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Tadoba

DIARIES

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Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS IN TIGERS

Dear Reader,

Some animals are fiercely territorial and protect their territories even at the cost of their lives. But in no other animal, it is fiercer than the tiger. We learned this from the recent encounters among tigers in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, revealing a vivid portrayal of the intricate social dynamics and territorial battles among the tigers. A brutal confrontation resulted in the warrior-like demise of the T-44 male tiger during a fight with T-126 in the Chimur range on the outskirts of the buffer area, and there was a fierce confrontation between T-185 and T-141 in the Moharli range of the buffer area. There was a surge of reactions from wildlife lovers from across the country exhorting the forest department to immediately intervene and save the injured tiger and even to prevent such flights in the future!

Such reactions, though born out of love for the tigers, represent misconceptions about the social dynamics of tigers and how they survive, live, and thrive in our jungles. We would like to highlight here that such violent encounters are by no means an isolated occurrence. Instead, they represent chapters in the narrative of nature's timeless law—the survival of the fittest. Grounded in Darwin's theory of evolution, the phrase "survival of the fittest" manifests itself through the complex social dynamics of Tadoba's tigers and underscores the inherent intraspecific competition among these magnificent creatures for domination, where only the strongest and most adaptive survive.

If you look at India's landmass and the variety of life it supports, you would wonder how with a smaller geographical area (2.5% of the world) and even smaller forest area (1.8% of the world), our country can support 16 % of the world's human population and 17 % of its livestock population while being one of the 17 mega biodiverse countries of the world. At the same time, the tiger population in India experienced a notable increase—reaching 3,682 in 2022 from 2,967 in 2018 which is a commendable 23.5% increase in the tiger population.

A male tiger needs an average of 60 to 150 sq. km, while females require territories of 20 to 60 sq. km area. These territories serve as the epicenter for pivotal life events – from mating and reproduction to securing sustenance and seeking shelter. Female tigers inherit and augment their mother's domain. In

densely populated areas, the territories of both male and female tigers can have heavy overlaps, underscoring the pressing challenges posed by constrained space. Generally considered solitary animals, they occasionally display complex social structures. Instances of them cohabiting with females and cubs emphasize the intricate dynamics at play. Beyond mere physical expanse, the size of a tiger's territory dictates the trajectory of its reproductive and hunting success.

At Tadoba, our recent estimates of the 2023 tiger census results revealed the presence of 93 minimum adult tiger individuals as compared to 87 from the last estimate. Tadoba currently boasts a nearly equal male-to-female ratio, with 44 males and 47 females (1:1.0682). The sex of the two individuals could not be determined based on the images. While the increased number of tigers signals success for conservationists, it also raises concerns about potential conflicts within the reserve. A significant factor contributing to territorial conflicts among tigers is the male-to-female sex ratio. Maintaining an ideal ratio of 1:3 is crucial for balancing competition for mates. An excess of male tigers can lead to conflicts and, at times, the killing of cubs by dominant males. This ratio is not static and liable to change over the period as the male-to-female ratio at birth changes. We believe it will happen naturally in due course of time.

The battle for survival extends beyond territorial and legal boundaries, emphasizing the critical importance of suitable habitats outside the tiger reserves, especially fringe areas. Safeguarding satellite habitats and corridors to facilitate tiger movement, can help in the safe dispersal of tigers and can reduce conflict among themselves as well as with humans. Whether making a place for tigers by facilitating the voluntary relocation of villages, creating nature conservancy schemes, establishing safe passages for tiger dispersal through corridor conservation, or future translocation of a few individuals to vacant tiger reserves, tiger conservation goes beyond merely counting numbers through camera traps. The future of tiger conservation will depend on a delicate balance between the range of management activities, continued support of local communities from across the landscape, and sustained protection efforts within and outside the tiger reserves.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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CELEBRATING CLEANLINESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri's Jayanti on October 2nd, the young kids of Tadoba displayed their commitment to cleanliness and environmental awareness. Organized by the dedicated team of Project Zero-Waste Tadoba, the Swachhta competition witnessed enthusiastic participation from school kids in the region. To infuse an element of fun and spirited competition, the children were divided into six groups, each named after the splendid birds that grace the Tadoba landscape: Peacock, Lapwing, Golden Oriole, Cuckoo, Kingfisher, and Parrot. The event comprised two exhilarating rounds that left an indelible mark on the young minds.

In the first round, an environmental quiz challenged the kids with questions centered around crucial topics such as waste segregation, the impact of plastic on the food chain, plastic's detrimental effects on the environment and human health, and the significance of conservation. What made this quiz truly engaging was the children's unique way of responding—by calling out the name of their designated bird group to answer questions. This interactive approach turned the learning process into a delightful and educational experience.

The second round took the form of a clean-up drive, where the young eco-warriors fanned out to various designated locations in the villages, passionately spreading the message of "Swachh Moharli, Sundar Moharli." The impact of their efforts was not confined to the village alone; they ventured into the forest colony, where they were joined by officials from the Forest Department.

