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Tadoba

DIARIES

The Official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



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Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

₹ 30/-



A Peek into Culinary Choices of Animals

Dear Reader,

As you know, all life on our planet is a manifestation of energy that flows through our ecosystems. From plants, grasses in particular, to the top predators like Tigers and Leopards energy travels through the lowest to the highest trophic levels, which is visible to us as intricate connections of this food web.

Understanding this web and the interconnectedness of one group of animals on the other has wide-ranging implications for wildlife management. At the basic level, it is important to know what herbivores like chital, sambar, and other deer species eat in various seasons. This has implications for the use of various parts of the park and the different types of vegetation that are palatable and nutritious for these animals. At Tadoba, the works of grassland development have led to an increase in the extent of grasslands and also increased diversity of grass species across different grasslands. Also, as a part of this process, non-palatable species of vegetation occupying large areas of the grasslands were systematically removed. Going forward, we need to fine-tune this process by understanding the food preferences of herbivores. Earlier methods of studying these involved visual observations and microscopic analysis of the faeces of wildlife. The same methods were also used to study what carnivores like tigers and leopards eat. But often the results were not very accurate due to the limitations of the techniques.

Recently, a new methodology has been developed that uses a DNA reference library of all animal species and plant species found in any given area. Every sample of faeces collected is subjected to DNA extraction and compared with the reference species of either plant or animal. This gives us a very accurate understanding of what plants and animals are forming the diet of animals that are placed high in the energy pyramid.

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), in collaboration with the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bangalore, is studying the dietary habits of three charismatic carnivores: the tiger, leopard, and dhole (wild dog). The study, conducted during the monsoon and winter seasons of 2022 and 2023, explores the seasonal variations in their diets, shedding light on the intricate trophic relationships within this vibrant ecosystem.

The mammalian diet plays a pivotal role in unraveling trophic interactions and deciphering the broader dynamics of ecosystem functioning. Overlapping niches among co-occurring species often result in interspecific competition,

shaping the dietary preferences and adaptations of these predators. The study aims to provide insights into the width of the dietary niche, helping us comprehend the level of dietary specialization influenced by environmental factors and competition between other species of animals.

Salient observations of dietary patterns of the tiger diet have revealed that it was diverse with 14 different species identified from the faecal samples. Predominantly wild prey such as sambar, chital, and wild boar constituted over 84% of the diet. Notably, the study hinted at potential co-predation with dholes on shared kills.

Distinct dietary patterns emerged between the core and buffer ranges. In core areas, the tiger's diet predominantly comprised wild prey, while buffer areas showed an increase in cattle presence and a reduction in wild prey. This tells us about the quality of habitat that influences the abundance of wild herbivores and where management interventions are required.

Similarly, Leopards displayed a broader dietary spectrum, with 25 identified species. While chital and wild boar dominated, buffer areas exhibited a higher dietary composition, including domestic species such as village dogs, cows, and buffaloes.

Wild dogs, or the Dhole, exhibited a preference for wild prey, constituting over 90% of their diet. Seasonal variations were evident, with Indian hare featuring prominently in the monsoon, while winter saw a shift towards wild ungulates. Monsoon diets included a variety of species, while winter diets were dominated by sambar, chital, and barking deer. The study highlighted the influence of prey availability on seasonal preferences.

All this information coming out of a study based on robust DNA-based methodology is very important for wildlife managers to base their decisions regarding habitat improvement works. Proper management, based on such scientific inputs, will ensure in the long run that our habitats are managed according to the needs of the wildlife and they are not forced to adapt to undesirable changes in their habitat.

At the same time, it unveils the gastronomic choices of TATR's top predators, offering a nuanced understanding of their dietary adaptations across seasons and landscapes. As conservation efforts intensify, such studies become instrumental in safeguarding the delicate balance of nature in our protected reserves.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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Weed Removal for Wildlife Conservation

The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) stands as a sanctuary of unparalleled biodiversity, encompassing the Core Division and the Buffer Division. TATR is a predominantly southern tropical dry deciduous forest that harbors a rich variety of flora and fauna, making it a haven for wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists alike.

The lush landscapes of TATR are home to an array of plant species, including the iconic Teak, Ail, Bija, and Bamboo, creating a thriving ecosystem. The reserve is not only a sanctuary for vegetation but also a habitat for a diverse range of animals. Tigers, Indian leopards, Sloth bears, Gaur, Nilgai, and various avian species call this reserve their home. The reserve's biodiversity extends beyond charismatic megafauna to insects, reptiles, and a myriad of bird species, creating an intricate web of life.

