



Issue 33/Aug. 2024

Tadoba

DIARIES

The Official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



TIGER AS PROTECTOR OF OUR WATER SECURITY

Dear Reader

This monsoon has been very strong so far, and we have been fortunate to receive good rains that have filled the waterholes and lakes located in the tiger reserve to the fullest. Chandrapur district overall has received around 950 mm of rainfall from June onwards, which is about 150% of the normal for the corresponding part of the year. Unfortunately, the excess rains have caused widespread damage to agricultural activity, and crops have been destroyed over thousands of hectares. Many of the villages were cut off from the rest of the world due to water levels reaching above the bridges causing large-scale disruptions to normal life and activities in the district. One of the rivers that caused flooding downstream, the Andhari River, originates in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. This has put the spotlight on the role forests play in regulating the water flow and other hydrological services that forests provide. Have you ever wondered how the streams flow in summer when there are no rains? It is the water received in rain and absorbed by the forest as a sponge that is slowly released. But for this to happen, we need to allow the forest to remain intact and not disturb its integrity.

What we see today in the form of tragedies of devastating landslides and floods is in large part due to the fragmentation of forests and disturbances to their watershed functions.

It is to be noted that tiger reserves in the country are the largest watersheds and catchment areas that are very important for the water security of the country. As many as 35 major rivers in our country originate within the various tiger reserves (The total tiger reserves in the country are now 55, spanning all the critical ecosystems of India). The forests of these tiger reserves mainly provide two services: Water provisioning that augments the water flow, recharging the streams, and water purification.

The presence or absence of forests has a great impact on the hydrological processes at the watershed level impacting the quantity and quality of water that flows downstream. Natural ecosystems within tiger reserves filter out and decompose organic wastes introduced into them at various levels. In doing so, tiger reserves avoid the cost of the establishment and operation of water purification plants. Many of the tiger reserves are located upstream of rivers and streams that cater to the drinking water requirements of numerous people without the added cost of purification.

It also prevents the silting of water reservoirs which can take crores of rupees to desilt and maintain their water-holding capacity.

Forests of the tiger reserves contribute significantly to balancing the watershed ecosystem and maintaining high-quality water. Forests and water bodies capture water during monsoons and can be a source of water throughout the year. The forests play a critical role in not only regulating and ensuring water security but mechanism to provide natural water purification systems and enhancing watershed functions. We can better appreciate it by putting it in monetary terms. A recent study of 10 tiger reserves indicated that the monetary value for provisioning water from ten tiger reserves varied between Rs. 38.19 crore to Rs. 7,033.05 crore annually.

A similar study is underway for the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and I am sure it will reveal the magnitude of water-related services that the reserve provides for the downstream people of the district and beyond.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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MAGICAL WORLD OF BUTTERFLIES

As the rainy season begins, nature comes alive with tiny jewels that flutter and shine all around us. These jewels are insects, and among them, butterflies stand out as the most captivating and colourful. With their shimmering wings, butterflies are a delight to watch and play a vital role in our ecosystem. They aren't just beautiful; they're also nature's biological indicators, showing us the health of the environment.

Butterflies undergo a complete transformation in their life cycle, reminding us of the wonder of change in nature. They begin as tiny eggs, hatch into caterpillars, transform into pupae, and finally emerge as adult butterflies. This incredible journey teaches us to embrace change and transformation.

With the onset of the monsoon, butterflies become more active, adding vibrant splashes of colour to the lush greenery of Tadoba. You might see them in various situations, each telling a different story:

Fluttering Together: When you notice one butterfly hovering around another, it's trying to attract attention. If it follows closely behind, they're likely courting each other.



Mud Puddling: When a butterfly rests on the mud, it's sipping on essential nutrients and minerals that help it stay healthy and strong.



Feeding on Rotting Matter: Some butterflies are drawn to rotting fruit or even animal scat. This behaviour shows that they rely on various food sources, not just flowers.



One of the best places to experience this magical world is the Agarzari Butterfly Park in Tadoba. Here, in the majestic wilderness, you can witness the diverse beauty of butterflies. I remember my first encounter with the common tree brown butterfly there. It was trying to camouflage with its surroundings, demonstrating its incredible ability to hide and blend in. Butterflies are delicate creatures and have mastered the art of disguise, which they use throughout their life cycle.