The refreshing sight of kids actively participating in the



clean-up drive, armed with enthusiasm and determination, served as a testament to their commitment to cleaner surroundings. As a token of appreciation for their hard work, the children were treated to refreshments, making this experience even more rewarding. This heartwarming activity underscored a profound truth: the children of rural India are indeed trailblazers, lighting the path for their villages towards cleaner, more sustainable environments. Their unwavering dedication to the cause of cleanliness and environmental awareness is a source of inspiration for us all.

Project Zero-Waste Tadoba expresses heartfelt gratitude to RFO Arun Gaund Sir and his dedicated team of the TATR Moharli Core Department for their invaluable support. Their involvement and encouragement further fuelled the children's enthusiasm and commitment to this noble cause.

Project Zero-Waste Tadoba is a remarkable initiative underway in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, aimed at tackling waste management issues with the ultimate goal of achieving a Plastic-free Tadoba. This initiative is firmly rooted in the principles of the 5Rs and seeks to influence the communities surrounding the forest and commercial establishments to adopt a zero-waste lifestyle. The Swachhta competition was just one of the many steps taken by this visionary project to create a cleaner, greener tomorrow for Tadoba and beyond.

- Charul Parihar and Priya Jaware
Eco-coach
Project Zero-Waste, TATR



Colour Blocked!

Colour Blocked! A famous maxim in creative communities is "Art inspires art" and no other art has been as much of an inspiration to us as observing nature. Experimentation is a cornerstone of art and design. The visual "experiments" seen in the plethora of birds, unique camouflage patterns, symmetrically laid out flowers, etc. remain to be an endless source of creative inspiration. It is easy to imagine the creator of the natural world sitting in a room like any other artist, and playing with colours, textures, and layouts giving rise to the wonderfully iridescent peacock feathers or alarmingly red flame-of-the forest or this wonderful blossom-headed parakeet, which looks like a bird inspired by colour blocking!

- Shreya Khadilkar
Visual Designer

GOLDEN MEMORIES

The memories of that incredible day in November 2014 will stay with me forever. Back then I had just started my career as a safari guide at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. Private vehicles were allowed inside the reserve. On this particular day, I ventured into the Dewada-Adegaon zone, a less frequented area with hardly any tourist vehicles around.

As we rumbled along the dusty track, we reached a tranquil waterhole known as Faterabodi, surrounded by grass. Suddenly, a loud, heart-stopping sound echoed through the air. Was it the majestic roar of a tiger? Fear gripped us, myself and my guests. Yet, we gathered our courage and decided to wait, curious about what might unfold.

For an hour and a half, we waited in anticipation, the only ones in that secluded spot. The mysterious sound persisted, keeping us on edge. And then, like a scene from a wildlife documentary, a tigress emerged from the bushes – T, fondly known as Madhuri, the super mom of Tadoba! She roared, and surveying her surroundings, made sounds looking towards the bushes.

To our amazement, four tiny cubs cautiously stepped out from the undergrowth. Just about one and a half months old, they were so adorable! Madhuri showered them with affection, licking them lovingly. Then, one by one, she carried them in her mouth, swam across the waterhole, and carefully placed each cub in the grass on the other side.

Our hearts raced as we witnessed this breath-taking family moment. Unfortunately, none of us had a camera to capture the scene, but those golden moments are etched in our memories forever. The magic of that day in the jungle, with Madhuri and her cubs, is a treasure that time cannot fade.



© Jay Kodape

- Vishal Tiwade
Dewada-Adegaon Gate

FROM LIMP TO LEAP

In the chilly December of 2022, the tranquility of Tadoba's dense forests was shattered by the news of T04, popularly known as Hirdinala female, the oldest tigress in the region, found limping in the Kolsa range. The initial speculation pointed towards a hunting mishap or a territorial scuffle with rival competitors. As the story unfolded, it became a gripping tale of resilience, community support, and the delicate dance between human intervention and the natural course of the wild.

T04, a majestic tigress estimated to be 15-16 years old, bore witness to the eons of nature's drama. Her limp, a visible testament to her struggle in the wild, raised concerns among wildlife enthusiasts. The urgency heightened as it was revealed that T04 was currently raising two sub-adult females, adding a layer of complexity to the decision-making process.

The dilemma faced by wildlife professionals was palpable—confine the aging tigress for her own well-being or allow her to continue reigning over the forest, considering the potential impact on her sub-adults. Tigers accompany their cubs until they reach the age of 2, and separating them prematurely could jeopardize the future of the young ones.

The decision to monitor T04 for a few days, mapping her prowling route in case a rescue became necessary, reflected the careful consideration given to the delicate balance of nature. Any rescue attempt involved risks, especially given T04's age and potential hidden medical issues. For two weeks, the fate of T04 hung in the balance, with the dense forests echoing concerns and the community anxiously awaiting camera trap results.

