



Tiger Attacks

Recently a tigress shifted to Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR) claimed another human life.

- The tigress was brought from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh to Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR) as part of a tiger re-introduction programme.
- The programme is being implemented by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest and its statutory body National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). It aims to shift six tigers — three males and three females.
- In 2004, Satkosia had 11 tigers, including four adult males and six adult females. The number went down to eight in 2010 and to two in 2014.
- Tiger conservationists say it is critical to identify and mitigate factors responsible for a decline in tiger population before trying to introduce new tigers in the area. Emphasis should be on protecting the forest, curbing illegal hunting, increasing prey numbers.
- The recent attacks in Odisha comes in the backdrop of an ongoing intensive operation to catch or shoot tigress T1 and catch her two cubs alive in Ralegaon area of Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, where 13 people have died in tiger attacks since June 2016.

Reasons for Attacks

- The depleting forest cover and growing human presence, in around 650 wildlife zones in the country. Reports by the Forest Survey of India since early 1990s indicate that around one-third of the dense forest cover has been lost and half the traditional wildlife corridors have disappeared, bringing animals and people dangerously close.
- Densely packed tiger forests often lead to young and old tigers wandering outside. Such wandering tigers are more likely to come into conflict with people.
- Many of these attacks on people are accidental. A tigress with cubs, a tiger protecting its kill, or a tiger startled by the appearance of people are prone to charge in self-defence.

Why Save Tigers?

- A 2015 report of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) titled: "Economic Evaluation of Tiger Reserves in India: A VALUE+ Approach" highlights why "large" areas are reserved for preserving fierce animals like the tiger, when we need more land for human use.
- It says that tigers are "umbrella" species. And by saving tigers, everything beneath their ecological umbrella - everything connected to them - including the world's last great forests, whose carbon storage mitigates climate change are saved.
- NTCA's recent paper called the "Making the Hidden Visible: Economic Valuation of Tiger Reserves in India" lists the benefits rising from tiger reserves. They include employment generation, agriculture, fishing, fuel wood, fodder and grazing, carbon storage and sequestration, water and its purification by filtering organic wastes, soil conservation, nutrient cycling, and moderation of extreme events such as cyclone storms, flash floods.

Project Tiger

- Project Tiger is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change launched in 1973 to provide central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves in India.

Killing a Man-Eater Tiger

- Conservation is about saving the species and not defending individual animals at the cost of the species. Letting a man-eater continue in the wild results in more attacks, turning locals against the Forest Department and making every tiger in the vicinity a potential target of reprisal.
- In the era of mass media, callous handling of conflict can shape the public perception of the tiger across the land and affect every community that lives in and around tiger forests. Prompt action sends the right message to local communities.
- Although, the 2013 Standard Operating Procedure of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) says an “aberrant tiger” (man-eater) must be caught and “sent to the nearest recognised zoo and NOT released in the wild”, the conditions and circumstances makes trapping and tranquillisation difficult.
- Seasonal abundance of forest undergrowth may not allow clear vision or approach required for darting within a range of 15-25 metres. If live capture is not possible, the only option is to gun down the animal.

- Moreover, it does not make a difference to conservation whether a tiger is sent to a zoo or killed. In both cases, it is one tiger less in the wild.

Conclusion

- Public outcry over a spate of human killings should neither provoke forest officials to hastily declare a tiger a man-eater nor come in the way of promptly removing an identified man-eater.
- It is very important to find solutions that lead to mutually beneficial co-existence of animals and the local human communities.
- Ensuring that both humans and animals have the space by protecting key areas for wildlife, creating buffer zones and investing in alternative land uses are some of the solutions.

- Losing a handful of tigers that have become, for no fault of their own, a threat to local communities will not risk the future of the species. In fact, it will help the tiger retain local goodwill.
- Likewise, fighting poor communities and the disempowered forest departments on sporadic shoot-on-sight orders will not secure the big cat’s future as well. That time and energy may be better spent saving the tiger against the powers of mindless development.