If you're visiting Tadoba or near Chandrapur, don't miss the chance to explore the Shradhey Shri. Atal Bihari Vajpayee Botanical Garden at Visapur. The garden features an indoor butterfly enclosure, where you can see these flying jewels up close and marvel at their diverse forms and colours.

So, the next time you're walking through the Tadoba jungle, keep an eye out for these enchanting flying jewels. They are not only beautiful but also tell a fascinating story about the wonders of nature.

- Yogita N. D. Chhapekar

Biologist, Shradhey Shri. Atal Bihari Vajpayee Botanical Garden, Visapur

WHAT DOES A TIGER LOOK LIKE?

The average patron of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve does not need a physical description of what a tiger looks like; but in the interest of anyone who hasn't had the benefit of spotting a tiger in the wild or at a zoo, we will move forward in the 'tiger' series with a description of the tiger's morphology (In biological sciences, morphology is the study of the structure and form of animals and plants).

Tigers are the largest species of wild cats and their appearance is an ode to their feline features. Depending on where they are found, tigers have a characteristic reddish-orange coat with vertical black stripes running along the sides of the tigers, right from the tail to the face. The underside of the legs, belly, chest, throat, and muzzle are white or pale. There are white patches above the eyes which extend to the cheeks. Tigers also have a white spot on the back of each ear. Scientists believe that these spots are meant to look like eyes to confuse prey or avoid potential threats.

Tigers are large, powerful cats perfectly equipped to hunt prey much larger than their own size. They have a well-defined muscular body with a short and broad head and a thick neck. They have massive shoulders and forearms, with the hind legs longer than their fore legs allowing them to make huge leaps. Although lions are proclaimed to be the "King of the Jungle", tigers are bigger than lions. Tigers exhibit sexual dimorphism (which means that males and females of a species look different) and the males are significantly larger than their female counterparts. On average, male tigers weigh 100-261 kg while females weigh 75-177 kg. Male tigers have a body length ranging between 6 to 10 ft., while females have a body length ranging between 4.75 to 6 ft. As a rule of thumb, males are generally 1.3 – 1.6 times larger than females. Another interesting feature of male tigers is their facial ruff, which resembles a lion's mane.



While on a safari, many of us have come across the pug marks of a tiger. What do these pug marks indicate? Like the domestic cat or dog, tigers have soft padded paws, which offer a cushion while traversing large distances. The padded feet also allow the tigers to sneak up on their prey without making a sound. Unlike canids (species of the dog family) though, tigers have retractable claws i.e. the claws are hidden inside a protective skin sheath when not being used. This allows the claws to remain sharp for hunting. Not to mention, the claws of the tiger are huge and can grow up to 10 cm in length.

Tigers have large powerful jaws, allowing them to crush the wind-pipes of their prey by exerting immense pressure. These jaws are supported by a set of 30 teeth. Tigers have the largest canines of all big cats in the world and range from 6.4 to 7.6 cm in length. Interestingly, the canines have pressure-sensing nerves that enable tigers to identify the exact point to strike to sever the neck of their prey. Teeth towards the back of the mouth (called 'carnassials') enable the tiger to shear meat from their prey like knives, while the small incisors in the front are meant to pick off meat and feathers from their prey. The tiger's tongue is covered with numerous small, sharp, rear-facing projections called 'papillae'. These papillae allow the tiger to strip the meat off the bones of their prey.

Interesting Factoid: The stripe pattern of each tiger is unique like the fingerprint of a human. This allows researchers to identify individual tigers using their stripe patterns!

- Yashaswi Rao
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



A Vibrant Wader

The painted stork, a frequent sight in Tadoba's waterbodies, is a striking wader bird known for its long, skinny legs and vibrant plumage. Its black and white body is adorned with strokes of strawberry pink feathers, complemented by an orange head and beak, earning it the artful name 'Chitrabalaak' in Marathi, meaning picturesque stork. From afar, they resemble beautiful sculptures, gracefully poised to hunt. These elegant birds enhance the serene landscapes with their colourful presence, embodying nature's artistry in the waters of Tadoba and beyond.