The images captured during this period painted a poignant picture of T04's determination to protect her territory despite her frailty. Her sub-adults, on the verge of separation, signaled an imminent changing of the guard. The online community, comprising conservationists, animal lovers, and concerned citizens, flooded social media with messages of support, urging the forest department to take swift and decisive action.

As the team continued to monitor T04's health and the growing independence of her cubs, tension filled the air when her picture couldn't be found on cameras. However, relief swept through the community when the team discovered T04 with a kill in her home range, all three tigers feasting together.

2022



2023



The subsequent months saw the forest officials carefully weighing the pros and cons, symbolizing the delicate dance between human intervention and the natural course of the wild. March 2023 brought a revelation during phase IV camera trapping—images showcasing T04 and her now-adult cubs roaming freely, embodying the triumph of tenacity.

The narrative had shifted from a tale of fragility to one of strength and adaptability. T04's sub-adults had turned into adults, occupying parts of their mother's territory and venturing into new areas. New official individual IDs were given to both sub-adults. One female who ventured out of the TATR was sent to NNTR, promising to make it a new tiger destination.

The story of T04 resonated not only within the forest but also in the hearts of those who followed her journey. It highlighted the power of nature and the need for cautious decision-making when it comes to wildlife intervention. In a country where tigers are not just numbers but emotions, finding a balance between ensuring their safety and allowing them to flourish is a challenging yet crucial task.

As the fierce tiger mother's tale continues, the legacy of T04 serves as a reminder that not all wounded tigers need rescuing. Nature has its own power to heal, and respecting the survival of the fittest is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance of intra and interspecific relations in the wild.

- Prajakta Hushangabdkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR

THE MELANISTIC MARVEL

On the crisp morning of October 14, 2023, our safari from the Kolar core gate unfolded into a narrative of serendipity in the heart of Tadoba. The canvas of the Navegoan meadows, though picturesque, initially held no whispers of the wild. Barren landscapes stretched before us, and even a trek offered no glimpse of life. However, our luck took a fortuitous turn as we circled back to the Enbody route for a second chance.

As the gypsy rumbled along in the morning silence, hope flickered like a distant flame. Then, from the vantage point of the last seat, our guide's eyes ignited with a rare excitement. "Black leopard!" he whispered, and suddenly, the world underwent a metamorphosis. Cameras clicked in harmony, capturing the graceful dance of this melanistic marvel against the backdrop of the earth's rich palette.

Brown soil cradled the creature's silent footsteps, trees adorned in emerald hues stood witness, and bushes whispered secrets to the wind. And there, amidst this living masterpiece, emerged the Blackie! The road transformed into his runway, his silent prow painted in the golden hues of the sunrise.

It was a surreal moment! For two to three fleeting minutes,



time itself seemed to suspend, and our jeep became the sole audience to this enchanting encounter.

The world paused as Blackie met our gaze, shattering the barrier of shyness and forging a connection beyond the constraints of words. Then, with unmatched grace, he vanished into the intricate tapestry of the forest, leaving us with a tale woven in shades of awe and reverence.

In those brief moments, Tadoba shared with us the magic of the wild, where time stands still, and nature paints its stories with creatures that embody the very essence of grace and mystery. The memory of Blackie's fleeting appearance lingers, etching a chapter in the journal of our safari adventures, a tale to be told with reverence and wonder.

- Niraj Kaku

Chartered Accountant, Mumbai

COMMENDABLE CONSERVATION

Tadoba, my perennial refuge, unfolded its wonders once again during my fifth visit. Each sojourn to TATR is a revelation, a testament to the constant evolution of this enchanting wilderness. This November, the jungle safari at Tadoba bestowed upon us a series of awe-inspiring moments. On two separate safaris, we were graced by the majestic presence of two tigresses and their playful cubs, a living example of the Reserve's triumphant conservation endeavours.

Our first encounter with a black leopard, mere minutes into entering the Kolar Buffer, left us in breathless awe. Unfortunately, its elusive nature denied my camera a chance to capture the fleeting beauty. However, nature smiled upon us as we crossed paths with T-82, the regal tigress affectionately known as Junabai, in the same buffer zone. Our guide shared that she had just finished a kill with her cubs and was now embarked on an early morning exploration, marking her territory.



My heartfelt congratulations extend to the Field Director and the dedicated management team of TATR for their unwavering commitment to preserving the delicate jungle ecosystem. Their efforts transcend the protection of tigers, encompassing the flourishing diversity of flora and fauna. Noteworthy is their strategic approach to mitigating human-animal conflict in the buffer area, showcasing a harmonious coexistence between the wild and the local communities. TATR's conscientious balance between conservation and community welfare stands as an exemplary model, deserving of commendation.

- Ubaid

Overseas Educational Consultant, Hyderabad

THE HUNT (Part-II)

From our perch on the compound wall, we anticipated that the wild dogs might pursue the deer in our direction. However, they veered toward the rear of the MTDC resort. Without a word, Sidh and I sprinted toward the gate, inadvertently leaving our house doors wide open. We reached the concrete road outside, sat down, and awaited their crossing.