However, amid the natural beauty lies a growing threat – invasive weed species. Hyptis, Cassia Tora, Lantana, and Parthenium, identified as invasive, have infiltrated sensitive areas within the Tadoba Core and Buffer divisions. These weeds, if left unchecked, pose a severe risk to the delicate balance of the ecosystem.

The menace of invasive weeds disrupts the natural cycle by hindering the growth of grasslands, a crucial component of the herbivores' habitat. The decline in herbivore populations subsequently endangers the predators, including the majestic tigers. Weeds push the herbivores into the agricultural fields and give birth to the man-animal conflict. Removal of weeds helps in the growth of palatable species of plants which keep herbivores inside the reserve. As a result, carnivores are also confined within the reserve area and conflict is avoided. Recognizing the urgency, the management objectives of TATR encompass the conservation of biodiversity, the protection of carnivores and their prey, and the restoration of the ecosystem.

A comprehensive weed removal strategy has been instituted

to combat this environmental threat. The process involves the identification of invasive species, including Hyptis, Cassia Tora, Lantana, and Parthenium, after the rainy season each year. These areas are then meticulously surveyed and demarcated for targeted removal efforts.

The actual removal process involves uprooting the invasive weeds before they flower, ensuring the prevention of further seed dispersal. This meticulous operation spans three consecutive years to eliminate the weed infestation effectively. Notably, the financial investment and manpower required decrease in subsequent years, underlining the importance of sustained efforts.

In the first year, approximately 21 man-days per hectare are needed, followed by 16 man-days per hectare in the second year, and 12 man-days per hectare in the third year. This systematic approach ensures the successful eradication of invasive species and the restoration of natural grasslands vital for herbivore sustenance.

The proactive removal of invasive weed species aligns with the Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biodiversity (1992), acknowledging biological invasions as a significant threat to the environment. By safeguarding the herbivore populations, TATR aims to secure the foundation of its ecosystem, mitigating human-wildlife conflicts and fortifying the delicate balance of nature.

In conclusion, the weed removal initiatives in TATR stand as a testament to the commitment to wildlife conservation. It reflects an understanding that safeguarding the entire ecosystem, from the grandeur of tigers to the humble grasslands, is integral to the long-term health and sustainability of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. Through these efforts, TATR continues to be a beacon of hope for the preservation of India's rich natural heritage.

- Kushagra Pathak
Deputy Director, TATR (Buffer)





Stream of Consciousness

The roads of Tadoba, meander as if like a painted river past villages, lakes and dense foliage. Their colour changes from a smooth terracotta near Teliya lake to a deep grey on the road towards Tadoba lake to an almost golden dust near the Jamni grasslands. In a way, each scene is exactly like the next, and yet, not even a leaf like the other. One cannot help but almost flow up and down these winding ways, blurring the boundaries between the self and the surrounding. It is easier to stop thinking, stop worrying and almost stop being, when trundling along on this stream of consciousness in Tadoba's jungles!

- Shreya Khadilkar
Visual Designer

Etched in The Memory

More than two decades have passed since the occurrence of this unforgettable incident, taking us back to the year 1999. During that era, private vehicles were permitted to venture into the heart of Tadoba, an era when the tiger population was scarce, and safari guides like myself were allowed to step out of our vehicles. On this particular day, a couple arrived for an evening safari in their Maruti 800, and fate designated me as their guide.

Our journey began at the Moharli gate, heading straight to Teliya Lake in hopes of witnessing the vibrant movements of wildlife. Upon arrival, we discovered a cluster of vehicles already stationed there, their occupants fixated on a particular direction. Tall grass flanked both sides of the road, concealing the mystery that had captivated the attention of the other tourists. Hindered by the limitations of my smaller and lower vehicle, I decided to step out, taking a few strides toward the grass for a better vantage point. I did not realize that the female guest had also disembarked, standing beside me as I scanned the concealed terrain.

In the periphery of my vision, I discerned her presence just as a majestic tiger rose from the grass a mere forty meters away. Swiftly, the tiger initiated a sprint toward us. In a reflexive motion, I scooped the lady into my arms, depositing her onto the car seat, before hastily retreating into the safety of the vehicle, securing the door behind me.