- Shreya Khadilkar
Visual Designer

BALANCING SURVIVAL

If I offer you some land and financial assistance and ask you to uproot your life including your house and work for the sake of tigers, will you agree at once? This is the question faced by many of the forest-dwelling tribal communities across the country. It would be of course unfair to ask it to an urban audience with all the comforts of public amenities. Nor it is fair to compare the hardships of those living inside a tiger reserve. In these struggles of survival let's explore one of the facets of community-based wildlife conservation, village rehabilitation program aka voluntary village relocation program.

In 2005, India faced its second tiger crisis, revealing a sharp decline in tiger populations, particularly in the Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan where poaching had wiped out the entire reserve's tiger population. This alarming revelation catalyzed the formation of the Tiger Task Force by the Government of India, aimed at reassessing and revitalizing conservation strategies. The task force submitted a comprehensive report (Joining the Dots) which emphasized a balanced approach to conservation, recognizing the necessity of safeguarding tigers while also considering the rights and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities. One of the significant recommendations was the relocation of villages from critical tiger habitats to reduce human-wildlife conflict and enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts. This led to the initiation of various village relocation programs across India, including those in the TATR.

The relocation/rehabilitation program aimed to create inviolate spaces for tigers, ensuring minimal human interference in the core habitats. In return, relocated villagers were provided with compensation packages of their choice which included land, financial assistance, and support for livelihood restoration. Importantly, the process is entirely voluntary. No one is forced to leave; the process only begins after a resolution is passed by the respective village's Gram Sabha, ensuring community consent.

Advantages of Relocation:

1. Enhanced Conservation: Creating undisturbed habitats has the potential to significantly improve its quality in turn impacting the wildlife in the region positively. In Tadoba's case, the meadows developed on the vacated land are home

to several families of tigers and endless herds of deer.

2. Reducing Human-Wildlife Conflict: Relocating villages minimizes encounters between humans and wildlife, thereby also reducing instances of livestock predation and human fatalities. Tadoba has seen an increase in the tiger population in the core area which has also been reflected in the increasing number of conflict incidents in the landscape. Relocation of villages situated in the core area prevented the unimaginable losses from them.

3. Improved Quality of Life: Villagers often moved to areas with better access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. New settlements are provided with all the essential infrastructure such as schools, healthcare centres, electricity, and better road connectivity.

Disadvantages of Relocation:

1. Loss of Ancestral Land: Many communities have deep-rooted cultural and spiritual ties to their land, and relocation can sever these connections, leading to emotional and psychological distress. It is observed, the majority of the elderly population is affected by this factor.

2. Economic Displacement: Despite the provided compensation, the transition to new livelihoods can be challenging. There is hand-holding required from the social development sectors of government and non-government institutions.

3. Social Disintegration: The relocation process can fragment communities, disrupting social networks and traditional support systems. Utmost care is taken during the finalization of a new location considering the social network of the community is mainly within the district.

In TATR, the relocation process has been ongoing and at the last stage, reflecting both the successes and challenges of such initiatives. The villages relocated, in order, are Boteyzari, Jamni, Navegaon (Ramdegi), Palasgaon Singru, Kolsa, and currently, Rantalodhi is in the process of being relocated. The process in TATR involves meticulous planning, starting with the identification of villages in core areas, followed by consultations with the affected communities. This participatory approach ensures that villagers are adequately informed and involved in decision-making.

- Saket Agasti

Social Scientist, TATR



KOTHARI SAFARI

Our angle served as the perfect vantage point. We sat quietly, my son, my niece, and I, excitement quickly mounting. Our knowledgeable driver Sanjay had us tucked on a side street away from all the other jeeps. I held my breath as she neared. To my utter amazement and trepidation, she turned toward us onto the street where we sat holding our breath. Sanjay whispered, "Don't look and be still," in Hindi. I squeezed my 21-year-old son's hand as I peeked at the tigress T-12, popularly known as Maya from the corner of my eye without turning my head. Her large striped head came alongside our open jeep, the epitome of grace; her beauty at this moment unsurpassed while time stood still. Walking slowly, her padded feet glided past us, a blur of sinewy muscle and flowing prowess. Shaken to the core, I realized I could have touched her, the Queen of Tadoba, as I sat frozen, suspended in this unique encounter.