Within seconds, a high-pitched, barking-like sound reached our ears. I immediately recognized it, having heard a similar sound a few years ago during a skirmish between wild dogs and the dominant male tiger, Waghdoh, in Tadoba. I shouted, "Get up, Sidh. They've made a kill!"

We hurriedly ran in that direction, choosing different paths as we approached the under-construction resort, situated between our house and the MTDC resort. Construction workers called out to me as I reached the rear of the resort. They directed my attention to the scene unfolding some 250 meters from the resort – the wild dogs had hunted a spotted deer and were feasting on it.

I beckoned Sidh to the spot, and as the dholes were engrossed in their meal, we decided to get closer. We ran through knee-high grass and mud for about 100 meters, finding a secure vantage point. The wild dogs were now just 150 meters away from us. Sidh began snapping photos while I observed through binoculars. After some minutes, the alpha male in the pack turned his attention in our direction and began advancing towards us. Fearing that he might have spotted us or possibly mistook Sidh for prey, as he was seated on the ground, I

insisted we retreat to the resort.

We returned to our vantage point and continued to observe. The alpha male arrived at the exact spot where we had been standing just seconds before. He then made his way toward the resort, ventured into the grass, and crossed to the other side via the water. Was he strategizing another hunt? He was heading toward a tree. Through my binoculars, I noticed some movement beneath the tree. As the alpha male reached the tree, another wild dog emerged – a puppy! The alpha male had gone to retrieve the puppy. They both retraced their steps toward the kill, splashing through the water, and then turned their attention back to the meal.

With their bellies full, the three adult wild dogs gradually moved behind the MTDC resort. We also retraced our steps and sat on the concrete road, waiting for their next move. We observed them entering the tall grass, just opposite our gate. Meanwhile, the herd of spotted deer, which had sought refuge in the same grass earlier, scampered back to our backyard, crossing the concrete road with haste. Curiously, the wild dogs paid no attention to the fleeing deer, calmly passing through the grass, crossing the road near the bushy patch near the Junona gate, and vanishing into the jungle.

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR



CC-BY-SA/Anant Sonawane



BAJRANG

Forged in the kiln of ambition, greed, power, and control is a tiger that went on to become an emperor in the truest sense – dominating an extensive territory, reigning over regnant queens, and ruling interminably. His desire was like hunger; it obeys no laws, but its appetite. T-44 popularly known as Bajrang from Tadoba was the stuff of a legend. Robustly built, with burly shoulders, forelimbs, and a sinewy skull, Bajrang was the true exemplification of built-like-a-tank.

Bajrang was first seen in the summer of 2014 at the Panderpauni-2 waterhole of the Tadoba range. Three dominant males – Saturn (Namdeo), Gabbar (Leopard-face), and Tyson (Katezhari male) had turned the Panderpauni waterholes and encompassing territory into a bloody battlefield. A young Bajrang couldn't settle in that territory, and thus moved to the Moharli range, southwards. He was then known as Bajrang or Bajirao.

Receiving only rain for three months, at times scanty, water remains a scarce resource, especially in the dry season. However, the Moharli range has a few fresh-water lakes and two rivers meandering through the forest area, around which wildlife is concentrated.

Naturally-formed lakes are not only sources of water but also have their banks laced with mosses, algae, weeds, and fresh sprouting grass, which become a chomping ground for ruminants such as deer. Deer naturally attracts tigers, but tigers cannot hunt deer in open grounds; a tiger cannot outrun a deer. The tall reed grasses overlooking the perennial Telia Lake encompassed by dense trees provide cover for a lurking predator like the tiger. This is the perfect ambush hunting ground. And only the strongest of the tigers can rule a fertile domain like that of Telia Lake.

From the earliest known records, around 2005-06, Yeda Anna was ruling this territory. A dominant male of his time, he controlled a sizeable portion and reigned over at least four tigresses. Yeda Anna was the nucleus for tigers of the Moharli range – the Circuit line and the Devdoh line of tigers.

He was challenged and dethroned in 2011 by Waghdoh, a massive tiger of unknown origin.

The mighty Waghdoh had taken over the territory, the queens and the daughters of Yeda Anna, pushing Yeda Anna from his erstwhile southern territory to the North.

There weren't any indications of challenges during Waghdoh's reign. His sheer bulk was sufficient enough to strike fear in the heart of an intruding tiger.

By the end of 2013, T-10 Madhuri, the reigning queen was ousted by her daughter, S-mark female T-24 who is fondly known as Sonam. Madhuri herself took over the territory from her mother Lakshmi in the same fashion, a few years ago. Madhuri moved further south, and her loyal mate Waghdoh, who sired the four Telia sisters – Geeta, Lara, Sonam, and Mona, followed Madhuri, leaving behind the lush and prey-rich territory.