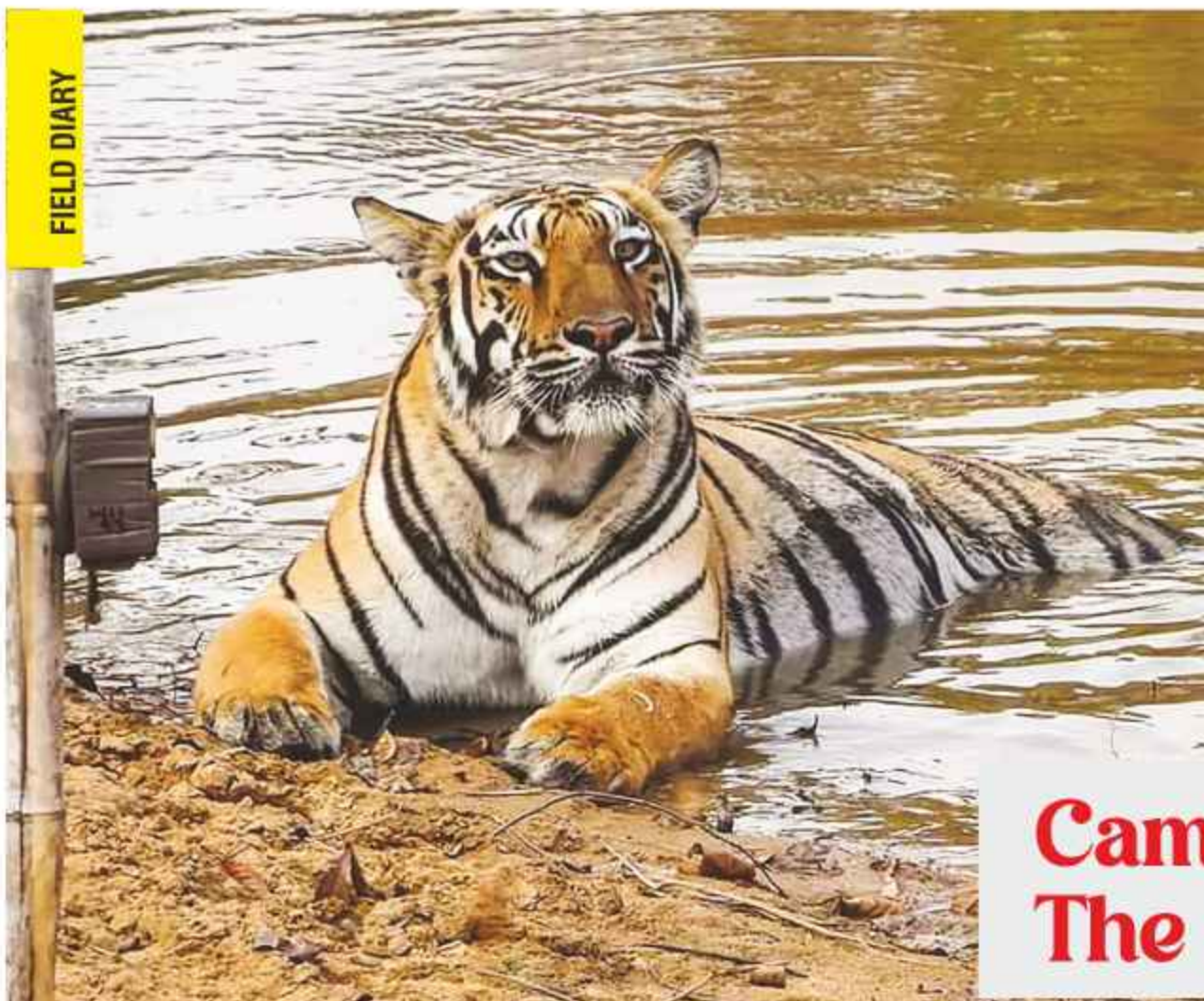


The spectacle of the charging tiger prompted loud exclamations from occupants of other vehicles, unsettling the beast. Responding to the cacophony, the tiger hesitated and eventually retreated.

The lady, understandably terrified, began shedding tears. Yet, amidst the lingering fear, I reassured her, ensuring that she understood she was now safe.

This heart-stopping incident remains etched in my memory, a testament to the unpredictable and awe-inspiring nature of the wild, forever imprinted in the canvas of my experiences as a wildlife safari guide.

- Anil Tiwade
Guide, Moharli Gate



Camera & The Queen

It was late in the afternoon on a warm and sunny day when the team and I set out to check the cameras placed inside the forest. Passing through the vast expanse of rugged stones, bamboo forests, bare teak trees, and a particularly dense belt of forest consisting of ridges with a few small waterholes scattered throughout, the air was still and drowsy from the heat. The only sound was the continuous droning of the never-tiring bees hovering over stagnant water, their activities unaffected by the scorching rays of the sun.

Upon reaching the waterhole, we parked our vehicle a few meters (less than 20 meters) away from the camera. The waterhole, surrounded by bushes, was sufficiently damp, and patches of tall grass and huge teak trees stood opposite to us, rustling in the wind.