Our cousins in Mumbai planned this vacation for us to come from the United States. Our first trip to India in 13 years, our jungle holiday was coined 'Kothari Safari', Kothari being our surname.

Imprinted in our minds, our Tadoba experience was captured to be released at any beckoning. With every sighting, the reward was unparalleled, we chased these magnificent



beasts, a glimpse satisfying the craving, the urge to satiate our hunger growing. We saw T-114, popularly known as Roma ambling along the road. We saw Maya again near the water with her frolicking cubs. Our addiction was fed. Our spirits were nurtured by the abundance of the forest. Addicted, we will return.

- Toral Mallory
Tourist, US

QUEEN OF PANGDI

For the past five years, I have worked as a safari guide, and I feel incredibly fortunate. I have witnessed the highest number of sightings of the Black Queen of the Pangdi buffer area, a female black leopard that has made this area her home.

In 2018, a black leopard was spotted in the Pangdi core area, but none had been seen in the buffer zone until 2019. It was during an afternoon safari with my guests at the start of that year that we experienced something extraordinary. As we neared the Ghagarzari waterhole, an unusual animal darted across the road in front of our vehicle. It happened so quickly that my guests thought it was just a black cat. However, I knew we had just encountered a black leopard, the first of its kind seen in the Pangdi buffer. Unfortunately, we couldn't capture it in a photograph.

After that, the elusive black leopard vanished for four years. It wasn't until 2023 that I saw her again, twice, and confirmed that she was a female. Yet again, I failed to get a photograph.

It was only in May this year that I managed to take a perfect picture of our Queen as she crossed the road. In May, I saw her four times, and once in June. Now, she has become more



comfortable with the safari vehicles. She takes her time at the Aswalchuha waterhole, drinking water and allowing tourists to photograph her. I have also seen her mate, a regular leopard. I hope she continues to reign over the Pangdi buffer for a long time and that I get to see her little ones.

- Pramod Kotnake
Guide, Pangdi Buffer Gate, TATR

BRAND AMBASSADORS OF TADoba

As a panel member for the safari guides' oral examination at Tadoba for the last couple of years, I have had the privilege of witnessing the incredible dedication and passion of these individuals. The examination, held annually, is a two-stage process consisting of written and oral assessments. Every guide is required to participate, and their performance determines their grade and pay per safari. This system encourages them to constantly update their knowledge and skills, ensuring they remain well-informed and effective in their roles.

Tadoba's management plays a crucial role in this process by offering necessary training to the guides. I have had the opportunity to conduct communication training sessions for them, and it is clear that these efforts have significantly helped many guides improve their abilities.

For me, participating in this training and examination process is personally enriching. It provides an opportunity to deepen my understanding of the local communities, their relationship with the forest, and their extensive knowledge about wildlife.

Tadoba boasts around 360 guides, including 30 remarkable women. Many of these guides hail from the tribal Gond community. It's truly heartening to see these shy individuals speak confidently with guests. While they often express concerns about their language skills, particularly regarding "Shuddh" (perfect) Marathi, I always remind them that their dialect is just as valuable and authentic. What matters most is their knowledge and confidence, not adhering to a city dweller's idea of "perfect" language.

As Tadoba gains recognition on a global scale, it attracts

numerous international tourists. Our guides are rising to the occasion, preparing to welcome guests from around the world. Some guides have completed their graduation, with a few even holding postgraduate degrees. Many have learned to introduce themselves and Tadoba in English, practising diligently to master what they have been taught. Even those who have been working as guides for 15-20 years, now in their forties or fifties, strive to keep up with the younger generation by learning and communicating in English when needed.

What impresses me the most about these guides is their genuine love for the forest. It's not just about financial dependency on wildlife tourism; they have a deep connection to the land. When tourism was initiated from the Agarzari gate, guides came together to help build safari roads under the guidance of the forest department. Their cooperation and dedication extend beyond tourism, as they willingly assist whenever the department calls upon them.