So, in all probability, Bajrang took over the territory of Waghdoh without a fight.

In July 2014, Bajrang mated with Sonam. That was the beginning of his chapter. By the end of 2014, Bajrang captured Waghdoh's favourite territory, the Waghdoh area, which incidentally became Bajrang's favoured territory as well. This ravine-sque landscape combined with a perennial flowing stream and the cooler shade under the dense trees is a tiger's archetypal realm.

The Waghdoh territory was then ruled by old Waghdoh female also known as Kori. Kori delivered a litter of two cubs in early 2014, most likely from Waghdoh, one of which remained in the territory and would go on to become Bajrang's mate.

Despite sitting at the top of the coveted throne of Telia and Waghdoh, and ruling over two queens, Bajrang was no ordinary tiger to remain content. With no tigers to check his authority and challenge his dominance, Bajrang went on an



THE GREAT!

expansion spree. In just two years, he amassed a huge territory ranging from Khatoda (and parts of Kolara buffer) in the North to Khutwanda in the East, Waghdoh in the West, and Dewada in the South. With these territories, he gained many queen consorts.

By 2015-16, he was reigning over Bala (Devdoh female), R-mark (new Devdoh female), Kori (Waghdoh female), Pakhi (new Waghdoh female), Sonam and Lara. He already earned the monicker – Casanova of Tadoba!

He even mated with other females such as Choti Tara when she veered into the fringes of his territory and could have possibly mated with a couple of other tigresses as well.

Bajrang had an indomitable reign, till the end of 2020, when he was challenged by a sudden influx of younger males. By then Bajrang had already sired 40+ cubs.

He was challenged by males like Tala (at Telia lake), Taru (Agarzhari), Ambeutara (Dewada), Paras (Dewada), Chota Dhadiyal (Moharli), etc. at different points in time. It is always difficult for an aging tiger to constantly thwart attacks by much younger males. So, he finally had to abdicate his throne by 2022.

Such was his ruthless dominance that the domain he alone ruled once, is now ruled by more than six males viz., Taru, Paras, Chota Dhadiyal, Pachees-Bawan (25-52), Shambu and Sanju; consequently, no tiger could have as many consorts as Bajrang had.

He sired 49 cubs in all, the most coming from Sonam and Lara, his two beloved consorts. Of late, Sonam is being challenged by Zara (Lara's daughter from 2nd litter) and Lara has been challenged by Roohi (Sonam's daughter from 3rd litter); both sired by Bajrang. W-mark (Lara's daughter from 1st litter), Collarwali (Lara's daughter from 2nd litter), and Bela (Choti Madhu's daughter from 1st litter) have established their territories as well. Whilst on the male front, Chota Bajrang (aka Pratap – Kori's son from her last litter) and Xylo

(Choti Madhu's son from 1st litter) have established territories. So, his bloodline will continue to dominate the reserve, just like that of Yeda Anna and Waghdoh – the sun will never set on Bajrang's empire.

During his long reign of eight years, Bajrang courted at least nine tigresses and sired many male and female cubs. But he never recorded to be mating with any of the female cubs, a unique scenario that surmises an important verity in natural selection – how tigers avoid inbreeding.

The extent of his territory was so vast and his mates were so large in number that there was almost no local competition for resources and breeding opportunities and thus the need to find unrelated partners, possibly.

After an indomitable reign, Bajrang had to find a recluse in the Tadoba range, hiding from other males in plain sight. With each tiger barely having any advantage over the other, the males viz., Mowgli, Balram, Rudra, and Yuvraj. As of the monsoons of 2023, he was courting Junabai in the Kolara buffer area for a short while.

By early 2023, beyond his prime though, Bajrang still seemed to have some fight left in him, but his olden and golden glory were never to be reinstated. Towards the end of his life, he became a wandering tiger without a territory. Chota Matka, the dominant tiger of the Alizanja zone, got the best of Bajrang on 14th November 2023. A very badly mauled Bajrang seemed to have died instantly in the skirmish.

Bajrang wasn't a warrior or a fighter. He didn't wage wars with other tigers. But he ruled like a King. He could bring down the formidable Indian Gaur. He conquered a massive territory – the largest ever of any tiger at Tadoba. He had the most consorts and provided a stable rule for a very long period, vouching for the safety of the cubs as a doting father. In the process, he taught us many lessons about tigers and their behaviour. His legacy thus lives on with the deserving title 'Bajrang The Great!'

