO) at Chandrapur. Around 6 o'clock in the evening, I received information that an injured leopard was spotted in Lohara FDCM area which technically was not under my jurisdiction. It was important to save the leopard. But I did not have my staff with me. Hence I took two-three people from the rest house and rushed to the spot with a net. I found that the leopard had injured its back, but was not immovable as I had expected. It was dangerous to go close to him. Also, it was getting dark. Hence I postponed the rescue operation.

The next day we resumed the operation at 6 am. The location was near a village. Thousands of villagers had gathered to witness the rescue. My team had double responsibility—control the mob and find the injured leopard. It took us three hours to find the leopard. He was sitting in a bamboo thicket. Hence it was difficult to dart him. My shooter shot the dart twice but missed both times. It was important to get him out in the open. However, the mob was getting excited. The leopard got irritated and all of a sudden, charged at my shooter! Watching this some of the on-lookers started running fearing that the leopard would attack them. It was a very tricky situation. I realized that

the most important thing was to save my shooter and calm down the leopard. The next second, I found myself jumping between the leopard and the shooter. I had a stick in my hand. But I had no intention to harm the leopard. I used the stick only to keep him away from myself and tried to calm him down. He kept on attacking and I kept on saving myself. People always ask me, "Weren't you afraid?". No. I have never been afraid of any wild animal in my entire career as a forest officer. On that particular day also, I was more worried about the leopard than myself. I engaged him for seven to eight minutes. Finally, he calmed down. Was he too tired to fight or did he realize that I meant no harm to him? I don't know. But I was happy that he cooperated. The shooter could dart him and we safely rescued him.

Later, the leopard was sent to Gorewada for treatment. His

backbone was fractured in an accident. He was operated upon and his backbone was fixed with a rod.

I was appreciated for my work, but I was happier with the fact that I could save a leopard.

**- Santosh Thipe**  
RFO, Moharli Buffer, TATR

RFO Santosh Thipe is recently awarded a state-level gold medal for his exemplary work in the field of conservation of forests and wildlife.





## THE ACHIEVERS (Nov. 2022)

Happy to share 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 glad to announce the top two achievers in November 2022.

Forest Guard - Mamta S. Soyam  
Beat - Chosari  
Round - Katezari  
Range - Tadoba  
Division - TATR Core  
Duration - 20 Days  
Target - 125 Km/ Month  
Actual Patrolling - 163.75 Km.



Forest Guard - G.M. Hingankar  
Beat - Khadsangi-2  
Round - Khadsangi  
Range - Khadsangi  
Division - TATR Buffer  
Duration - 24 Days  
Target - 125 Km/Month  
Actual Patrolling - 313.25 Km.



## Nisarganubhav Camp

Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is conducting conservation education programs for peripheral students of TATR since 2005. This year, BNHS selected 50 schools from the TATR buffer, Bramhapuri Division, Chandrapur Division, and Central Chanda Division. The selected schools are in a high human-wildlife conflict zone of the district.

The Nisarganubhav Camps were organized for these schools at the Agarzari campsite. Though the students were from the forested areas and were familiar with nature, this nature camp aimed at fostering empathy for wildlife, nature, and especially Tiger.

A total of 360 students from the 9th grade and 18 teachers from nine schools participated in a total of nine camps held under this initiative. The arrangements for travel from schools to Agarzari campsite and return to schools were made by TATR and BNHS. Breakfast and meals were also provided to the students at the campsite with the help of the local women's self-help groups.

The camp module began with an explanation of the history of TATR, its cultural significance, biodiversity, ecological importance, eco-tourism model of TATR, and its economic importance for peripheral villages. Students were then sensitized on the most important issue of forested villages in Chandrapur district - human-wildlife conflict. The students were also taken on the jungle safari at TATR, during which they observed the rich variety of wildlife. The initiative will surely be helpful to strengthen their bonds with the wildlife, especially tigers, and to live with them in harmony.

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**THE GYMNAST!** Oriental Honey Buzzard, a medium-sized bird of prey feeds on bees, wasps, and cicadas. They also eat bits of honeycomb and honey. A frequent visitor to TATR recently witnessed this interesting way of Honey Buzzard feasting on a honeycomb at the Pandharpaul area in the core zone. Balancing its weight on the wings, the Honey Buzzard showed its gymnastic skills!



**Do You Know?**

The most expensive coffee in the world is brewed from beans partially digested and defecated by the Palm Civet.

## Palm Civet or Toddy Civet

The Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) also called the "Toddy Cat" because it climbs up coconut trees and drink tapped toddy collected in pots. The Palm civet is a small, body is long. Stocky covered with coarse, bushy hair that is usually greyish and black in colour. Weighing 2 to 5 Kg. It has body length of about 53 cm with a 48 cm long tail. There is a white mask across the forehead, a small white patch under the each eyes. The tails is without rings, unlike in similar Civet species. Anal Scent glands emit a nauseating secretion as a chemical defence when threatened or upset.

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