The Tadoba Management also values and supports the guides. During the Covid pandemic, the management provided monthly rations to help them through difficult times. However, they also enforce strict rules to maintain discipline, taking necessary actions if any guide breaks the rules.

These guides serve as the vital link between wildlife and tourists. Their immense practical knowledge of the forest and its treasures makes them the true brand ambassadors of our forests. They are the unsung heroes of Tadoba, ensuring that visitors leave with a deeper appreciation for the wonders of nature and the importance of conservation.

- 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.



Subodh Singh Hada

THE WATCH KEEPER! Amidst the lush green forest in the monsoon, a leopard perches majestically on a tree, its gaze sharp and unwavering. From this lofty vantage point, it surveys its verdant kingdom, embodying the essence of silent power and keen observation.

MONSOON MAGIC IN TADOBA

During the monsoon, Tadoba becomes a lush green paradise, where every sighting feels special. The rain brings the forest to life, with vibrant colours and the soothing sound of raindrops. Each moment in this season offers a new and exciting glimpse of wildlife in their refreshed habitats. Join us as we share some of the highlights of this magical time in Tadoba, where nature puts on a truly unforgettable show.



[[Omkar Phatak



[[Arif Ayub Ali



[[Randeep Kataria, RFO



©Girish Vaidya, Wikimedia Commons

WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER

The White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) is a strikingly colourful bird that stands out in various habitats, from lush forests to open agricultural lands. Although kingfishers are typically associated with water bodies, this kingfisher can be found far from these aquatic environments, perching on telephone wires and in open fields throughout the Tadoba landscape.

Measuring 27–28 cm (10.6–11.0 inches) in length, this large kingfisher is easily recognizable. It boasts a large, predominantly brown body, with an electric-blue back and wings, a heavy red bill, and a distinctive snow-white patch extending from its throat to its breast. In flight, the bird's large white wing patches contrast with its blue and black plumage, adding to its visual appeal. While males and females look alike, juveniles are a duller version of the vibrant adults.

The White-throated Kingfisher has a varied diet that includes rats, skinks, lizards, crabs, fish, frogs, insects, and even bird chicks. Its call is a series of jarring, raptor-like trills and cackles, often heard during flight or from a high perch.

Breeding occurs from March to July, with the female laying 3 to 7 round eggs in a tunnel-like nest dug into soil walls of dried nallahs. Both parents are involved in rearing the chicks. Today, the White-throated Kingfisher is the State Bird of West Bengal, celebrated for its stunning appearance and captivating presence.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR

DIKAMALI

While walking in the forest near Karwa village in the TATR Buffer Zone, Balaji Kaka, a local who has been a mentor to me in many ways, pointed out the striking flowers of the Dikamali tree (*Gardenia gummifera*). The white flowers of this Gummy Gardenia tree, some of which had turned yellow, emitted a pleasant fragrance. Bees and many insects swarmed around the flowers, likely attracted by the nectar and pollen.

It was April, and the Dikamali flowers were in full bloom. The fruits that follow take around 8-10 months to mature. The tree belongs to the Rubiaceae family, the world's fourth-largest group of flowering plants, which also includes coffee. Besides being found in Central Indian forests like Tadoba, Dikamali trees are cultivated as ornamental plants in parks and gardens due to their attractive and fragrant flowers.

Various parts of this tree have been used by local practitioners as a painkiller, wound healer, antifungal, and antioxidant. Traditionally, Dikamali powder has been used for dental aches and is known to help babies develop strong and painless new teeth. The famous Gandhraj and Dikamali gum, which oozes from the leaf buds, is very popular and can also be bought online.

In some communities, flowers are used to flavour tea or as a culinary ingredient. An array of chemical compounds, such as cycloartane, including dikamaliartanes, are extracted from the Dikamali trees.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

A RARE BREAKFAST

On a warm May morning, the gentle lapping waves were just like any other day in the forest. However, today was special because it marked the end of our exciting safari. We had been talking to the forest dwellers since the morning, snapping lots of pictures with our camera. As our vehicle wound its way along the path, it came to a halt in front of Pandharpauni, where we saw a lot of animals. We then took in the beautiful path leading to Tadoba Lake, amid intermittent silence.