- Siva Sanjeev
Wildlife Enthusiast



GRASSHOPPER WARBLER

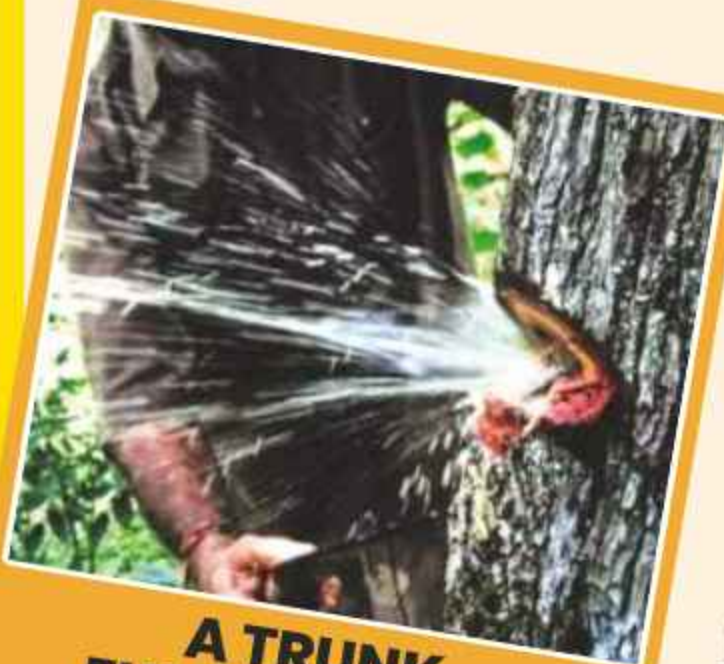
In 2022, a rare avian spectacle graced the newly developed Kolsa grassland in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. The sighting of the Common Grasshopper Warbler marked a significant biodiversity event, being only the second recorded instance in both TATR and the broader Chandrapur district, as per E-bird records.

This small winter visitor exhibits distinct features, including dark spots on its olive-grey crown and mantle, pale underparts with subtle buffy breasts and flanks, and fine arrowhead streaks on the vent. Recognizable by its skulking behaviour, the warbler sports dark grey-brown plumage with prominent black streaks on its back and long under-tail coverts.

Commonly favouring damp grassy thickets, heaths, and shrubby habitats near water, this elusive warbler is seldom seen unless engaged in its characteristic late-day or night-time trilling from perches in grass or low bushes. The male Grasshopper Warbler employs unique courtship displays, walking or running along twigs with a spread tail and fluttering wings. In terms of diet, this insectivorous species consumes a diverse range of invertebrates, including flies, moths, beetles, aphids, dragonflies, mayflies, spiders, and woodlice. The chicks are nurtured with a diet consisting of aphids, green caterpillars, woodlice, and flies.

Commonly found in tall grasslands, reed beds, and paddy fields, the Common Grasshopper Warbler's rare presence in TATR adds a feather to the conservation cap, highlighting the reserve's role as a haven for both iconic and lesser-known species, contributing to the rich tapestry of India's avian diversity.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR



A TRUNK FULL OF WATER

Tissa Buddha, the 20th Buddha who preceded Gautama Buddha achieved enlightenment under the majestic Ain tree, also known as the *Terminalia tomentosa*. This remarkable tree, often called Saza or Asana, earned the quirky nickname "Crocodile Bark tree" due to its bark resembling the back of a crocodile.

During your safari in Tadoba, you'll encounter the Ain tree, standing tall in the forest. It can reach a towering height of 100 feet, with straight trunks stretching up to almost 70 feet. What makes this tree more intriguing is its fruit, which boasts a distinctive five-wing structure. The seeds are dispersed through wind and water.

The Ain tree's leaves are utilized for rearing silkworm larvae, producing a special silk known as Tussar silk. This silk is prized for its superior texture compared to Mulberry silk. Additionally, the Ain wood is used to make furniture, boat building, and railway sleepers.

The term 'tomentose' in its scientific name indicates that the young leaves of the Ain tree are covered in densely matted woolly hair. What truly sets this tree apart is its ability to store water in its trunks. In the forest, locals make incisions in the trunks of old Ain trees to tap into this water source for drinking.

The state of Goa has chosen Ain as its state tree, recognizing its diverse contributions to the ecosystem and the lives of those who share the land with it.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist



MONITORING MY TADOBALA! A monitor lizard keeps a watchful eye on its beloved forest from treetop perch.

CHALA MAJHYA TADOBALA

Chandrapur, the tiger district of Maharashtra, boasts a significant tiger population, with over 200 majestic felines calling it home. At the heart of this conservation success story lies the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve which houses more than 90 tigers. Recognizing the importance of involving local communities in safeguarding this natural treasure, a buffer zone was established in 2010-11, encompassing over 90 villages. These villages have become integral to the conservation efforts of the TATR, marked by various developmental initiatives under the Shyamaprasad Mukherjee Jan-Van Scheme.

Understanding the crucial role of local communities, especially the younger generation, in the conservation of biodiversity, an innovative initiative called 'Chala Majhya Tadobala' was launched. This initiative, started in the academic year 2015-16, aims to cultivate a love for nature and a sense of responsibility toward wildlife conservation among school students. The program engages students in nature education and emphasizes the importance of their contribution to the protection and conservation of the TATR.