As soon as we approached the cameras, a sambar bellowed, alerting us to the presence of a predator. After a quick scan of the surroundings, we initially dismissed the possibility of the dreaded tiger being nearby. However, with the next set of calls, we quickly climbed back into the vehicle and conducted a rapid round of the waterhole to ensure that no predator was lurking near the camera.

After completing the round, which took us hardly five minutes, we spotted a tigress sitting unobtrusively in the

water pool next to our camera. What an illustrious sight she was! After quenching her thirst, she crouched down, gave us a deep gaze, followed by a yawn, and then walked slowly along the edge of the waterhole. A faint breeze stirred the grass and teak leaves, and the beautiful striped body glittered in the golden light.

Her distant growls echoed in the surroundings as she walked on the road, encountering a wild boar along her way. The boar, always alert to danger, immediately rushed away to safety upon seeing the tigress. Though she eyed him longingly, the distance was too considerable for a swift pursuit of the big boar. She moved on, sighing with regret at the missed opportunity to secure food. Continuing ahead, she marked her territory on multiple trees and stopped again to stalk a sambar, but with no success this time.

As the afternoon gradually slipped away and the sun began to rapidly sink behind the jagged, tree-capped horizon, she continued walking slowly towards her secluded retreat, where she would remain until the shades of approaching night. The afternoon reached its heady climax, and we returned to work, checking more cameras.

- Prajakta Hushangabdkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



An Exhilarating Experience

The most enchanting aspect of a visit to a tiger reserve lies in the potential for a one-on-one encounter with a tiger. However, the anticipation of catching a glimpse, only to miss it, can be a profound disappointment.

I recently had a similar experience when we set out on an early morning safari to the Nimdela buffer zone, sacrificing

our breakfast and carrying a different kind of hunger in our eyes. Our eagerness heightened upon spotting a few chubby cubs playfully lurking around, albeit from a distance. Yet, this didn't satiate our thirst. Testing our patience, we eventually saw a huge male tiger T-16, popularly known as Chhota Matka lying belly-down amidst dense bushes, obscuring our vision, unfortunately. Adding to our frustration, he slowly stood up and walked away languidly.

Despite the disappointment, we continued to wait with bated breath for the exhilarating experience of spotting a tiger. However, as the saying goes, time and tide wait for none, and our safari time was ticking away, deepening our dismay.

Suddenly, luck favoured us. Chhota Matka emerged swiftly, locking eyes with us intensely with his magnificent gaze—a vision etched permanently in my memory. He took a few steps, settling down lazily. Then, in his majestic form, he stood up, gazing at us again before retreating to his sanctuary.

Those fleeting moments of an intent gaze, intertwined with his charisma, constitute one of the most extraordinary experiences of my entire life to date.

- Akash Sinha
Insurance Professional, Kolkata

Love in the Air

In the scorching heat of May 2017, we embarked on a safari through the Moharli gate. The initial leg of our journey was devoid of any wildlife sightings, prompting our guide to recommend a visit to waterhole number 91. As we arrived, we discovered a gathering of seven to eight safari vehicles, all anticipating some extraordinary wildlife activity.

We patiently lingered there for nearly one and a half hours. During this wait, a thirsty sambar deer made an appearance, followed by the unexpected arrival of a sloth bear. Although these sightings were captivating, some disappointed tourists, specifically those hoping for a tiger encounter, chose to leave the spot. Undeterred, our guide and driver advised us to remain patient, assuring us that the wait might yield rewarding results.

Our persistence paid off when, out of nowhere, the majestic male tiger, T-49 Matkasur, emerged at the waterhole. To our delight, he was accompanied by the most beloved tigress T-12 Maya. The air was filled with a palpable sense of love as the two tigers exhibited mating behaviour. They affectionately rubbed faces, lounged in the water together,



and engaged in mating rituals for a remarkable 40-45 minutes. In this intimate display of wild romance, they seemed entirely oblivious to our presence.

As time passed, the pair retreated into the grass near the waterhole, settling down peacefully. Regrettably, our safari time came to an end, and we had to bid farewell to this enchanting scene.

For me, this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that unveiled the tender and affectionate side of the wild tiger.

- Mayur Vaidya
Chemicals Professional, Gombivli

A Night at a Kuti

Under a sky adorned with twinkling stars, the night was a canvas of dreams. The air was cool, and the jungle's symphony, performed by crickets, night jars, and owls, created a magical ambiance. This, indeed, was my dream night, an opportunity I had always yearned for but never thought would come true. Fate had conspired, and there I was, on the rooftop of a Kuti (Protection Hut) within the heart of the Kolara range, surrounded by the mysteries of the core jungle.