Tadoba Lake is one of the main sources of water in the forest, and we knew that crocodiles lived in its waters. Our guide, Dilip, said, "Keep an eye on the water... I have a feeling something is about to happen!" Just then, a crocodile emerged from the lake, carrying a huge, freshly caught fish in its mouth. Was the crocodile enjoying its breakfast? It was a rare and amazing sight, one that we will remember forever.

- Debadrita Dubey

Age- 17 years

Class- 12, Bardhaman, West Bengal



LEOPARD'S GLORY

Our first adventure took us to the Kolara zone of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. We were all excited, hoping to spot a tiger. Our guide, Ashish, an experienced and knowledgeable person, led us through the dense forest. Despite our efforts, we couldn't find any tigers, which felt a bit disappointing.

But then, things got incredibly exciting! We heard distant alarm calls echoing through the forest, and Ashish Uncle suggested we investigate. We drove towards the source of the calls, our hearts racing with excitement. And guess what? When we got there, right in front of us was an incredible leopard, just chilling like it owned the place!

We were all amazed as we watched this magnificent creature, its golden fur glowing in the sunlight. It was like something out of a movie! The leopard didn't even seem bothered by us. It just casually strolled past our jeep, giving us the coolest photo before disappearing into the bushes. We realized on the spot that we were the only ones who saw the leopard. None of the other vehicles spotted it, which made our experience even more special.

As the excitement of the moment slowly faded, we couldn't stop talking about what we had just seen. It was definitely the highlight of our trip and a memory that will stick with us forever. Tadoba is just full of surprises!



- Sharv Deshpande

Age- 14 years

Class- 10, VPMS, Lohegaon, Pune

Book your safaris only through the official booking site:
<https://mytadoba.mahaforest.gov.in>



SYMPHONY OF LIGHTS

The phenomenon of bioluminescence at Tadoba, during the onset of the monsoon is truly spectacular. Each year, shortly after the first rains, millions of fireflies gather in the jungle, creating a mesmerizing display of light. This unique congregation was captured in photographs at our biodiverse campus.

In this natural spectacle, only male fireflies, equipped with wings, gather on trees to emit light from their abdomens. Wingless females on the ground are attracted to these synchronized flashes and respond accordingly.

The synchronized flashing, where fireflies adjust their frequency to match their neighbours and flash simultaneously, creates a wave-like effect across the forest, offering a breath-taking visual treat.

- Jeswin Kingsly
Naturalist, Red Earth Resort

Firefly Survey in Tadoba

World Firefly Day was celebrated on 6-7 July across the globe to spread awareness about the fireflies. On this occasion, a Firefly Survey was conducted in the TATR.

The approximate number of fireflies observed in various ranges is as follows:

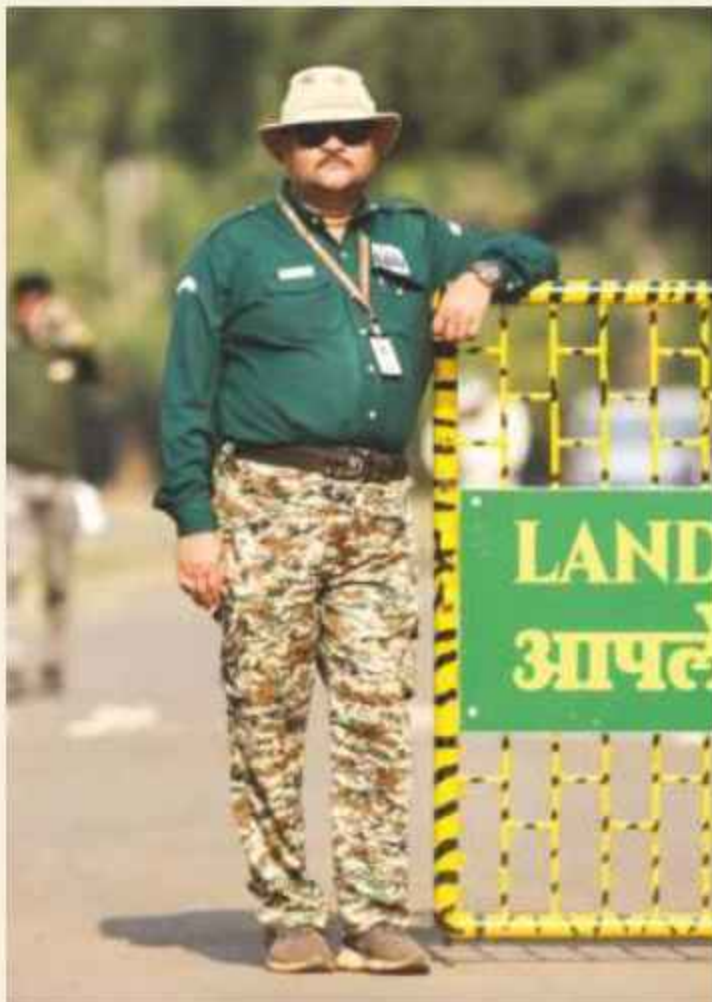
Tadoba	-	48	Moharli	-	109
Karwa	-	115	Khadsangl	-	128
Kolsa	-	220	Mul	-	177
Kolara	-	172	Total	-	969

INTERNATIONAL TIGER DAY

International Tiger Day was celebrated in TATR on 29th July. Various initiatives were undertaken by the forest department in the villages around TATR to raise awareness about tigers. These included painting competitions, walking rallies, cycle rallies, motorcycle rallies, Gypsy rallies, cleanliness drives, and tree planting. School students, local villagers, guides, Gypsy drivers, and forest department officials and staff participated in these initiatives.



AN ENTREPRENEUR WITH A GREEN HEART



Sanjay Mankar's story is an inspiring one, not just for the youth living around the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) but for everyone near tiger reserves across India. Born and raised in Moharli, Sanjay transformed his love for wildlife into successful business ventures, showcasing his entrepreneurial spirit. Today, he works as a safari guide, owns two gypsies, and runs a souvenir shop in Moharli.

Sanjay comes from a family deeply connected to Tadoba. His grandfather and father both served as chowkidars (guards), and his uncle still works as a chowkidar at the Field Director's office. From a young age, Sanjay was captivated by the forest and wildlife. He frequently accompanied his father on visits to the forest, where he marvelled at the beauty of nature.

In 1998, after finishing his 10th grade exams, Sanjay had nothing to do during the summer holidays. One day, he decided to visit the entry gate at Moharli and joined a group of guests as a guide. From then on, he started working as a guide every summer and Diwali holiday. Back then, walking tours were also allowed in Tadoba, and whether on foot or in a

vehicle, Sanjay never missed a chance to explore the jungle and satisfy his thirst for wildlife sightings. As a guide, he earned Rs. 5 per hour, making about Rs. 100-150 per day, which helped support his family.

By the time he finished his 12th grade exams, the forest department had opened a canteen for tourists at Panchdhara near Tadoba Lake. A businessman named Mr. Ashok Patel from Jam had a two-year contract to run the canteen. Seeing a business opportunity, Sanjay opened a small paan (betel leaf) shop nearby, using Rs. 500 from his savings and borrowing Rs. 700 from his mother. After a year and a half, when Mr. Patel struggled to manage the canteen, he offered Sanjay the chance to run it for the last six months of the contract. Sanjay seized the opportunity and managed it so efficiently that when the forest department took over the canteen after the contract ended, they appointed him as the manager, with a salary of Rs. 800 per month. Sanjay worked hard and made the venture profitable, and the department awarded him the contract around 2005. He ran the canteen until 2008 when the department closed all activities in the core area.

The canteen business improved Sanjay's financial situation. He got married in 2005 and bought his first Gypsy in 2006. Over time, he owned six Gypsies in total. Throughout his entrepreneurial journey, Sanjay never lost his passion for wildlife and continued working as a safari guide.