Since its inception, this initiative has witnessed impressive participation, with over 40,000 students from both the buffer zone and regional forests having experienced the wonders of the Tadoba forest. In the academic year 2022-23, 5,000 students from 135 schools in Chandrapur district actively took part in this transformative initiative. Notably, students from 27 ashram schools in Chandrapur also joined the cause.



The year 2023-24 marks another chapter in the ongoing efforts to instill a sense of environmental stewardship among the youth. Under the guidance of Hon. Sudhir Mungantiwar, Minister of Forests and Cultural Affairs, Maharashtra State, the 'Chala Majhya Tadobala' initiative for this academic year commenced on November 29, 2023, starting with schools in Bhagwanpur, Phulzari, Karawan, Katwan, and Doni in the Mul forest area.

Giving precedence to Bhagwanpur, a village voluntarily resettled from the TATR in 2007, the initiative takes a personalized approach. This village, formed by merging Kolsa and Botezri, exemplifies the harmonious coexistence of human resettlement and wildlife conservation. The first-hand experiences of Bhagwanpur's residents are instrumental in conveying the importance of conservation efforts to the participating students.

In the current academic year, more than 5,000 students from 121 schools in the buffer zone, including villages rehabilitated from the tiger reserve, will engage in this initiative. The Tadoba forest tour will serve as an immersive educational experience, fostering a deep connection with nature and reinforcing the commitment to the ongoing forest and tiger conservation movement.

- Prafulla Sawarkar
Education Officer, TATR

WAAGH: OUR KITH AND KIN

Upon the enchanting hill of Bodal Tekdi (hill of the Gaur), nestled in the heart of central Indian forests, where the wind whispered tales of ancient mysticism, a Koyatur named Mangalya dwelled with his expectant wife, Jangobai. One day, the couple ventured into the mysterious forest in search of nourishing roots hidden within its depths.

As they delved into the verdant foliage, the forest resonated with the symphony of rustling leaves and elusive creatures. Suddenly, amidst this sylvan symphony, Jangobai's joyous anticipation twisted into agony as labor pains gripped her. In desperation, she called upon the Phadapen, invoking the deity to find solace for the pain intertwining with the roots beneath her feet.

In a cosmic response, a divine force seized Mangalya, and he convulsed with transcendent energy. The forest itself seemed to hold its breath as Mangalya, now a vessel for ancient powers, bellowed prophecies. He proclaimed that the fate of their newborn rested on its gender. If a boy, Jangobai must shield him from Mangalya's gaze; if a girl, she must present the child to him. The reason unfolded—a son demanded a journey fraught with challenges, while a daughter would command respect from others.

The celestial proclamation hung in the air like an irrevocable decree. When the moment of truth arrived, and the cries of a newborn pierced the forest's serenity, Mangalya's eyes widened with fury. It was a boy. Consumed by rage, Mangalya, wielding the very tool meant for harvesting sustenance, tore a piece of the Saja tree from the earth. Channeling ancient incantations, he transformed it into a fearsome tiger and tigress, a living embodiment of his wrath.

Jangobai, witnessing this otherworldly spectacle, felt her heart shatter. With tears streaming, she made a heart-wrenching choice. Abandoning her newborn on the forest floor, she fled, leaving the child to fate's cruel hand. The tiger and tigress, embodiments of Mangalya's fury, circled the infant, their eyes gleaming with predatory hunger.



Yet, fate took an unexpected turn in the cosmic drama. The predators, instead of succumbing to their primal instincts, recognized the fragility of the tiny being before them. A silent pact was forged in the depths of the forest—the child would not be a sacrifice but a ward. The tiger and tigress, moved by mysterious compassion, decided to nurture the boy as their own.

As the seasons changed and the child grew, a unique bond blossomed. The forest became a stage for a peculiar family dynamic, as the boy, armed with a bow and arrow, became the provider for his wild kin. His days were filled with echoes of laughter intertwined with the roars of the tiger and tigress. He tended to them until their last breaths, turning the once fearsome predators into fragile beings under his care.

The tale of Mangalya, Jangobai, and the Koyatur boy raised by tigers transcended the boundaries of the ordinary. Legends echoed through the hills, and the Koitur community, rather than resenting the tiger as a manifestation of their wrathful leader, embraced it as a brother. The dramatic tapestry of this tale was woven into the very fabric of Bodal Tekdi, where the mystical and the mundane danced in a delicate balance.

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

—Mandar Pingle

Deputy Director, Satpuda Foundation

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.

PALASGAON TO RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

In the tranquil village of Palasgaon, nestled in the buffer zone of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), the story of a self-taught artist Liladhar Atram unfolds, a tale woven with threads of creativity, resilience, and the transformative power of eco-tourism.

Born with an innate artistic flair, Liladhar's formal education extended until the 8th standard. Later stepped into the world of sculpture, joining his father in crafting statues from the soil and plaster of Paris. The young artist also discovered a passion for painting. Because of the limited reach of his creations within the local community, making ends meet was a constant struggle.