The clock struck 10, and my colleagues, along with the Kuti's workers, were deep in slumber. Curiosity led me to switch on my torch, casting its glow on a nearby 6x6 ft waterhole. To my amazement, two Asian Palm Civets were delicately sipping water. The night belonged to the night jars, their calls echoing through the darkness. From the Kuti's roof, I watched them in flight, their eyes shining like stars under the torchlight.

Owls, the nocturnal rulers, added their own notes to the jungle's melody. Around midnight, a magnificent Mottled Wood Owl graced the waterhole, its entire body gleaming under the torch's light. Two hares reveled in the soft grass, oblivious to the world. The symphony was briefly interrupted by the spotted deer's alarm calls—a sign that the King, a tiger, was on the move. Anxiously, I scanned all four roads near the Kuti, but he eluded my eager eyes.

As the night progressed, the jungle fowl joined the nocturnal orchestra. Other mysterious players contributed to the musical night, though some remained unidentified. Exhaustion overcame me around 2:30 a.m., but by 4:30 a.m., I awoke to a mongoose enjoying its share of water. Indian Cuckoo, Brain Fever, and Indian Pitta joined the dawn chorus. With the rising sun, the bird activity soared, revealing more than 45 species in just a couple of hours. The show stealers were the Indian Pitta, Brown Capped Pigmy Woodpecker, and half a dozen Asian Paradise Flycatchers.

Descending from the rooftop, I explored the dusty roads near the Kuti to discover what I had missed during my short slumber. No tigers or leopards had visited, but tiny pugmarks hinted at the presence of a jungle cat. While I missed some moments, what I experienced fueled my thirst for more adventures in the heart of the jungle.



- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR



Naman Agarwal

THE HUNTER!

This mother of two cubs woke up, went for a hunt, caught a sambar fawn, and brought it back to her cubs... all in 20 minutes! A highly skilled tigress T-115 lovingly called Bijali with her prized catch.

SIZE MATTERS! A curious pack of monkeys watches intently as a sloth bear strolls through the dusty forest road, proving that sometimes it's not about the numbers, but the sheer presence that commands attention.



Sheldar Nannwadekar

THE ATTITUDE! Tourists enjoyed monsoon vibes with a tigress T-16 lovingly called Bhanuskhindi and her cubs at Nimdela buffer forest. Here, the tigress takes a chill dip while her mini-me practices the art of 'guarding mom with attitude.' Family drama at its wild best!



Harsh Patel



Ravindra Kulkar, RED, Kolasa

HELLO BOYS! Every day, their paths intersect, and each encounter leaves them enchanted by the tiger's elegance and splendour. A TATR forest officer seized this fleeting moment of mutual fascination between the wildlife star and the dedicated staff. The tigress seen here is none other than the Queen of Tadoba T-12 Maya and the image is clicked at the grass nursery in Tadoba.

Blue-capped Rock Thrush

This particular bird is an exceedingly rare find in Chandrapur district and Tadoba. My initial sighting occurred in 2019 within the Junona forest of the Ballarpur range. Remarkably, according to the e-bird portal, this marked the first recorded instance in Chandrapur district. Subsequently, I observed it near the Kolsa Lake area within the Kolsa range of TATR.

The male Blue Capped Rock Thrush presents an enchanting spectacle, showcasing a harmonious blend of blue, white, purple, orange, and black hues. The male, distinguished by its vivid colouring, features a striking black mask, a sky-blue head, and an orange rump and underparts. In contrast, the female, while less visually captivating than the male, exhibits a grey-brown plumage with scaled underparts, faint white eye crescents, less densely patterned underparts, and an overall paler appearance.

For those with a keen eye for avian wonders, the bird makes appearances in Chandrapur during the winter season. It migrates from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats for breeding purposes. This species typically breeds in hilly and montane regions, favouring open dry forests and rocky slopes adorned with scattered trees. During winter, it descends to lower elevations, displaying a preference for secondary forests and plantations. As part of its migratory journey, it can also be spotted in Pakistan and Bangladesh, often traveling with mixed-species flocks.

The sighting of this exquisite bird in Tadoba marks a significant development in the realms of biodiversity and tourism.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR



Tree of Life

There are numerous Banyan trees in the villages surrounding Tadoba. Unfortunately, there aren't many within the forest, which is primarily dominated by teak and bamboo. Consequently, the Tadoba management initiated an effort to plant saplings around the chowkies within the forest.

The Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), boasting the most extensive crown in the tree world, represents not just a tree but an ecosystem in its own right. It offers fruits to a variety of mammals, including bats, langurs, and squirrels, as well as birds like green pigeons, barbets, and hornbills. Additionally, it attracts insectivorous birds, which, in turn, are drawn to the numerous insects that come for the ripe fruits. Consequently, standing beneath a Banyan tree offers a truly captivating experience with its melodious cacophony. Within its crevices, branches, and hollows, the tree provides a habitat for numerous insects and reptiles.

Beyond its appeal to animals and birds, Banyan trees also hold a magnetic attraction for humans. The British observed that the village Baniya often set up their small shops beneath the large *Ficus* trees in the village center, thus bestowing the tree its popular name of "Banyan."

In terms of expanse, Banyan trees rank among the largest on the planet. The Great Banyan Tree in the Botanical Garden,



Kolkata, is a staggering 255 years old and spans over four acres of land. Similarly, the one in the Botanical Garden in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, covers more than eight acres! However, the genesis of these giants is truly unique. Their seeds pass through the digestive tracts of birds and squirrels and are excreted onto other trees. From there, the new sapling sends its roots downward along the main stem of the host tree. Within a few years, the host tree is strangled and dies. The Banyan tree itself then grows sideways and sends down prop roots that eventually reach the earth, becoming as sturdy as individual trees themselves.

If you've never embraced one of these magnificent trees, I encourage you to do so soon, before many of them are sacrificed in the name of development.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist



A Lion-hearted Friend

If you want to fight a tiger, you must have a lion-hearted friend by your side. This line from a movie perfectly resonates with the deep bond between me and Ajay. Our friendship extends beyond the professional realm, as we share the risks and the joys of saving lives.

Since 2013, I have been working as a Wildlife Veterinary Officer for the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. My primary task is to conserve wildlife and, concurrently, safeguard human lives from wildlife, particularly tigers. To rescue wild animals, we often administer tranquilizers to them. This challenging task requires not only skill but also courage. Over the last decade, along with the Rapid Rescue Team's (RRT) efforts, we have successfully tranquilized and captured/rescued several distressed wildlife, such as 59 tigers, and 46 leopards.

On June 3, 2021, at 6 a.m., all members of our QRT team including Ajay Marathe, Atul Mohurle, Pavan Kulamethe, Anil Chaudhari, Bhojraj Dandekar, and Amol Korpe, proceeded to a village in the buffer zone. I was told that a tigress had been in a dried water canal for the past two days, and her condition was critical. Given the severity of her injuries, immediate medical attention was necessary.

At the site, a detailed discussion took place in the presence of local officials. As there was no possibility of taking the vehicle to the canal, we decided to go on foot and monitor her from a distance as direct intervention could agitate the tigress. Around 40 field forest staff were positioned on both sides of the canal. We managed to approach within 80



meters of the canal's edge, allowing for a well-organized inspection. The tigress was lying in the canal, surrounded by rocks. She was not displaying any aggressive behaviour.

As we descended further into the canal, people on the banks of the canal got excited. Their movement agitated the tigress. The next moment we heard a big roar and saw her running towards us. People started shouting. Though we had anticipated such a move by the tigress, a slight miscalculation caused me to slip, and I found myself right in front of the tigress! Before I could get up, she grabbed my left leg in her jaws and started to drag me. I tried defending myself with my right leg. Instantly, Ajay and QRT members rushed forward, and Ajay, in particular, bravely grabbed my shoulders and started pulling me. It was a life-and-death situation!

The shoe in my left leg came off in these efforts to fight back. Now my leg was free! The tigress took the shoe, went back, and sat with the shoe in her jaw. Immediately, Ajay and the team pulled me out of the canal. Using the first aid kit from our vehicle, they provided initial medical care and quickly transported me to a medical facility in Chandrapur.

With coordinated efforts, we managed to fend off the tigress. This incident exemplifies the dedication and bravery of Ajay and the entire RRT. I express my gratitude for their swift response and commitment to ensuring the safety of everyone involved including myself.

- Dr. Ravikant Khobragade
Veterinary Officer (Wildlife), TATR

Mahua A Transcendent Bliss

Once upon a time, in the heart of the lush Gond tribal territory, there reigned a wise and benevolent King. He was loved by his subjects for his generosity and admired for his ability to bring prosperity to his Kingdom. Yet, there was one thing that intrigued the King—a desire to offer his guests something truly unique, something that would leave a lasting impression.

One winter evening, the King gathered his trusted ministers and informed them of an important guest set to arrive in March. Eager to please their beloved ruler, the ministers embarked on a quest to find the most extraordinary gift imaginable.