With the growing population and tiger sightings in Tadoba, tourism flourished. Sanjay encouraged local youths to buy their own Gypsies. Later, when the Tadoba Management implemented a policy restricting the number of vehicles an individual could own, he reduced his Gypsies to two. Today, he employs three local drivers to operate his vehicles.

Just before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Moharli Grampanchayat auctioned commercial shops near the Moharli gate. As soon as tourism resumed after the lockdown, Sanjay rented a shop and started a souvenir shop, providing employment to three local girls.

While Sanjay has built his businesses around tourism in Tadoba, he remains deeply connected to the forest and wildlife. He never misses an opportunity to venture into the forest as a guide, fulfilling his passion. His story exemplifies how determination, passion, and entrepreneurship can transform lives and inspire others.

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR



DRAMA IN THE DARK! Caught in the glow of the night, this camera trap at the TATR landscape captures a rare and intense moment: a tiger and a leopard confront each other over a prey. With tensions high, this striking scene highlights the raw and unpredictable nature of the wild.

THE ACHIEVERS (June-2024)

Join us in celebrating the achievements of the top-performing forest guards at TATR. These frontline heroes of the forest department have done the most foot patrols in their divisions.

We are excited to announce the top two achievers for June 2024!



Forest Guard - M. A. Rajgade
Beat - Sonegaon
Round - Sonegaon
Range - Tadoba
Division - Core TATR
Duration - 22 Days
Target - 125 Km / Month
Actual Patrolling - 333.21 Km



Forest Guard - S. M. Thamke
Beat - Khandala-II
Round - Warvat
Range - Chandrapur Buffer
Division - Buffer TATR
Duration - 27 Days
Target - 125Km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 350.43 Km

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M. 9834689541
Avinash Rathod
M. 9158928393



Kayaking
Moharli

For Booking
Sanjay Junde
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Avinash Rathod
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Adventure
Agazari

For Booking
Ajay Kodape
M. 9730853324



Camping Site
Agazari & Nandrapur

For Booking
Ajay Kodape
M. 9730853324
Rupesh
M. 7083669491



Cycling
Nubhari

For Booking
Sanjay
M. 9834689541
Avinash
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One more wish that remained on my list for a long time was to see and photograph a male tiger with its habitat in the background and its full profile at eye level. This was quite ambitious because a male tiger's territory is five times larger than a tigress's, so it could be anywhere in the forest. Yet, the forest sometimes surprises you, as the Marathi phrase goes, "Andhala magato ek dola aani Dev deto don", meaning "a blind man asks God for the vision of one eye, and God gives him the vision of both."

At Tadoba, we once witnessed a tigress T-163, popularly known as Collerwali, hunting a wild boar right in front of us. It was late evening, and we had to head back to the gate, but we were fortunate to have a booking for the same zone the next morning. Determined, we returned to the location at dawn. As we reached Junona grassland behind the MTDC resort at Moahrli, we saw a tiger walking away from the kill. I noticed that it was much larger than the one we had seen the previous evening. We decided to follow it, and just in time, we traversed the meadow to see the tiger walking parallel to us. To our surprise, it was the huge male tiger T-84, lovingly called Chota Dadhiyal, likely drawn to the kill in his territory and possibly mating with Collerwali. Capturing his enormous frame was thrilling, although with the Gypsy moving and the tiger walking, it was difficult to get a clear shot. Still, watching him was a sheer joy. The best part was the surprise, as we hadn't been looking for him. But that's what Tadoba is-full of surprises!

I have more stories and wishes that have come true, but I will save those for another time. What I learned from these experiences is that in the forest, you should respect the smallest details and plan safaris accordingly, always considering such sequences and respecting the experience of the driver and guides. Listening to your guides is crucial, as they know the animals' movements, especially since tigers are creatures of habit and follow set paths. Then there's the element of luck, but to test that luck, you must visit the forests, right? Hence make you move. Plan your trip meticulously, book your safaris, keep your eyes, ears, and mind open, and let your luck do the rest for you.

Promising to try my luck again soon and allowing myself time to make a new wish list, I left Tadoba with a satisfied mind and loads of memories.

- Sanjay Deshpande
Wildlife Enthusiast,
Sanjeevani Developers, Pune



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