The turning point came in 2013 when the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and TATR organized a Bamboo Handicraft Competition. Liladhar, with a bamboo Ganesh sculpture, won the first prize and earned a 15-day training in Pune. Armed with newfound skills, Liladhar found a new avenue to support his family. He started making bamboo handicrafts for the BNHS shop in Palasgaon. His artistic flair found recognition among wildlife tourists, bringing a ray of financial stability to his life.

The Corona pandemic in 2020 temporarily shuttered TATR and the BNHS shop, leaving him unemployed. However, instead of succumbing to despair, Liladhar seized the opportunity and secured a substantial order from a resort. With resilience and determination, he opened his own shop

near the Palasgaon bus stand, employing youths from his village.

Today, Liladhar is a revered artist in the TATR region, showcasing his talents in painting, sculpture, and innovative bamboo crafts. His shop attracts wildlife enthusiasts not only from Palasgaon gate, but also from Moharli, Kolara, Khadsangi, and beyond. His younger brother assists him and his shop has provided employment to four local youths. The financial woes that once shadowed him are now replaced with a sense of contentment as he runs a happy family with his wife and two kids.

With financial stability, Liladhar dreams of expanding his business, envisioning a future where modern machinery for bamboo processing fuels his artistic endeavours.

The pinnacle of Liladhar's journey arrived in November 2023 when TATR sent him to Delhi to present his art to the President of India. His painting adorned the prestigious National Level Silent Conversation Program, organized by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Sankala Foundation, highlighting the traditional art of tribal communities. Liladhar's visit to the Rashtrapati Bhavan and his meeting with the Honourable President became a golden moment, a testament to the transformative impact of eco-tourism on a resilient artist's life in the heart of Tadoba's vibrant wilderness.

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR





MIDNIGHT BALLET! The forest comes alive at night with a lot of nocturnal tales and our camera traps reveal all those magical moments. Witness the forest's lively ballet as a hare gracefully leaps through the air, caught mid-flight by a camera trap.

THE ACHIEVERS (October - 2023)

Kindly join us in commemorating the accomplishments of the most outstanding forest guards at TATR. These frontline warriors of the forest department have demonstrated exceptional dedication by conducting extensive foot patrols in their respective divisions.

We are delighted to announce the top two achievers for the month of October 2023.



Forest Guard - S. D. Maraskolhe
Beat - Thanegaon
Round - Moharli
Range - Moharli (Core)
Division - Core TATR
Duration - 21 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 223.35 Km.



Forest Guard - Ku. M. T. Buradkar
Beat - Moharli-II
Round - Moharli-II
Range - Moharli (Buffer)
Division - Buffer TATR
Duration - 26 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 349.26 Km.

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For Booking
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M. 9834689541
Avinash
M. 9158928393

Cycling
Moharli

A DUSTY ROAD TO SOLACE

In the heart of the Alizanza Buffer in Tadoba, my soul found solace as I embarked on a wild ride through what could only loosely be termed a road – a boulder-laden, steep slope that challenged both vehicle and traveller. However, all dusty roads and bumpy rides are not stressful, but some of them make you at peace. The usual discomforts of such a journey were mere background noise, drowned out by the anticipation of encountering nature's most majestic creation – the elusive tigers with their distinctive yellow and black stripes.

The air, tinted red by the dust stirred up by the gypsy's movement, became a mere afterthought. In this wild terrain, where every turn held the promise of a new discovery, the vibrant greens and intoxicating fragrances of the forest took precedence. It was as if the very essence of heaven permeated the air, overwhelming my senses and diverting my attention away from the mundane concerns of the outside world.

As the journey unfolded, I became one with the forest that enveloped me, much like the sea cradling a fish. From the playful mongoose scaling a tree to the leisurely sloth bear nonchalantly blocking our path, every creature seemed to embody the harmony of the wild. However, the true pinnacle of this experience lay in the unexpected encounters with the majestic tigers, each moment more enchanting than the last.

Tadoba's forest, a realm where rules are set by nature herself, demands a visitor's openness to learning and adaptation. It is a place where peace descends upon those who embrace its ways. The thrill of spotting a tiger is not confined to capturing the perfect photograph; it is in the palpable presence of the big cat, evidenced by pug marks on the road and the hushed alarm calls of sambhar and langurs echoing through the silence.

In the Kolara buffer, my senses were heightened as we tracked the elusive tigress T-82 named after a waterbody in the region- Junabai. The anticipation built through alarm calls and the trail of her pugmarks culminated in a breathtaking moment when she gracefully entered the frame. The essence of Tadoba's forest is not merely in witnessing its inhabitants but in becoming a part of their world, a world where the journey is as profound as the destination.

- Sanjay Deshpande
Wildlife Enthusiast,
Sanjeevani Developers, Pune

MY FOREST MY HOME OUR ROAD TOO..!



When We Build Your Home in Pune,
We Also Care for Their Home in Tadoba!

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