Months passed, and the winter chill gave way to the promise of spring. However, one month before the anticipated arrival of the esteemed guests, the ministers returned empty-handed, failing to unearth anything that met the King's lofty expectations. His patience was exhausted, the King's temper flared like wildfire, and in a fit of rage, he mounted his horse and galloped into the dense jungle, leaving his Kingdom behind.

As time passed, anger subsided and thirst overcame him. Water sources were scarce in the burgeoning summer, forcing the King to continue on foot, searching desperately for relief. Guided only by instinct, he ventured deeper into the forest until he stumbled upon a peculiar commotion.

Hiding among the foliage, the King witnessed a surreal sight. Tigers and deer, natural enemies, were singing in harmony. Eagles and snakes, mortal foes, danced together with joy. Predators and their prey frolicked, all under the shade of a massive tree laden with off-white flowers. A small pond beneath the tree collected the fallen blossoms, and the animals drank from it.

Intrigued and parched beyond belief, the King plucked leaves from a nearby Palash tree and fashioned a cup. He filled it with the mystical pond's water and drank deeply. Almost instantly, a trance-like state overcame him, stripping away his royal demeanor. He, too, joined the wild creatures in their jubilant revelry.

Hours or perhaps moments later, as he returned to his senses, he was overwhelmed with exhilaration. He gathered some of the enchanted water and hastened back to his palace, driven by an irresistible force.

When the long-awaited guests, Phada Pen (Bada deo) and Chidur Pen (Chhota deo), arrived, the King couldn't contain



his excitement. He offered them the magical water, and as they partook, they too entered a transcendent state of bliss. The Gond deities were pleased, and they blessed the King and his Kingdom with unparalleled prosperity.

Raja Birsa recounted his miraculous discovery—the sacred tree with off-white flowers. The deities admonished him to protect the tree at all costs, declaring it to be the greatest boon to the King and his subjects. This revered tree, the Mahua tree, had long been known as the 'Kalpavriksh' for the Gond tribes.

The Mahua tree provided abundantly for the Gond people. Its leaves were fashioned into plates and cups, its trunk offered valuable timber, its flowers and fruits were nutritious, and its seeds yielded precious oil for various purposes. Even the seed waste served as cattle feed. The liquor made from its flowers possessed unique qualities and medicinal properties, used both for celebrations and religious offerings, continuing the tradition of the King offering the divine drink to the deities.

Thus, the Mahua tree became a symbol of prosperity and unity for the Gond tribes, a testament to the wisdom and curiosity of their beloved King, who had discovered the magic hidden within the heart of their ancient forests.

(Koitur = People from Gond tribe/People who live on hills)

-Mandar Pingle
Deputy Director, Satpuda Foundation

Through the Lens of an Entrepreneur

Palash Shende, aged 24, hails from the Moharli village on the fringes of TATR, where he was born and brought up. This perpetually cheerful young man operates a camera and lens rental business just outside the Moharli gate, simultaneously managing a household of five individuals. Palash exemplifies the thousands of youths in the communities surrounding Tadoba, positively impacted by the conservation and eco-tourism initiatives spearheaded by the reserve management.

During Palash's school days, his father managed a Pan Centre to sustain the family. The financial constraints were such that Palash had to discontinue his education after completing the 10th grade to assist his father. Despite selling ancestral land and constructing a house, the family struggled. In 2017, with the purchase of a Bolero vehicle, Palash initiated a pick-up and drop service for Tadoba visitors. However, increased competition from high-end vehicles compelled him to cease the service. Driven by his passion for cooking, Palash ventured into the hospitality sector, establishing a small hotel and offering tiffin services to tourists, NGO workers, and forest staff. Additionally, he opened a Goli Vadapaav franchise in Moharli, with his father and younger brother overseeing the food business.

The turning point came in 2020 when TATR management put a ban on mobile phones during safaris. Tourists eager to capture wildlife moments but lacking digital cameras sought rented cameras. Recognizing the opportunity, Palash invested his savings in purchasing three second-hand digital cameras. The idea resonated, and he quickly set up a shop near Moharli Gate to cater to tourists. His success inspired other youngsters, resulting in the establishment of at least



four similar shops in Moharli offering camera and lens rentals.

Presently, Palash has eight DSLR cameras and three lenses available for rent. His monthly earnings range from Rs. 35,000 to 50,000, with a portion allocated for camera servicing, rent, and electricity bills. When asked if he harbours aspirations of relocating to larger cities like Nagpur or Mumbai for better prospects, Palash responded promptly, "Why should I, when I am finding it right here in my village?"

His story stands as a testament to the transformative power of local initiatives and the resilience of individuals determined to create opportunities within their communities.

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, 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.





JUST CHILL! Camera traps strategically placed in the forest unveil a multitude of secrets about wildlife. In this instance, a leopard is captured lounging in a state of serene relaxation.

The Achievers August 2023

Please join us in celebrating the accomplishments of the top-performing forest guards at TATR. These frontline heroes of the forest department have conducted the highest amount of foot patrolling in their respective divisions.

We are happy to announce the top two achievers in August 2023



Forest Guard - M. I. Gedam
Beat - Parna
Round - Karwa
Range - Karwa
Division - Core TATR
Duration - 16 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 210.33 Km



Forest Guard - P. P. Kshirsagar
Beat - Karwa 1
Round - Karwa
Range - Palasgaon (Buffer)
Division - Buffer TATR
Duration - 25 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 326.45 Km

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For Booking
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Understanding Laws of Jungle

I have been visiting forests for many years now, yet they never cease to amaze me! During a recent visit to Pandharpauli in Tadoba, we found ourselves, as usual, waiting to witness the outcome of a call. However, our attention was abruptly diverted by an unusual, piercing chirping sound coming from a small patch of grass behind us. To our astonishment, two jungle crows were engaged in a fierce battle over a tiny object that appeared to be the source of the noise.

Upon closer examination through my camera lens, I realized that a unique and dramatic event was unfolding before us. We shifted our full attention to the crows and were stunned to see that the object of their dispute was a small bat. I couldn't identify the bat's species, but it was tragically being consumed alive by the crows. The poor creature was making its final attempts to escape, but it was in vain as jungle crows are formidable predators with their sharp beaks.

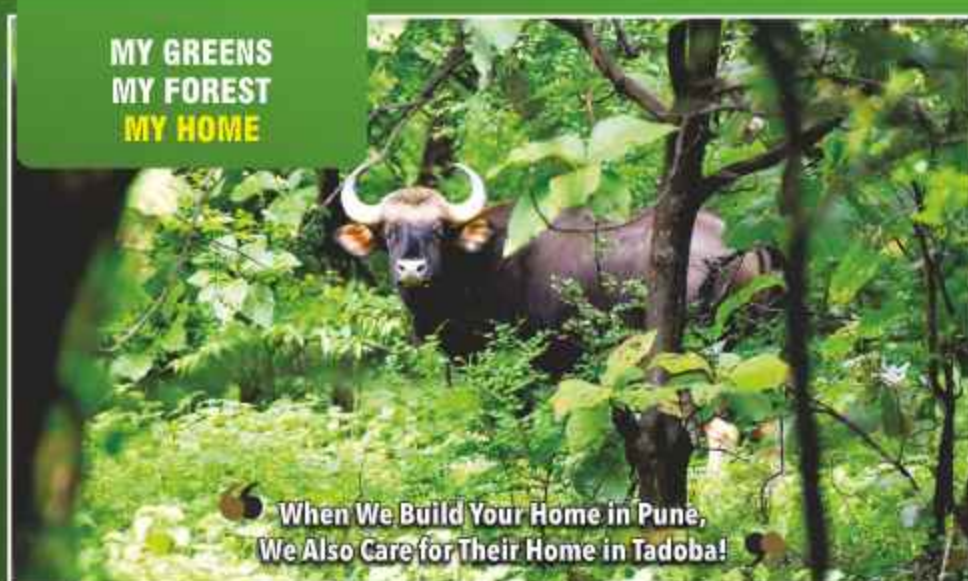
Even our guide, with fifteen years of experience roaming the forest, admitted that he had never witnessed such a scene before—a bat being devoured alive by crows. It was undeniably a cruel sight, but it reminded us of the unfiltered reality of nature.

All we can do is stand in awe of its raw and spontaneous beauty. What I have learned from these encounters with wildlife is that while we all eagerly anticipate glimpsing a tiger, especially when visiting Tadoba, our expectations are often quite high. However, the forest is not solely defined by tigers. Jungle crows, bats, butterflies, spiders, snakes, and numerous other creatures

contribute to making the forest whole, providing the necessary components for a tiger's existence. The forest is a living entity, constantly teeming with activity, and not every action is necessarily instigated by the presence of a tiger.

If we can train ourselves to observe and appreciate these smaller-scale actions, it will greatly enhance our understanding of wildlife. Then, a tiger sighting becomes the icing on the cake because you've already grasped what the true essence of the cake is, wouldn't you agree?

- Sanjay Deshpande
Wildlife Enthusiast,
Sanjeevani Developers, Pune



© Sanjay Deshpande, Tadoba, October 2023



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